

The Freethinker

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SOME OF OUR READERS, and some members of the National Secular Society, may think that we are making too much of the dangers inherent in Sir Leslie Plummer's proposed Racial and Religious Discrimination Bill, which has the support of the National Council for Civil Liberties, to which the NSS is affiliated. We are convinced otherwise, and we have made our views known to the NCCL in Conference and in writing.

The latest drafting of the first, and relevant part of the Bill, as printed in the NCCL Annual Report, 1959-1960, reads as follows:

1. If any person advisedly endeavours to incite any other person to do or to omit any act to the detriment of any third party on account of the colour, race or religion of such third party, he shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.
2. Any person who prints, publishes, distributes or circulates any written matter tending to incite any other person to do or to omit any act to the detriment of any third party, on account of the colour, race or religion of such third party, shall be guilty of an offence under this Act.
3. (1) Any person who commits an offence under this Act shall be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding One hundred pounds or to both such imprisonment and fine or on conviction or indictment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to a fine not exceeding Five hundred pounds or to both such imprisonment and fine;
(2) A Constable may without warrant, arrest any person reasonably suspected by him to be committing an offence under Section 1 or 2 of this Act

Good Intentions

We feel sure that the *intentions* of the NCCL are good, but we all know about the road to hell, and we quite seriously believe that Sir Leslie Plummer is leading the Council along it.

We don't doubt Sir Leslie's sincerity, but we must say quite forthrightly that we have steadily come more and more to dislike his mode of thinking. It is not that he is religious—we can and do work willingly with religious people for common objectives—it is his alarming tendency seemingly to want to stop people saying things because he doesn't like what they say. And, furthermore, his obvious conviction that there is nobility in this attitude.

Apprehensions

Our apprehensions regarding Sir Leslie Plummer were recently confirmed by a letter he wrote, indirectly, to one of our Leicestershire readers. The latter wrote to his local M.P., Mr. Woodrow Wyatt, expressing his fears about the proposed Bill and also referring to the Blasphemy Laws. Mr. Wyatt replied (28/3/60):

Thank you very much for your letter. I understand the point you make. I have sent your letter to Sir Leslie Plummer asking for his comments.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) WOODROW WYATT.

A few weeks later, a letter from Sir Leslie Plummer was sent on to our reader by Mr. Wyatt's Private Secretary, Mr. Wyatt having gone away for a few days, but having

left instructions for this to be done. The letter from Sir Leslie Plummer, dated April 4th, 1960, reads:

I am returning this letter from your constituent. He quite clearly expresses the view of the Secularists. I don't agree with it for two reasons:

- i. I don't see any point in abolishing the blasphemy laws, for blasphemy upsets a lot of perfectly sincere and decent people.
- ii. There is all the difference between attacking Jews, who have suffered monstrously at the hands of the Germans, and saying slighting things to Christians who haven't gone through similar torment.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) LESLIE PLUMMER.

Repression

There is some inconsistency, needless to say, about Sir Leslie's two points.

"There is all the difference", etc., yet he favours retention of the Blasphemy Laws. As we said earlier, we don't like his way of thinking. He thinks in terms of repression of free speech. What free speech would there be if the law prevented any upsetting of "perfectly sincere and decent people?" Doesn't Sir Leslie's own political party say many things that upset "a lot of perfectly sincere and decent people", to wit, members of the Conservative Party? Should Sir Leslie and his colleagues be prevented from criticising Mr. Harold Macmillan for fear of upsetting him?

Let Them Say It!

We readily accede that it would be better if some things that are said in public—and in private, for that matter—were never said. But we prize the British tradition of free speech (even at the risk of upsetting people) for which our predecessors fought, and we intend to fight against any inroads into it. Sir Leslie could learn something from the Rev. David A. Hewitt, Manchester Methodist minister who acted as spokesman for the city's outdoor speakers whose usual site is now being built on; speakers who include (as the *Evening Chronicle*, 17/6/60, put it) "atheists, pacifists, abolitionists—in fact anyone with something to say and a rugged determination to say it". Mr. Hewitt's commendable view is: "It's not what they say and believe that is of first importance. It's finding them somewhere to do it". And, we should add as the *Evening Chronicle* did, "letting them say it".

In case some people should consider us hopelessly idealistic in this, let us recall the recent resolution of the National Secular Society, copies of which have been sent to the NCCL and the Home Secretary, viz.:—

This Conference calls upon the authorities to use their existing and adequate powers to deal with hooliganism and breaches of the peace, etc., with firmness and common sense, and not to introduce new legislation. It feels anxiety at the clamour for additional laws of a repressive nature to deal with anti-Semitism, racialism, etc., knowing that a democracy has to take risks, that liberty of expression is its most valued possession and its safeguard against the growth of subversive and underground movements.

The plain truth is that the police already have adequate powers for dealing with any situation for which the first

part of the proposed new Bill was (presumably) framed. It is argued that they don't use these powers. We contend that they should be persuaded to do so: that Sir Leslie Plummer's House of Commons time would be better spent on urging the Home Secretary to get them to do so than in trying to introduce new legislation. On a previous occasion when drawing attention to the dangers of the Bill, we said: "For years we have been trying to abolish the Blasphemy Laws, now, in effect, they are being extended". And Sir Leslie Plummer, though thinking there is "all the difference between attacking Jews and

saying slighting things to Christians", indeed favours retention of the Blasphemy Laws.

We are glad to say that the Secretary of the NCCCL, Mr. Martin Ennals, at least admits (in a letter to the NSS, 30/6/60) that the Bill "must be studied with extreme care and the wording made such that criticism of religious and political groups is permissible while personal abuse and discrimination because of an individual's religion is avoided". But it remains our firm opinion that the proposed Bill could do a very great deal of harm, and that it should be most strongly opposed.

Far From the Madding Crowd—July

By RUSTICUS

Oh, who will set me down in the cool dells of Haemus, and shield me with the branches' boundless shade!—VIRGIL.

AS I LEAN OVER A FIELD GATE in a quiet Dorset lane, I thank what gods there be for this one escape from the crowd's ignoble strife. It is the month of July: the time late evening. In the profound quietude of this lane—the hedges a mass of lady's bedstraw, scabious, the greater celandine, marjoram, campion, honeysuckle, nettles, grasses, and "old man's beard", the latter just breaking into flower—one is able to empty one's mind of the world and its trifling futilities.

Breathing the heady scent of new mown hay, and watching the swallows skimming over the ripening wheat like terns skipping over the waves, I think of the city dwellers. Engrossed in the struggle for money and yet more money, townsmen never achieve anything of lasting value—or so it seems to me, a haunter of woods and hedge-sides. The peace of mind enjoyed by most country dwellers is a thing never met with in the great "wens"—to use a favourite word from Cobbett's *Rural Rides*. Perhaps Hudson's old shepherd was the classic example of the contented mind.

As I meditate upon the futility of the human scene my attention is distracted by the appearance of a single rabbit a few yards away. Soon a couple of hares appear, one of whom approaches to within six feet of me, unaware of the presence of an hereditary enemy. In a far corner of the field a cock pheasant is attended by three of his harem, whilst overhead the rooks are returning in a long straggling line to the roost they will occupy till next Spring. The great black birds are mostly silent: very occasionally one will give vent to a single "caw". Flying in the opposite direction, seagulls make for the coast—distant about a dozen miles—after a day spent stealing the food of land-based birds. Some gulls fly in perfect V formation, others in ones, twos and threes.

Sweeping the newly mown field with my glass, I note a little owl, perched on a post. A few wood pigeons are wandering about on the ground nearby, and the miniature owl appears afraid to venture among the bigger birds. Eventually he takes off, making for a small wood, flying in the weird and silent manner of his kind. He is not a native Englishman: he was introduced into the country in the 19th century. A fascinating little fellow.

And so the world is left to darkness and to me. As I return slowly down the steeply descending lane to the village I hear a familiar sound. Though mechanical, it does not rouse my wrath as does the sound of the jet plane. It is the slow slogging sound of a long goods train, pulling up the steep incline into the village, along the old Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway. The sound ceases for a full minute as the train passes under the far side of a British camp, once known to Vespasian. The train will eventually

reach Templecombe, in smiling Somerset, that famous junction where many of us have spent years of our lives waiting for connections.

As I enter the village, the motor traffic which has averaged 50 m.p.h. all day long through the speed-restricted street has ceased. I pause to listen to the silence. A full hundred yards away two or three old men can be heard talking and laughing, lounging upon a stile. The notes of a piano float drowsily up the village street from the pub. It is 9.45 p.m., but lights are already burning in many cottage bedrooms, and I am reminded of Johnson's words: Whoever thinks of going to bed before twelve o'clock is a scoundrel. The sparrows and swallows are silent under the eaves of the cottages after an eight-hour day, but the rooks are still winging their silent way across the darkening sky to the roost in the valley.

A farm worker friend of mine is leaning over his cottage gate. He wishes me a friendly "good-night" as I pass by. "Rain tonight: we can do wi' it," he adds.

The World Liveth On

ALAS, ONCE AGAIN, this old, old World of ours has survived the Prophets of Gloom. For the 1,873rd time we have been told of some terrible catastrophe, some unalterable prophecy, which would inevitably cause our planet to perish in fire and flood—only fully-believing Christians or Jews or some other religious sects surviving still.

The year 1000 AD was, however, the one in which Christians expected not only the end of the world as it is, but also the one when millions of Christians would survive safe—as they said—in the arms of Jesus. Millions went out into the fields and on hills and mountains waiting for the Army of Angels who preceded Jesus to give the joyful news and help 144,000 of the faithful to pack up for the journey to Heaven. We say "pack up" but crowds of them had already sold all their belongings.

The triumphant success of Jesus in thus saving the world had a setback in 1000 AD—but many prophets kept up the merry game, particularly those who fell for the marvellous secrets of the great Pyramid in Egypt which foretold the exact year in the nineteenth century when the world would end for ever. They were backed up by the Rev. J. Cumming, the stoutest of all the doom prophets: though in fairness to him, it ought to be added that he bought a house to run on long after the year of Doom. And his faithful followers never knew!

We must not be too hard on Brother Korem or Brother Enman. They—or their like—will ever flourish on Mont Blanc or elsewhere.

As the eldest priest said in sorrow at the survival of the world—"Yes, but had it been destroyed, would YOU have been ready to go to your maker?" I wouldn't!

H.C.

Why Christianity Won

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE MOST IMPORTANT ERA, in my opinion, in the long evolution of Christianity from its obscure beginnings as an heretical sect on the fringe of Judaism into the world-wide religion of modern times, is to be found in the 4th century of the Christian era. The fact that we have a Christian era at all, is due to the final outcome of the decisive religious conflicts of that century. For, prior to then, it still remained an open question which religion would come out on top in the struggle for the vacant sceptre over the declining Roman Empire and civilisation of antiquity. There was no dearth of aspiring candidates: Mithraism, Manicheanism, both these were in the running at the start of the decisive 4th century. By its end, the issue was closed, not to be reopened until the age of the French Revolution first manifested an open challenge to the rule of Christianity. By 400 AD, the Jealous God had come into effective possession and the cardinal maxim of the new intolerant creed, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me", was established as the overall rule of European society throughout the long Ages of Faith.

One of the most important individual figures in shaping the destinies of this momentous religious and cultural revolution, was the Emperor Constantine (288?-337) denominated the "Great" by a grateful Christian posterity, and still canonised in the Calendar of the Orthodox Greek Church as "St. Constantine" and endowed with the honorific title of "Equal to the Apostles". Throughout the entire Christian world, Constantine is still generally regarded as the first Christian Emperor. Despite his active role in calling and then actually presiding over the first Ecumenical (General) Council of the Church at Nicaea (325), and despite the important influence he was there enabled to exercise upon the present and subsequent evolution of Christian theology, it does not appear that Constantine was actually a very orthodox Christian. In fact, some modern historians have even doubted whether he was ever really a Christian at all; e.g. the German military historian, Hans Delbrueck, has pointed out that Constantine went on striking coins with the effigy of Mithra, "the Unconquered Sun" down to the end of his days: whilst the learned compiler of the Christian Chronology recently issued by the *Ernest Renan Circle* in Paris, draws attention to the still visible fact that the surviving Victory Arch of Constantine in Rome, contains several inscriptions in honour of the solar Deity, but absolutely no reference to the Christian God. On the whole, however, the dictum of another contemporary authority, Professor A. H. N. Jones, appears to be more probable.

In his book, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*, Professor Jones argues that Constantine was at least, some sort of a Christian believer, though uninterested in the embittered theological disputes so dear to the Christians of his day. Constantine's personal attitude to the Christian God, argues this authority, was really an amalgam of military obedience and rank superstitious terror. It was only by the potent aid of this omnipotent Deity that the Emperor believed it to be possible to restore the fortunes of the sinking Empire, to save which was naturally the primary preoccupation of a Roman Emperor in the 4th century. When the threats of ultimate collapse represented by both internal decay and by the growing menace of Barbarian invasion were assuming an even more menacing aspect, Constantine called in the Christian Church as a kind of spiritual police in order to reinforce

the hard-pressed Roman army and administration. Professor Jones's further estimate, that Christians only represented a small minority within the Roman Empire at the start of the 4th century, appears however, to be difficult to reconcile with the known facts. A century earlier, the Christian apologist, Tertullian, boasted that "we" (*viz.*, the Christians) "are everywhere" and made a scarcely concealed threat of revolutionary violence against the Pagans and the Emperor Decius (c 250) who launched the first really serious persecution against the Church, did so on the explicit ground that the Bishop of Rome was more powerful in Rome than was the Emperor. Whilst Christians probably still represented a minority in the Roman Empire at Constantine's succession, yet it was already probably a considerable one, and already represented a kind of "State within the State", a well-organised body coeval with the cosmopolitan Roman Empire whose bishops were already, no doubt, often equal in actual influence to the local state officials. Whilst superstition no doubt played an important part in Constantine's "conversion", a successful general and shrewd politician like this Emperor, is hardly likely to have overlooked the political utility of the Christian connection too, particularly the ruler of an Empire upon which the sun—whether unconquered or not—was visibly beginning to set. This aspect was the more likely to appeal to Constantine, since the tenacious resistance of the well-knit Christian Churches had successfully defied the last and fiercest persecution of the Pagan Empire; that unleashed at the start of the 4th century by the Pagan Emperors Diocletian and Galerius; a persecution symbolised in subsequent Christian mythology by the victory of the Martyrs (symbolised by St. George over the Dragon, *viz.* the Pagan Empire). The most important question, both as it relates to the career of the first Christian Emperor and more generally to the religious and cultural history of the 4th century itself, is one to which no definitive reply has so far been found.

Why did Christianity eventually win? Why was it that it was the Christian Emperors, Constantine and Theodosius and not the, in many ways more talented, Pagan Emperors, Diocletian and Julian, who eventually set their mark on universal, as well as Roman history? Until recently it would have been impossible (and indeed dangerous) for anyone to have asked such a question. For the victory of Christ over his Pagan rivals was—literally—"an act of God"; the victory of Christianity was inevitable because divinely ordained. Since, presumably, the readers of THE FREETHINKER are not necessarily in agreement with this *a priori* view, they will demand some explanation more in keeping with current social and religious evolution. Actually, the ultimate victory of the Galilean does not appear to have been due to any one decisive cause, but to a combination of causes that chanced to coincide. To start with, the Church undoubtedly had a very efficient organisation that gave it already substantial bargaining power. This fact is proved by the efforts made by its Pagan rivals to imitate its organisation, as was done by both the persecuting Emperor Maximin and (after Constantine's death) by the temporarily successful Pagan reaction under Julian the Apostate. Christianity had also certain advantages over its Pagan rivals, the most important of which was possibly that it believed in and practised persecution, whilst its rivals did not—at least with any-

(Continued on next page)

This Believing World

Already the story is going about that the late Aneurin Bevan, though he affirmed instead of taking the oath in Parliament, and must have given instructions to prevent the Churches taking over in case of his death, was in actual fact very religious. We expect to learn later that he recanted on his deathbed exactly like Bradlaugh, Foote, Paine, Voltaire, and many other Freethought stalwarts. To believe some of the people who distribute these pious stories, there never has been a real "infidel" to the end. All, without exception, died fully believing Christians.

★

In this connection, lively Sarah Jenkins in *News Chronicle* gave us recently particulars of a parson, the Rev. A. C. Bridge, and his wife, both of them "atheists" at one time, and now all-believing Christians. We want to give them a magnificent opportunity to convert all the readers of THE FREETHINKER. We invite them to give us the Atheistic case which made them Atheists, and the Christian replies which made them Christians. The columns of this journal are open to them for it is a long time since we have read any Christian arguments which were anything but nonsense. Perhaps Mr. Bridge can do a little better.

★

Miss Jenkins was greatly impressed by Mr. Bridge, and says that he is "one of the clergymen most likely to convert" her—"if I am ever converted" she adds, which is very unkind of her. She ought to have considered the tender feelings of Mr. Bridge. But exactly why the reverend gentleman failed so far to convert her would be most intriguing to learn.

★

Professor A. C. B. Lovell gave us his selection of Desert Island Discs the other Saturday on the radio, and of course he was asked the 64,000 dollar question. Have his studies in Astronomy ever shown him the Divine Hand of the Creator anywhere in the Universe? And the famous Professor warded off a direct answer by saying that he had worked with all sorts of believers and unbelievers, and that the question of a Creator depended on how a man was mostly brought up.

★

Did Professor Lovell think that somewhere in the millions of galaxies could planets be found on which was life similar to our own? Again he dodged the question, though admitting it was possible. He gave no direct answer all the same. On the question of man reaching the Moon, however, he thought that would come in five or ten years. As for reaching any planet—he thought that space fiction stories were so far quite impossible. But the Creator . . . !

★

The surprising thing about Zen-Buddhism is not that it is a mixture of Hindu mysticism and unintelligible expositions of "spiritual" humbug, but that its foremost defender in this country is Mr. Christmas Humphreys, a brilliant QC. In a review of Mr. Humphreys's latest book about it in the *Daily Mail*, Mr. Kenneth Allsop gives specimens of its "maddening logic" culled from the author's explanations. For instance, "What is to be considered the first principle of the Dharma?" The answer in impeccable logic is, "Vast Emptiness and nothing holy therein". Which about equals in intelligence Jesus talking about "Living Water".

★

We must follow this up with more specimens of Zen. "Two hands make a sound of clapping. What is the sound of one?" The answer—"None can reveal it, none conceal it". And what about this? "A is A. Agreed? But A is

only A because it is not-A. If A were only A it would not be A. If A is A it is only because A is not-A." This exercise in pure logic should convert all thinkers to Zen, but we are sorry to note that Mr. Allsop wants to be counted out. He has "reluctantly" decided to belong "irrevocably to the not-Zens". So have we, but not reluctantly.

★

That the celebrated "Monkey Trial" in Tennessee in 1923 in which a teacher had to be defended in court for teaching Evolution is surprising enough; but so is making a film of it. For whatever else it does, it is bound to be seen by millions of people who still believe that the Bible is the final word in Science as in everything else. And what is still more surprising is that the part played by Clarence Darrow (a Rationalist) for the defence is taken in the film by that stout Roman Catholic, Spencer Tracey. The Genesis defender in the original trial was W. J. Bryan perhaps the greatest Fundamentalist then living. In the film, it is a fine actor, Fredric March—though his religion, if he has one, is unknown to us. We have an idea that the opponents of Evolution will not like this film.

WHY CHRISTIANITY WON

(Concluded from page 235)

thing like the same consistency. For, as both Theodosius (the first persecuting, as also the first really Christian Emperor) and in more modern times, Torquemada discovered (and Hitler later rediscovered) "the blood of the martyrs" is not always "the seed of the Church". Persecution, if sustained and severe enough, can be a decisive weapon whether against ancient Roman Pagans or modern Spanish heretics. However, to be in any position to persecute, the Church had first to get control of the State which it did with Constantine. Here again, Christianity enjoyed certain definite advantages over both its Roman and Persian Pagan rivals: the Roman official cults were decrepit and the whole system was out of date, and when the Emperors went over to the Christians, the backbone of Roman Paganism was broken. Had not the Pagan Emperor Julian been killed in battle—or murdered by the Christians?—a permanent Pagan revival might have won out. As is evidenced by their hysterical language upon hearing the news of Julian's death, it is evident that the leaders of the Church were thoroughly scared. As for the major rivals of Christianity in the 4th century, Mithraism was too militaristic and bound up with the army, whilst Manicheanism was a pacifist creed, useless in an age of Barbarian invasions. Moreover, both these creeds were of Persian origin, and Persia in the 4th century was the permanent Eastern rival of the Roman Empire (cf. Jacob Burckhardt—*The Life and Times of Constantine the Great*).

It is along such lines I suggest, that the victory of Christianity is to be explained. As Professor Jones points out, the age was one of decay and as such, intensely superstitious; the old freethinking schools, the Stoics and the Epicureans died out during this era. Some religion was bound to win and, under Constantine, Christianity took its first and decisive step towards the completion of the most momentous counter-revolution in human annals, the final effects of which are still with us today, 16 centuries later.

—NEXT WEEK—

GENEVA FOR FREETHINKERS

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. MILLS and WOODCOCK. (Weekday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria statue.)

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.

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

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, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m. (Market Place, Mansfield), Sunday, July 24th, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Notes and News

A VERY SUCCESSFUL MEETING was held at Brighton (the Peace Statue, opposite Embassy Court) by the Sussex Branch of the National Secular Society on July 10th, when Messrs. J. W. Barker, Len Ebury and David Tribe were the speakers. Despite blustery showery weather, a large crowd remained round the rostrum from 3 to 6.45 p.m. So successful indeed was this meeting, that it has been decided to hold weekly ones during the Summer season from Sunday, July 31st. Mr. David Tribe is expected to be the speaker on that date. The Sussex Branch Hon. Secretary is Mr. F. Pearce, 25 Farm Close, Upper Portslade, and he would be pleased to hear from Freethinkers in his area.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY MEMBER, Frederick E. Papps, is trying to form a Rationalist group in Redditch, Worcestershire, and has had letters in the local press announcing his intention. One clergyman, the Rev. L. J. Hopkins (Methodist) expressed amazement that Mr. Papps—or anyone else—should think there is “a necessary opposition between religion and reason”. Mr. Hopkins then went on to demonstrate, inadvertently perhaps, but irrefutably, the opposition between reason and his own religion “Without a belief in an ultimate purpose behind all things”, he said, “. . . Love is no better than hate; truth no better than falsehood, goodness than wickedness” and so on. Mr. Papps—whose address for those interested, is No. 1 Park Cottages, Hewell, Redditch—has replied.

IN HIS PARISH MAGAZINE, the Rev. E. C. Parker of Foxton, near Harborough, Leicestershire, asked, “Where are all the men?” A visitor dropping in from Mars at church time might think churchgoing was only for women, he

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

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said, and he instanced that on Whit Sunday, “not more than a handful of men attended at Gumley and Foxton churches”. “Is it thought unmanly or kiddish?” Prince Philip has been criticised for playing polo on Sunday afternoon, Mr. Parker went on, but “do not forget that he has already sanctified the Lord’s Day in the morning worship. I appeal most strongly to all men not to neglect the means of salvation, and to fathers to lead their families in worship”.

★

AT HINCKLEY, in the same county, there was another complaint; this time from Mr. J. Nicholson, Secretary of the Hinckley and District Sunday Schools’ Union, which held its annual procession through the streets of the town on Saturday, July 2nd. Over 1,800 children and Sunday school teachers had taken part, but Mr. Nicholson thought it was “probably the lowest turnout” (*Leicester Evening Mail*, 4/7/60), and he attributed it to “the present trend—a lack of interest in religion”. Mr. Nicholson is certainly “warmer” than Mr. Parker. It isn’t the unmanliness of Christianity that is emptying the churches, it is its irrelevance.

★

IN AN INTERESTING ARTICLE ON “Rationalism”, the Anarchist weekly, *Freedom* (27 Red Lion Street, London) for July 2nd, contrasted atheistic and agnostic attitudes and came down strongly on the side of the former. Here is a relevant quotation: “The agnostics are those who, although they would not go so far as to say that the Earth is flat, or that astrologers were always right, or that Wilhelm Reich could always control hurricanes, or that Christ really did walk on the water—aver that there is probably a great deal of truth in it all and that they are not prepared to be dogmatic and disbelieving. The atheists on the other hand are prepared to come right out in the open and express frank and utter disbelief in what they hold to be baloney”.

★

AN ABERDONIAN, now resident in Leicester, has been engaged on what he—but not we—would call a “labour of love”—copying out the Bible in his own handwriting (*Leicester Mercury*, 23/6/60). Mr. Charles Caie had two motives: to preserve his penmanship in three separate volumes for his three daughters and to impress every page of the Bible on his mind. For the statistically-minded, it took him 1,109 hours.

★

THE *South London Press* (15/7/60) printed Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner’s reply to the letter from Mr. Arthur Epps, referred to in this column last week. “My attention has been drawn to a reference to my grandfather, Charles Bradlaugh, in your issue of July 1st”, wrote Mr. Bonner. “Mr. Arthur Epps does no credit to his religion by his readiness to repeat a lie. Bradlaugh died ‘firm in the convictions on which he had lived’, in the words of my mother’s biography of her father.” Mr. Bonner went on to deal with the Knowlton pamphlet and quoted Lord Horder’s splendid tribute: “This matter (birth control) like all other matters that affect human progress in a vital sense, awaits one or other of the only two happenings that ever stir the human race to claim its birthright: one is the slow growth of culture among the masses, and the other is the advent of men like Charles Bradlaugh”.

The Book Nobody Knows

By H. CUTNER

SOME THIRTY YEARS AGO I reviewed a book with the title *The Man Nobody Knows* by Bruce Barton, a book which immediately became a best seller. It was a kind of "biography" of Jesus, and Mr. Barton tried to explain his title—which it may said at once was just sheer nonsense. The idea that Jesus Christ was known to nobody (except himself of course) in spite of the fact that his story had been before people over most of the world for at least 1,500 years, was however swallowed avidly by the readers of the book. Mr. Barton did make one good point which Jesus's devoted followers had overlooked. He himself was an American business man, and he had no difficulty in showing Jesus as the greatest business man who ever lived. Did he not found the Christian Church, the most powerful as well as the wealthiest business organisation in the world? Apart from its thousands of wonderful buildings, did not the Church have a huge army of business executives, all devoted to its business progress, some very highly paid, while others were only too pleased to work for love? This was the great discovery of Mr. Barton, and he made the most of it.

He followed up his first best seller with *The Book Nobody Knows* which strangely enough only came to my notice the other day. Now it was just impossible for the Christian world not to have known Jesus, but I am sure Mr. Barton is right when he claimed for the Bible that it was a book nobody knew.

It is considered the world's best seller. Every new edition or new translation is eagerly bought up by the public. Long articles appear in our theological journals dealing with specific aspects of the Precious Word. But who reads it now? I think it would be safe to say that no complete bibliography of the Bible is possible as there are far too many books in the world which have dealt with it. In Stewart's Catalogue of Theological Works of the 16th and 17th Century, he lists near 10,000 books on the Bible for sale, and there must be hundreds of similar catalogues in many languages. All these were printed long before the radio and TV gave the Churches a new lease of life as well as the heaven-sent opportunity to boost the Bible still more. Yet it is the book nobody knows!

But why? Simply because, especially in these days, most of its "lamentations" and pious pleas to "sin no more" bore the average readers to tears. The story of the Flood, or of Joseph and his brethren, or of David and Jonathan, as well as say, the story of Esther or Ruth can still be read with interest; but God Almighty—that is Jehovah—and Jesus going about "doing good" have about as much interest for modern readers as arithmetical tables.

Mr. Barton's is a very brave attempt to bring people back to the Bible, back to the time when nobody—or very few—people could read. He believes, and in this he has the support of all priests for their very livelihood depends upon it, that once the Bible is read and known, the beloved primitive Church will come back in all its glory. We are not—naturally—given anything about Devils or for that matter a scholarly defence of Miracles. Mr. Barton much prefers to tell us about the great men and women of the Bible in whose existence he devoutly believes. For example, he says that "Jeremiah is one of the noblest characters of history and perhaps the bravest figure in the whole Old Testament"; but "it is too bad that his book is so badly mixed up that the average reader can hardly follow it". It certainly is too bad, but whose fault is it

that the book is "so badly mixed up"? After all, is not God Almighty literally responsible? And if the reader cannot follow it—is it any wonder that the Book of Jeremiah is one that "nobody knows"?

Alas, when Mr. Barton comes to Daniel and Esther, two of the books he most enthusiastically praises he sadly says, "We are forced reluctantly to conclude that the two books bearing these honoured names are splendid pieces of Jewish propaganda . . ." that is, they are just *fiction*. There are certainly some things in the Bible even he cannot stomach—and if he cannot, there must be many people in the same boat, and perhaps here we find one reason why the Bible is a book nobody knows.

But when Mr. Barton comes to the New Testament, we find an almost true Fundamentalist under his skin. He *knows* who "Mark" was—an "active minded boy" who saw Jesus only once when the Last Supper was eaten at his mother's house. What can be more historical than this statement? We also know that Mark was associated with Paul and Peter. Mr. Barton also knows all about Matthew and Luke, and of course John whose Gospel was "hardly a life story; rather is it an interpretation". But it is "a very fine one". That is, an absolutely fictional "biography" has been palmed off for the Christian world as literally true, and now we are told it is merely an "interpretation".

Does Mr. Barton believe in the Virgin Birth? Well, as "Mark makes no mention of it", and "John ignores it", and "Paul does not once refer to it", and there is "no evidence" that Jesus "was concerned" about it, to say nothing of Philip who said to Nathanael that Jesus was the son of Joseph (John 1, 45), it is obvious that Mr. Barton does not. And as for miracles, here again Jesus did not "attach the same importance to these mighty works as his followers did". That is, Mr. Barton has grave doubts about these "mighty works".

But surely is it not one of the reasons why the Bible is "the Book nobody knows" because, unlike Mr. Barton, Christians *believe* in the Virgin Birth and the miracles on "faith" and not on reading? If Christians really knew their Bible, would they not contemptuously reject it as a work of fiction?

Mr. Barton even points out that "there is no record that Jesus ever prayed in public"—unlike the constant and boring reiteration by Christians for everybody to pray on every possible occasion. If Jesus never prayed, why should his adoring followers ever pray and expect everybody else to do so?

Exactly how much of the story of Jesus Mr. Barton actually believed is hard to find out. He says

Jesus did not overthrow the oppressive government of Rome. He did not lower the tax rate. He did not improve sanitary conditions in Jerusalem, nor erect a public library at Nazareth. He did not increase the wages of Christians over those of infidels . . .

Mr. Barton in fact picks out some of the best ethics in the New Testament and glories over them, quite sure, it seems to me that here the book is one nobody knows. He believes—if not in miracles—almost every thing else. Paul said and did everything described in Acts and the Epistles. Luke was Dr. Luke, and so on. By picking and choosing this way, it is not too difficult to bestow on the Bible the most extravagant praise, and with superlative adjectives this is exactly what Mr. Barton does.

"How did we get the Bible?" is discussed at the request

of "a surgeon of national reputation"—and it is not altogether surprising he also belongs to the crowd who do not know their Bible. Mr. Barton deals very very briefly with the problem, for he knows almost nothing about it, Jesus, it appears, spoke Aramaic, but we are told nothing of the way his "teachings" have come down to us in Greek. But we are told that the Greek was translated into Latin and English, and Mr. Barton adds that as "printing had been invented", William Tyndale determined to "make every ploughboy in England know the New Testament". He obviously and ingloriously failed, for Mr. Barton calls his own work *The Book Nobody Knows*—and this must include Tyndale's ploughboys. In any case

(it appears from Mr. Barton) that Tyndale's English New Testament was printed in England by Caxton, which is quite a miracle. Caxton died in 1491 AD—a year before Tyndale was born. His English New Testament appeared first in Cologne in 1525 AD, and was naturally bitterly attacked by Tyndale's fellow Christians—especially by that great Defender of the Faith, Henry VIII. In any case, 99% of the people in England could not read, so actually there was not then much point in translating the Book that Mr. Barton insisted even as late as 1927 nobody knew.

Do Christians know it any better in 1960 even with all the big guns on the radio and TV behind it?

I doubt it.

Gide on God

THE FOLLOWING QUOTATIONS are from *Les Nouvelles Nouritures* ("Later Fruits of the Earth") by André Gide (1935). They are submitted by Nicholas Toon, who writes by way of introduction: I think Gide's pantheism is very near to the truth. Although he says he is not an atheist, he was kidding himself—or his readers. Indeed, he admits himself in one passage that his belief is "equivalent to fundamental atheism".

"When I consider and weigh this word of 'God' that I use, I am obliged to acknowledge that it is practically empty of substance—which is the very thing that makes it so convenient for me to use.

"A vessel of indefinite shape whose confining limits can be indefinitely extended, it contains whatever each of us chooses to put into it, but contains *only* whatever each of us puts in. If I pour in omnipotence, how shall I not feel awe for this receptacle? And love, if I fill it with care for myself and loving-kindness for each of us? If I lend it the thunderbolt and gird it with the blade of lightning, it is no longer the storm that makes me tremble with terror, but God.

"Prudence, conscience, kindness, I cannot possibly imagine any of these things apart from men. That man, detaching all these things from himself, may imagine them very vaguely as things in themselves—that is, in the abstract—and fashion God with them, is possible; it is possible even for him to imagine that God is the beginning, that absolute being comes first, and that reality is caused by it and in turn becomes its cause—in short, that the Creator has need of the creature, for if he created nothing he would not be a creator. So that both the one and the other are in a state of such perfect relationship and interdependence that it may be said that the one could not exist without the other, the creator without the created, and that man could not have greater need of God than God of man, and that it is easier to imagine nothing at all than the one without the other.

"I am God's; he is mine; we are. But in thinking this, I only make one with the whole of creation; I am dissolved and absorbed in prolix humanity."

"I acknowledge that for a long time I used the word 'God' as a kind of dumping ground for all my vaguest concepts. The result was very different from Francis Jammes's God with a long white beard, but with hardly more existence. And as it happens that old people lose successively hair and teeth, sight, memory and finally life itself, my God as he grew old (but it was I who grew old not he) lost all the attributes with which I had formerly endowed him, and to begin—or end—with, his existence, or if you prefer it, his reality. If I stopped thinking of him, he stopped existing. It was solely my worship that created him. It could do without him—he could not do

without me. The whole thing turned into a play of mirrors which ceased to amuse me when I understood it was carried on entirely at my expense. And for a little time longer this divine remnant attempted to take refuge—without any personal attributes—in beauty, the harmony of number, the 'conatus vivendi' of course . . . At the present moment I see no particular interest in talking of it.

"But all the same, what in those days I called God—that confused mass of notions, sentiments, appeals, and answers to those appeals, which I now know existed only through and in me—all of this seems to me now, when I think of it, much more worthy of interest than the rest of the world and myself and the whole of humanity."

"I believe more easily in the Greek gods than in the 'Bon Dieu'. But I am obliged to acknowledge that this polytheism is purely poetical—equivalent to fundamental atheism. It was for his atheism that Spinoza was condemned. And yet he looked up to Christ with greater love, greater respect, greater piety, even than many Catholics—and those the most obedient—but a Christ without divinity."

"It is much more difficult than one thinks not to believe in God. One must never really have looked at nature. The slightest agitation of matter . . . Why should it stir and towards what? But this impregnation takes me quite as far from your creed as it does from atheism. That matter should be penetrable and ductile and open to mind, that mind should be so intermingled with matter as to make one with it—you may call my amazement at this religious, if you like. I am amazed at everything on this earth. Let us call my stupefaction worship. Very well. But how much further does it take us? Not only do I not see your God in any of all this, but on the contrary I see everywhere manifested that he *cannot* be in it—that he is not in it.

"I am ready to call everything Divine which God himself could not alter.

"This formula which is inspired (its last words, at any rate) by a sentence of Goethe's [*Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Book XVI], has the advantage, not so much of implying belief in God, as the impossibility of admitting a God in opposition to the laws of nature (to himself, in fact)—a God who would not be identical with them.

"How does this differ from Spinoza?" you ask.

"I have no desire it should differ from Spinoza. I have already quoted Goethe who gladly recognized his debt to Spinoza. Everybody owes something of himself to someone else. There are certain minds to whom I am related and attached and whom I take pleasure in revering as much as you revere the Fathers of your Church. But whereas your tradition goes back to a divine revelation and for that very reason is forbidden all liberty of thought, this other tradition, being purely human, not only leaves

my thought its independence, but encourages it and incites me to accept nothing as true that I have not first of all *verified* myself unless it is not in my power to verify—and this by no means betokens pride; it may even coexist with a very patient and prudent and even diffident humbled-mindedness, but it loathes the false modesty that consists in thinking man incapable of attaining any truth by himself or without the miraculous intervention of divine revelation.”

N.B. *English translations of Gide's works are published by Secker and Warburg.*

CORRESPONDENCE

SENATOR KENNEDY

The quasi-editorial “we” in Mr. McCall’s article on “Kennedy for President” is most unfortunate.

I might equally claim that “we” assume that Mr. Kennedy is acting with the usual “double-think” and “mental reservation”, that is endorsed by canon law and has characterised Roman Catholics in office or seeking office. We reflect on the disastrous result of Roman Catholic penetration into the Labour parties of Australia and Britain, and McCarthyism in America, which may be moribund but not dead. Remembering that the motto of the Roman Catholic Church is *Semper Eadem*.

I suggest that the majority of English Freethinkers do not concur with the statement that, “he has frankly earned our admiration in his staunch upholding of the principle of separation of Church and State”. From America we get a quotation from the Right Reverend James Pike, Protestant Episcopal Bishop of California, “to ask questions about the right of the church in the political sphere, and to weigh where particular candidates stand on this subject, is not bigotry but responsible citizenship”. From America, also, we read the strongly expressed misgivings of the Freethought magazine *The Liberal*, proving that they too do not share the sanguine views of Colin McCall.

E. EBURY.

ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

Referring to Mr. Ridley’s article, one weakness of Kalthoff’s theory is that he greatly exaggerates the depressed and frustrated state of slaves in the Roman Empire. Whatever the case may have been in Spartacus’s time, a century later conditions were fairly tolerable, and a slave had the best hope of regaining his freedom on earth. Individual emancipations were so frequent that a small tax in them yielded an appreciable revenue, and “freed men” were so numerous as to constitute an important element in society. They formed a large part of what Marxists would call the “petty bourgeoisie”, and many rose even higher in the social scale. Pallas became a multi-millionaire, and his brother, Felix (the one in Acts) also did pretty well for himself. Numbers of similar instances are known.

There is indeed little to show that Christianity owed anything to slaves as such. Nor is there, apart from an utterly worthless Church tradition, any evidence that Mark’s gospel was written in Rome, though the author was obviously a gentile. Suetonius knew quite well the distinction between “Chrestus” and “Christus”, while Tacitus definitely names Judea as the starting point of Christian propaganda.

W. SMITH.

MILITANCY

May I say how much I agree with J.G.’s letter on this subject? As he says—if THE FREETHINKER is not *militant* against all religions, it has failed in its duty to its readers. There is no other journal in the world which has for 80 years so brilliantly exposed the credulity and ignorance inherent in *all* religions but particularly in Christianity. As a result of its militant campaign, a good many famous propagandists of the religion of Jesus have had to modify, and in some cases deny, views on the Bible which have been held for centuries as Fundamentalist truths.

Who among them now believe and teach the story of the Serpent, speaking perfect Hebrew, seducing Eve, the “Mother” of the human race? Yet if this story is not true, there never was a “Fall of Man” and the whole of the Christian scheme must inevitably fall to the ground.

R.D.

HENRY GEORGE

Whatever the author of the “classic” *Progress and Poverty* may have said on “Civilisation and Decay”, pretty nearly everything else he said was vitiated by complete nonsense when he came to deal with the Population Question. Like so many “reformers”, he refused to acknowledge the pressure of population on the world food supply.

He actually said that there was so much food in the world that if London—the City of London be it noted, not the county—could house 1,000 millions of people, they could easily be fed.

One thousand millions in London!

That his famous “Single Tax” has some good points can be admitted. But like Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward*, he foresaw only a Utopia in which it would be easy to feed unlimited populations. This is just unlimited nonsense.

H. CUTNER.

THE TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS

Alan Snook says in his interesting article on the Tolpuddle Martyrs, that they were Dissenters and staunch Methodists, from this they undoubtedly drew their moral strength. This statement is misleading. Far from drawing strength from Methodism, they acted in strong opposition to it. They held their meetings in a public house owned by a sympathiser. In the early history of Trades Unionism and of Friendly Societies, the publicans were the friends of reform. All the Christian Churches, had a dread of any reform for the working people, and Tolpuddle Martyrs drew their inspiration, not from Methodism, but from the great work of a noble Freethinker, Thomas Paine, who wrote *Rights of Man*, and it was a parson, acting as a government spy who reported the Martyrs for holding their secret meetings.

PAUL VARNEY.

ANEURIN BEVAN

It is certainly good to know that none of the religious Christian “what-nots” were able to fool Mr. Aneurin Bevan, who refused to have any preacher perform his funeral rites.

As far as being a fine example of human being is concerned, he could easily vie with and even beat any good Christian, as is evident from the great praise he received from people of consequence from all over the world.

M. D. SILAS.

OBITUARY

We regret to announce the death of William D. Kerr, retired schoolmaster, Justice of the Peace and former Provost of Saltcoats, Ayrshire, a member of the National Secular Society and subscriber to THE FREETHINKER. Mrs. Annie Read, whose husband conducted the secular service at Woodside Crematorium, writes: “William died as he always had lived, an Atheist. He hated war and was a conscientious objector in 1914-1918. He was held in high esteem, was elected to the Town Council and elected Provost. He was a champion of the poor and worked hard to combat the appalling housing conditions of the interwar years. A founder-member of the Independent Labour Party in Saltcoats, W. D. Kerr’s high sense of citizenship will be hard to equal, while his kindness and eagerness to help, his pawky humour and fund of stories and his ready pen will be long remembered”.

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