

The Freethinker

Volume LXXX—No. 33

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

I WENT RECENTLY to see the English adaptation of the play by the famous East German dramatist, Bertolt Brecht, now running at the Mermaid Theatre, London. This notable production, which deals with the *cause célèbre* of the great astronomer, Galileo in the 17th century, has already been reviewed in these columns by Colin McCall, and I regard it as altogether superfluous to contribute any further dramatic comment upon this most remarkable theatrical interpretation by Bertolt Brecht; except merely to give my emphatic opinion that everyone interested in the great drama of intellectual revolution which has been the driving force behind human evolution, should make a special point of seeing this memorable re-

construction and reinterpretation of one of the most outstanding episodes in human progress: a piece of advice which incidentally, applies to Freethinkers in particular. It is certainly a most refreshing change from the general mediocrity that appears to dominate the commercial theatre at most times and places, including apparently the London theatre of 1960.

Copernicus And The Catholic Church

Much has been written upon the famous incident of the two successive condemnations of Galileo Galilei in, respectively, 1616 and 1633; but to apprehend what was the real significance of this renowned clash between Science and Religion (the former represented by Galileo, the latter by the Vatican Holy Office) it is necessary to view it in its particular context and in the particular era to which that specialised context belonged. For it is often forgotten that the great Italian astronomer was not condemned on account of his epoch-making telescope discoveries, but on account of his confidently-asserted claim to prove, with their aid, a novel and iconoclastic theory of the construction of the physical universe that was propounded twenty-one years before the birth of Galileo himself (1564) by the Polish astronomer, Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543). Rather curiously, the discovery of Copernicus—more accurately a rediscovery of ancient Greek science—was actually made at the Papal Court about 1500 by the young Polish astronomer then at the court of the Borgias.

Prudence, and perhaps the need for further research, prevented Copernicus from producing the definite statement of his views until 1543 just before his own death when his great work *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Bodies* first appeared, with the famous (and much disputed) preface by Osiander. It should be pointed out that Copernicus, himself a cleric, the Reverend Canon Copernicus, dedicated his *magnum opus* to the reigning Pope, Paul III and, though his views were already well-known during his life-time, had never been condemned by the Vatican.

In point of fact, the only theologian to assail his Christian orthodoxy vehemently, was the arch-heresiarch, Martin Luther, and that would hardly have worried the Inquisition! For seventy-three years, in fact, after the

death of Copernicus, his theory, whilst subjected to much pseudo-scientific criticism by the dominant school of Aristotelian-Ptolemaic, astronomy was not banned by the Church as in any way heretical. In fact, already in the 17th century and only a few years before Galileo's first condemnation in 1616, Cardinal De Berulle, one of the leaders of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, whilst speaking disparagingly of the Copernican theory as one that was rejected by the overwhelming bulk of contemporary scientific opinion, made no suggestion that belief in it was in any way incompatible with Catholic orthodoxy (*cf.* Aldous Huxley, *Grey Eminence*). When viewed objectively from the standpoint of the history of

science, there can be no doubt that Copernicus did not conceive the heliocentric theory originally, but actually derived it from the ancient Greek astronomer Aristarchus of Samos (3rd Century B.C.). This is virtually proved by Copernicus's own MS, which was rediscovered in Vienna in 1858, and which contains a passage referring to Aristarchus but subsequently crossed out by Copernicus himself. From which it would appear to follow that, just as America ought by rights to be styled "Columbia", so the Copernican theory ought rightly to be styled the "Aristarchian" theory, after its original discoverer (*cf.* E. Antoniadi *L'Astronomie Egyptienne*).

Giordano Bruno

Actually, it appears to be extremely probable that the real author, both of Galileo's personal misfortunes and, more generally, of the eventual condemnation (1633) not only of Galileo himself but of eventually, the whole Copernican system, was not Copernicus, but the ex-monk, Giordano Bruno (1543-1600) who associated the propagation of Copernican astronomy with the also vehement advocacy of pantheistic and selfconsciously anti-clerical and anti-Christian teachings. Bruno proclaimed in numerous writings to all and sundry, that God is immanent in an infinite Copernican universe, in which Heaven and Hell had no objective existence; that the earth was only one of innumerable worlds in which other rational beings may and probably do exist. (A view which ironically, is now explicitly accepted by the Vatican.) And most important of all from the standpoint of Catholic theology, that our planet far from being the God-ordained centre of the Universe, represents a mere drop in the illimitable ocean of space and time. For holding and propagating this the Roman Inquisition, as is well known, burned him alive in Rome in 1600. For Bruno, unlike either Copernicus or Galileo, was "of the stuff of which martyrs are made" and was prepared to die for his opinions. After that magnificent act of courage, there can be little room for doubt that the Roman authorities equated Copernican astronomy with an active anti-clerical and heretical revolt against the Church, and resolved to suppress this dangerous innovation as soon as they got a convenient pretext. This was eventually given them by Galileo. It must, however,

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Case of Galileo

By F. A. RIDLEY

be added that, when speaking from the standpoint of historical accuracy (and not of dramatic effect), Herr Brecht seems in the course of his fine play, to exaggerate the personal role of Galileo as the arch-enemy of the Church and of the anti-heliocentric Bible. Such an iconoclastic role was actually that of Bruno far more than of Galileo, who does not apparently appear to have drawn any very anti-Catholic conclusions from his revolutionary telescopic discoveries. It was the Church itself which drew them. (By a rather curious coincidence, Bruno, as he recounts himself, was nearly lynched by a London mob on Thames-side quite close to where the Mermaid Theatre now stands.)

cf. L. McIntyre, *Life of Giordano Bruno*.

Could The Age of Reason Have Begun In 1633?

It is scarcely open to doubt that the practical telescopic demonstrations of Galileo excited tremendous interest, and that on this account the Church shrank from an open breach with the great representative of Italian science. Both the reigning Pope, Urban VIII and the famous (now

canonised Jesuit theologian, Cardinal Bellarmine (formerly one of Bruno's judges) admired Galileo's scientific work, and resorted to what was then, unusual leniency in a case of suspected heresy, to get him on the side of the Church. But Brecht's assertion that, had Galileo refused to recant, the Age of Reason (presumably a successful revolt against the Church) would have transpired immediately, appears to be rather doubtful. The Catholic Counter-Reformation had already eradicated Protestantism in Italy, as in Spain, by fire, sword and Jesuit-led propaganda. Bruno and Galileo were its greatest victims. But the victory of an Age of Reason needs more than victims, and the Industrial Revolution and modern Democracy, which were to create the first mass movement of anti-Christian revolt, still lay far in the future. But this fascinating query crowns what must be one of the most powerful and stimulating re-interpretations ever witnessed, of the age-long war of human Reason against religious authority. In the drama of ideas, Bertolt Brecht would appear to rank in the same top class as Ibsen and Shaw.

The Cosmological Problem

By JACK GORDON

ONE PROBLEM which has faced man for all time is the question, "Where do the Sun, the Moon and the Stars come from?" In pre-scientific ages various answers were essayed. These usually portrayed the then known Universe as the work of one or more deities, with man's place in the scheme of things given some special importance. And, as in all branches of science, progress occurs only when events are interpreted in terms of the operation of impersonal forces rather than in terms of the wills and whims of gods.

Astronomy has been no exception in this respect. At the frontiers of this science, controversy still dances over such, at present unsolved, problems as the origin and evolution of the Universe; but today the controversy is a scientific and technical problem—not a religious one. To be sure, no religiously-minded person, scientist or non-scientist, will be refused a hearing for any theory which purports to answer a problem in terms of a Divine Creator. The only snag is that any answer which can be reduced to the form "God did it!" is useless, if not meaningless, because it does not tell us anything. "All right," we may say, "God created the Universe. But *how* did He create it?" An explanation of the *how* rather than the *who* is what makes sense to our minds. It used to be thought that God was responsible for childbirth. Now, while God is still given thanks for the birth of a child by some religiously-inclined parents, He is no longer regarded as the direct cause of the happy event. God is pushed further back along the chain of cause and effect, so to speak; but the actual mechanics of conception are no longer regarded as His doing.

Similarly, if the Universe appears to have no beginning and continues to defy our finest instruments in defining its extent, where shall we place God? And when?

When we peer through our telescopes into space we look back into the past history of the Universe. We see the nebula of Andromeda as it was 2 million years ago; the tremendously distant Hydra cluster of galaxies as it was 2 thousand million years ago. This latter figure is the greatest distance of penetration yet achieved by optical telescopes. For technical reasons it is doubtful if a mirror larger than the 200-inch one in the giant telescope at Mount Palomar, California, could be constructed on Earth. Within the vast range of time and space covered by the

optical telescopes there is still insufficient data to enable an appraisal to be made of the "steady state" theory or of the older evolutionary theory and its premise that the Universe expanded from a super-dense core of extremely hot gaseous material. A still further penetration is needed.

This further penetration beyond optical range is being achieved by the new radio telescopes, which detect radio emissions from the stars and certain other celestial objects. The situation is complex, because not every accurately located source of radio emission has been visually identified by the optical telescopes. Some of them are believed to be beyond the reach of any optical telescope. When a sufficient number of these very distant objects can be located and identified by radio telescopes of sufficient sensitivity and resolving power, it may then be possible to settle the conflict of opinion about the remote history of the Universe.

But the solution of one problem usually points the way to further, still unsolved problems. Science, unlike theology, is an open system. There is no conceivable limit to its growth. Moreover, as Sir Julian Huxley has recently pointed out, science is self-checking. Science is always re-examining its ideas, ready to question even its most fundamental concepts in the search for greater clarity and enlightenment. On the other hand, theology is a closed system of ideas, only partly self-checking, with the Beginning and End already given.

Today, science can show that the development of theology was inevitable. It is but one of the many systems of ideas developed and used by man during his evolution on this planet. If it will please the theologians, we will accept their gods. We will incorporate them as terms in the universal equation. If it be objected that God is Infinite, Indeterminable, etc., etc., we can point to the fact that science today is used to dealing with indeterminate quantities while mathematics has developed some effective techniques for handling them.

—NEXT WEEK—

A CONTROVERSIAL QUESTION

By H. CUTNER

Michael Servetus

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

AS ON SUNDAY September 4th next, the ceremony of unveiling a monument to the memory of Servetus will take place at Annemasse in Upper Savoy, France, just at the doors of that Geneva which burned him alive on October 27th, 1553, it is of interest to remind readers of the life and death of a man, whom Catholics and Calvinists condemned to the stake; the former at Vienne in Servetus's absence, and the latter at Geneva, carrying out the terrible penalty over a slow fire.

Why?

Servetus was born in 1509 at Villanueva de Sigena, in Spain, of a family in easy circumstances. When about twenty years of age, having studied at the University of Toulouse and perhaps at Saragossa, he entered the service of the Friar Quintana, confessor to the Emperor Charles the Fifth, with whom he went to Italy where at Bologna the Emperor and Pope foregathered, and later to Augsburg where the Emperor met the Protestant princes. To Servetus both Catholic and Protestant "seem to have something of truth and something of error in their views" (Willis, *Servetus and Calvin*). The young Spaniard was launched on dangerous seas. In 1531 he published a little volume *De Trinitatis Erroribus* ("On the Errors of the Trinity"), in which he denied the doctrine of the Trinity. Naturally the Catholics were horrified; and the Swiss Protestants equally so. He went to Strassburg, and met with opinion that the author of such a work should be disembowelled and torn to pieces. A couple of dialogues, intended to mollify these harsh opinions, merely aggravated his offence, so he sought refuge and obscurity in Paris, changing his name to Villeneuve, by which he was known for the next twenty years, and gaining a livelihood first as a press-reader, then as a physician. At Paris he made the acquaintance of a young Picard, John Calvin, with whom he apparently discussed theology. From Paris, via Avignon and Orleans, to Lyons, where he came into contact with Symphorien Champier, one of the outstanding doctors of the time. Servetus, or Villeneuve, was employed on Champier's *Pharmacopeia*. Champier was a convinced follower of Galen, as were most doctors at that time, and equally confirmed in his belief in astrology. In this latter connection, Servetus took up his pen in defence of Champier against Fuchs of Tübingen. Returned to Paris, Servetus contacted three other outstanding medical men, of whom the most noteworthy was Vesalius. He lectured and demonstrated on Anatomy and also on Astrology, which was looked on as almost an essential part of medicine then, though forbidden by the University of Paris. These lectures were prohibited and Servetus's printed apology banned. These lectures on Astrology apparently included meteorology of a sort; the moon not only affected disease, as Galen taught, but also the weather. Servetus was saved from his difficulty with the University authorities by Pierre Paumier, Archbishop of Vienne who invited him to be his personal physician. About this time he wrote his only best-seller, a treatise on Syrups, in which, as Sir William Osler emphasised in his lecture on Servetus (published by Oxford University Press, 1909), he declares "that diseases are only perversions of natural functions and not new entities introduced into the body", a novel thought at that epoch.

For fourteen years he led a peaceful life at Vienne, finding time in 1541 to bring out an edition of Ptolemy's *Geography*, with, of course, a dedication to his master

the Archbishop; and, in the following year an edition of the Bible; both these works for the publishing house of Trechsel. In the latter work he allowed himself some bold criticism of the Psalms and of the prophecies in Isaiah and Daniel, which did not forfeit the favour of his patron fortunately. Somewhat later Frelon, another Lyons publisher, brought him once more into touch with Calvin, with whom he entered into a correspondence on the doctrines of the Trinity and the Sacraments, of which Calvin wrote to Guillaume Farel in 1546, that if Servetus came to Geneva "if I have any authority here, I should never suffer him to go away alive". Theological argument aroused a desire for violence four hundred years ago.

Servetus wished to restore what he believed was the true, primitive Christianity. Calvin was convinced that, in Geneva, he had already done this. The story goes that Calvin denounced his opponent to the Inquisition at Vienne. The Inquisitor Orry was then at Lyons; hurrying to Vienne, he had Servetus arrested and thrown into prison; from which place the prisoner disappeared the very next day. All that the Inquisitor could do was burn the heretic in effigy in the market place together with 500 copies of his book on the Restoration of Christianity.

Where did Servetus go? Of all places he went to Geneva. Perhaps, as Guizot suggested, he fancied that the liberal element in this city would welcome him and could protect him. If that was the case, the protection lasted scarcely a month. He was arrested on August 14th. For two months the trial dragged on to an accompaniment of pulpit fulminations, in which Calvin distinguished himself by his violent language. On October 27th, the City Council condemned the prisoner by a majority vote to be burned alive on account of his great errors and blasphemies.

Christianismi Restitutio ("Restoration of Christianity"), the book which more than anything else expressed Servetus's heresy, was, as were his other theological works, most difficult to read and understand. His opinions of Church organisation, of the Vatican, of the sacraments, were much those of the other reformers; it was with regard to the doctrines of the Trinity, of Baptism and the Eucharist, that he went beyond the Swiss reformers. For him, infant baptism was a mere incantation, since the child could have no faith; transubstantiation had no rational basis; and so forth, all expressed in violent and obscure terms. In the fifth volume, as an illustration of the nature of the holy spirit, Servetus gave a clear and accurate description of the passage of the blood from the right side of the heart through the lungs to the left side. This is the first known description, and apparently the discovery should be credited to Servetus. His friend Vesalius had already demonstrated the impossibility of Galen's generally accepted explanation of the manner of the heart's functioning. Discovery was in the air.

About the year 1900, the strong freethinking element in Geneva and in Upper Savoy formed a committee for the erection of a monument to the memory of Servetus, the victim of both Protestant and Catholic fanaticism. The Geneva Fathers refused to allow the statue (by Mlle. Roch, showing Servetus in prison) to be erected in the canton: it was therefore placed just outside the frontier at the junction town of Annemasse. The Nazis removed it, as they did that of de La Barre in Paris. One of the principal

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

That well known broadcaster and journalist, Mr. Gilbert Harding, expressed in *The People* recently how shocked he is that the church in Stratford-on-Avon now charges sixpence to visitors who go in there merely because they want to see Shakespeare's burial place. And why? He roundly tells the vicar "that his church with its historic associations belongs, not to the parishioners, but to God". How dreadful it must be, and what a shock to his feelings that visitors in general who visit the church appear to care less and less for God, and more for Shakespeare! And this even if they have to pay sixpence a time when they go in. And why not? After all we have the *Plays* of Shakespeare—but what have we from God?

★

Whether Christianity has lost its universal appeal among women it is hard to say; but it is interesting to note that Elizabeth Taylor, the famous film star, has embraced Judaism, while actress Elizabeth Sellers (we are told by the *Sunday Dispatch*) "makes no bones about her allegiance" to Buddhism, "even wearing Eastern clothes and attending a mosque" (*sic.*). But though she admits that Buddhists "don't lie, eat meat, drink alcohol, or kill things", she herself "only accepts these tenets", she "doesn't observe them all". It is so like those Christians who certainly never—well, hardly ever—practise Christian tenets! Are there any Christians who hate their parents because Jesus *ordered* them to?

★

That very religious sect which recently predicted the end of the world, a prophecy which for once we were able to test for it completely failed, are not the only "prophets of doom". The members of the British Planetary Time and Space Society have in the past also predicted "world disasters", but strange to say (as the *Daily Mail* pointed out) "failed to force their own eviction". They have, alas, to get out of their present quarters because they can't pay the rent.

★

They came together first in 1935 and "took a vow of poverty", a vow which either they kept voluntarily, or were obliged to keep through lack of cash. "Food parcels and other help" kept them going as "money was only needed to pay the rent". But it is obvious that vows of poverty cut no religious ice these days, for we are grieved to note that only *seven* people formed the society. Prophets of Doom and Vows of Poverty belong to the Golden Age of Christianity especially when deserts were about. The Sahara is still open even now for genuine believers.

★

That—more or less—religious journal "The People" recently devoted half a page to the evangelical activities of a Mr. Eric Smith and his three lady disciples who often form his only congregation. They all live on a boat, saving up later to carry the Gospel to Israel and other places, a project which the writer in *The People* does not seem very enthusiastic about. Still, the sect of four calls itself, "The Full Gospel Revival and Healing Crusade", and Mr. Smith might easily one day have even Twelve Apostles like his Master—and roam about with equal success. But unlike Jesus, Mr. Smith can't go to Israel without a Fund, and until that comes merrily along, he may have to stay in unbelieving England. What bad luck some Evangelists have!

★

That forthright Bishop, Dr. Mervyn Stockwood, preached a sermon recently at Catford in which he roundly told the

congregation that (says *The Kentish Mercury*) "The Church of England will never make any progress in the 20th century while it continues to use a 15th century dogma". But the 15th century dogma came from Jesus Christ himself; is the Bishop ready therefore to throw overboard "our Lord's" precious teaching because his own Church finds itself right out of date? Perish the thought!

★

How does Dr. Stockwood propose to "win England"? He says that the Church must live "dangerously"—but there is only one way a Church can live dangerously—though it may die in the attempt. It is by courageously throwing overboard the unintelligible theology of Jesus and Paul, and coming down to *earth*. That is, by embracing Secularism. We wonder whether the Bishop himself really believes in Angels, Devils, and Miracles?

★

"The Universe" (29/7/60) informed us that the Vatican is to open an "international centre against atheism" next year, with the intention of studying atheism on "a scientific basis". The centre will be attached to the College of Propaganda Fide, and it will collect books from all parts of the world, including Russia. Courses are to be held to discuss "the dangers of atheism and the counter-action required". May the Pioneer Press now expect to receive its first order from the Vatican?

MICHAEL SERVETUS

(Concluded from page 259)

speakers at the unveiling of the first monument, in 1907, was Edouard Herriot.

A second monument was placed at Champel, where Servetus met his death; a plain stone on which is engraved "Mourut sur le bucher à Champel MICHEL SERVET de Villeneuve d'Aragnon" and the dates of his birth and death on the one side; and on the other (translation) "Duteous and grateful followers of Calvin, our great Reformer, yet condemning an error which was that of his age, and strongly attached to liberty of conscience according to the true principles of the Reformation and the Gospel, we have erected this expiatory monument". The *grateful* followers of Calvin, strongly attached to liberty of conscience!

How Voltaire would have hooted with laughter; he who wrote

Oui, jusqu' au dernier de mes jours
Mon âme sera fière et tendre;
J'oserai gémir sur la cendre
des Servets . . .

Le fanatisme est terrassé
Mais il reste l'Hypocrisie
Farceurs à manteaux étriqués
Mauvaise musique d'église,
Mauvais vers et sermons croqués,
Ai-je tort si je vous méprise?

(Yes, to the last of my days;
Proud and tender of heart
I shall dare to bewail
The burning of Servetus.

(Fanaticism is overthrown;
But hypocrisy remains.

(Ye cassocked comedians,
And your bad church music
Bad verses and stolen sermons,
Am I wrong to despise you?)

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

Sussex Branch N.S.S. (Peace Statue, opposite Embassy Court, Brighton), Sundays, 3 p.m.: Messrs. BARKER, EBURY, MILLS, and TRIBE.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, August 14th, 6.45 p.m.: A. D. BURNETT, "Spiritualism—the Science of Life".

Notes and News

The *Sunday Times* weekly item, "Mainly for Children" is probably read by many adults, and is generally very informative. On July 24th, it paid tribute to the Royal Society, but on one point at least it was distinctly misleading. Over pictures of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Francis Bacon, it declared: "At the time the Royal Society was born, the works of these men of science were not recognised or taught, because they conflicted with the earlier ideas of the Greek philosophers". This should read "because they conflicted with the earlier ideas of some Greek philosophers that had been accepted by the Church". In the narrative, too, we have: "Their path was a hard one. At best, they were ignored; at worst, they could be harried and persecuted, as Galileo was". No mention who by.

★
WE WERE PLEASED TO NOTE (*The Guardian*, 3/8/60) that the Irish Republican Minister for Industry and Commerce, Mr. Jack Lynch, had opened a new horse abattoir at Straffan, County Kildare. The abattoir, was acquired at a cost of £20,000 by subscriptions from thousands of people who objected to the traffic in live horses, and is owned by the Irish Horse Abattoir Investment Co. Ltd. All the directors of the company are women, who hope eventually to prevent the export of live horses from Ireland to the Continent for food.

★
THE SILLIEST, as well as the most impertinent comment on the Olympic Games to be held this year in Rome, came

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED £149 16s. 9d.; W. Fields, 2s. 6d.; I. McLeod, 10s.; T. Roberts, 5s.; R. Underwood, 7s.; Mr. & Mrs. Parnell, 10s., J. Hart, 2s. 6d.; E. Drabble, 5s.; Mrs. A. Calderwood, 10s. 6d.; G. Keane, 6s. 6d.; Wm. Ainesley, 10s. Total to date, August 5th, 1960. £153 5s. 9d.

A Place of One's Own

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY was founded by Charles Bradlaugh ninety-four years ago. It is the fervent hope of its present President, F. A. Ridley, and its Executive Committee, that it will celebrate its centenary in its own premises.

When the lease on 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, expired last year, we began looking around for a suitable place to buy. Prices, of course, were high, but then, to stay on would have meant more-than-trebled rent. Places were hard to find, but we kept at it. Eventually, after numerous disappointments, we found 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. And we bought it. To do so we had to sell securities, but we felt it worthwhile.

It is well situated: on a main road in a historic borough (Southwark) on a historic spot (site of an inn owned by the Harward family) close to London Bridge, Southwark Cathedral and Guy's Hospital. It is big, and there is a hope of letting the upper part. But it is badly in need of repair and decoration. And, in fact, the work of renovation has started. It will cost a lot.

So, we are appealing to N.S.S. members and FREE-THINKER readers, asking them to give anything they can to a Building Fund, to help make sure that the Society's centenary shall find it in a well appointed place of its own. It is one way you can help repay the sterling work of our founders.

Please send your donations made out to the National Secular Society, to the Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, and please state that they are for the Building Fund.

from the unofficial Vatican City weekly, *Osservatore della Domenica* on August 3rd. It hoped that the Games would be "devoid of paganism or neo-paganism" and, while respecting the freedom of all participants, said that the Christian character of the games should be predominant. But it is ironical, anyway, that the Olympic Organising Committee should have set up a special office in which the ecclesiastical adviser to the Italian Sports Centre, Monsignor Nicola Pavoni, "is working to co-ordinate religious assistance to all athletes taking part in the games, including those of other faiths". We do well recall at this time that the ancient Olympic Games were banned in 384 A.D. by the Christian Emperor Theodosius, and were not revived until 1896. Next week F. A. Ridley will deal with the matter more fully in a front-page article, "The Olympic Games v. Christianity".

★
ADDRESSING 150 DELEGATES to the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief's Freedom from Hunger Conference on August 2nd, Dr. Neville Goodman, Principal Medical Officer to the Ministry of Health said that the discovery of D.D.T. was just as important as the discovery of penicillin (*Daily Telegraph*, 3/8/60). "Because a German discovered the original, a Swiss developed it, and an Anglo-American team carried it further still, its importance seems never to have had the recognition it deserves", said Dr. Goodman. "Yet it has caused a social revolution." When he was young and took a girl out to dinner "flies were a natural accompaniment of the meal. Nowadays if a fly appears there are complaints to the manager".

Not Enough!

By COLIN McCALL

WHAT SHOULD ONE EXPECT of a book on *Religion in a Space Age*? I can't say precisely what I expected but, whatever it was, I didn't get it from this one (published by George Ronald, London, 1960, 10s.). Mr. John Lambley, the author, is patently a sincere man, but he clearly isn't fitted to write on this subject. His book is so flat, so tame, so uninspiring, in contrast to that dynamic title. I don't necessarily demand a racy style: style would be secondary, were the theme well reasoned. But I want one or the other. It is a spark that is missing, either of matter or manner.

The first paragraph sets the tone. "The search for the meaning of existence never ends. For thousands of years philosophers have been writing learned treatises on it; religious bodies have been advancing their ideas about it, but as yet no common agreement has been reached." Read that paragraph and you have virtually read the book. It continues in that imprecise way, as a few random selections will show. "Different atoms, combining in countless different ways, make up the matter of which the universe is composed" (Chapter 2); "Science may be able to trace the history of the world back through geological ages, and the birth of the planets to some nebulous cloud of gas, which itself can be atomised into nothing more than energy" (Chapter 4); "Evolution has caused the human species to divide into a number of different varieties . . ." (Chapter 12). With all due respect to Mr. Lambley, this is elementary text-book level, appropriate for *A Child's First Book on Evolution*.

"Many will not agree with his conclusions"—the blurb tells us—"but for them Mr. Lambley points the urgent need for re-thinking the many questions which orthodox creeds no longer answer satisfactorily." But, apart from the total absence of any urgency in the book (Mr. Lambley may *feel* an urgency, but he hasn't communicated it!) there is often a definite discouragement to re-thinking. It is true that Chapter 8 begins with the announcement that "Whatever the Supreme Power is, it is not the God of the Christians"; that a few pages later Christian teaching is described as "inconsistent"; but the same chapter concludes that "There is nothing better in the foreseeable future to take the place of Christianity . . . If we destroy Christianity now we create a vacuum. The totem pole is better than nothing". Which, to my mind, is a curious way of pointing "the urgent need for re-thinking". And a few pages from the end of the book, we read that "religious dogmas should not be cast aside without good reason. Loss of faith in them can have disastrous effects for many years".

We have had this so often that the tendency is to dismiss it. And in most cases it is probably the best reaction: losing faith is not like driving a car; you can't just brake when you want to. But occasionally this hackneyed argument has to be met, and I suppose now is as good a time as any.

We couldn't, if we wanted, "destroy Christianity now". Christianity is not a thing, an object that can be smashed once and for all like an electric light bulb. "Christianity" is a useful, general term to describe certain doctrines held by people and expounded by people, more or less in accordance with a written and oral tradition. We could destroy a church (building), of course, but that isn't destroying Christianity; nor is disestablishing or even outlawing the Churches as institutions. What we are concerned with are ideas in people's minds. That is the

first thing Mr. Lambley should realise (Freethinkers know it already). If it were possible, at one fell swoop, to "destroy" the religious faith of, say, a poor old Irish or Italian Roman Catholic, it might create a vacuum, but it just doesn't and couldn't happen that way. Freethinkers aren't sorcerers.

Religious dogmas are not "things", either, and cannot be "cast aside" like old boots. Again we are dealing with ideas in people's minds. The totem pole is, of course, an object which can be destroyed, but it is not *merely* an object; it is a symbol, again of ideas in the minds of its devotees. And destruction of the pole, the symbol, is not destruction of those ideas. Broadly speaking, people retain their religious ideas until these are seen to be inadequate. The totem pole remains as long as it is thought effective. Often, for emotional reasons, religion persists beyond that point (if it may be called a "point") but this needn't concern us here. What needs to be stressed is that one doesn't miss ideas that have proved inadequate. One may well miss the companionship of church membership, the comfort of churchgoing and collective worship. This, the Freethinker understands and readily grants. It is a real problem, though fortunately a declining one. Church membership and churchgoing no longer hold the attraction they once did.

"Religious dogmas should not be cast aside without good reason," says Mr. Lambley. The Freethinker has three retorts: (1) they aren't likely to be; (2) falsity is a good reason; (3) they shouldn't be implanted in the first place. This third one is the root of the trouble. All the "disastrous effects" that Mr. Lambley sees in loss of faith are really attributable to the inculcation of faith. Religion, not Freethought, must bear the blame for them.

I have implied that *Religion in a Space Age* is ingenuous. But, as so often, ingenuousness is accompanied by mental arrogance. "We know that much of our knowledge comes from extra-sensory, or supernatural sources . . ."; "We know that two minds which are sufficiently in harmony can transmit telepathic messages to each other even when they are far apart, and not under the same environmental influences"; "Spiritual knowledge does not result from empirical methods. It comes from extra-sensory perception"; "We are left in no doubt that the Supreme Power by granting us these powers has chosen us for a special purpose, and that purpose can only be to help on the evolutionary changes with which it is engaged". Mr. Lambley is apparently so sure of these things that he doesn't even *try* to support them with evidence. But this is typical of his whole book. One yearns for a concrete example of some sort. Even a reference to Professor Rhine or Dr. Soal would come as a welcome change, and that is really a sign of desperation so far as I am concerned.

On evil, I thought for a moment, Mr. Lambley might have something to contribute. At least he recognises the relativity of good and evil. But, pointing "the urgent need for re-thinking", no doubt, he soon tells us that "it is not for us to criticise creation. Evil things exist by the will of God and He, as the supreme power and first cause of all, cannot be wrong". "What we regard as evil is not 'wrong' in the sight of God. He would not have created it otherwise. Evil is a necessary ingredient of human progress."

Apart from disbelieving in an after-life, then, Mr.

Lambley offers very little real challenge to orthodoxy. His declared "quarrel" with existing religions is, as he says, "not so much for what they do, as for what they leave undone" and, after reading his book I am not very clear what he considers this deficiency to be. Little more, I should say, than failure to acknowledge evolution. And

Modernist Christians have already acknowledged it anyway.

Indeed, *Religion in a Space Age* is a hotchpotch of secondhand and second rate ideas, loosely assembled and loosely expressed. It proves only one thing: sincerity is not enough.

Far From the Madding Crowd—August

By RUSTICUS

They seek for themselves private retiring places, as country villages, the sea shore, mountains; yea thou thyself art wont to long much after such places. But all this thou must know to proceed from simplicity in the highest degree. At what time soever thou wilt, it is in thy power to retire into thyself, and to be at rest and free from all businesses.

—Marcus Aurelius.

THIS STILL AUGUST EVENING I have climbed the ancient British camp briefly referred to last month. This mighty monument of Celtic skill has stood guard over our village since the days of Romulus and Remus—or thereabouts! In fact, it was the village in pre-Roman times, and from its breezy heights can be seen at least eight more major prehistoric hilltop camps—surely a record number for any part of Britain—anything from two to three thousand years of human history, lost for ever. A very old villager who died before the war told me that he had seen some of the original inhabitants of our camp. As a small boy he had witnessed the construction of the railway in the 1850's, and during excavations at the foot of the camp had seen dozens of skeletons unearthed.

I concluded my "July" article with a brief mention of a farm worker friend of mine. He is one of the few of the "old school" now left in the village. He speaks in broad dialect, a speech that is music to the ears of at least one listener. Many of his words are pure Anglo-Saxon, and Alfred the Great could have conversed with him with greater ease than he—my friend—could converse today with his opposite number from Lancashire.

Before the war half the cottages in our village were occupied by farm workers and other rural artisans. Today, out of a total of about 500 souls, not more than 5% are engaged in rural industry: the figure would be even less but for the existence of extensive watercress beds. The village wheelwright and carpenter still ply their ancient trades, but the old woodmen, shepherds, thatchers and the like have gone for ever. The village has now been practically bought up by new-rich "foreigners" from alien parts of England. A rum lot, on the whole, and snobs to a man—and woman, especially woman! Their supercilious attitude towards the few old Victorian natives still lingering among them inspires profound detestation in at least one breast. The females of the retired military gents appear to imagine that they are still living in India; they treat the old villagers like dirt.

Though an unbeliever of some militancy, this writer bitterly regrets the closing of the Congregational chapel in the village, and the threatened closing of the humble Methodist chapel—average attendance four. Village chapels have at least been centres of political independence and spiritual defiance of the parson and squire: the reign of these latter gentlemen is far from ended in some places I could name.

Alas, I climbed the steep slope to the camp tonight solely to report upon the August scene, and find I have used most of my space on the human scene. However, having given a picture of the village of today, I can now leave the subject for good.

A hundred feet below, in the river valley, the lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea, to drink in some shallows, some distance from where they have been feeding. One or two of the cows are lowing in fact, but something appears to have upset several of these usually quiet animals, for at least half a dozen are bawling their heads off. Perhaps they resent the presence of children playing cricket on the village pitch, in the roped-off part of the meadow: it is a safe bet that the captain of cricket will resent that same presence when he emerges from the pub.

Our Celtic camp—or "castle", as it is locally termed—is a famous place for wild flowers, as the summer approaches fulfilment. The towering rampart of the camp is composed of solid chalk, clothed in bright green turf, flowers and numerous hawthorn bushes. Tonight, in as little time as it takes to record their names, I have indentified the following wild flowers—listed without regard to "families", but simply in the order I found them:—

Harebell, white clover, zigzag clover, knapweed, selfheal, lesser scabious, field thistle, spear thistle, ground thistle, plantain, daisy, horse daisy, yarrow, pignut, rockrose, buttercup, hawkweed, hawkbit, lesser bindweed, lady's bedstraw, hop trefoil, rest-harrow, bird's-foot trefoil, burnet-saxifrage, wild carrot, squinacywort, clustered bellflower, plus two more I was unable to indentify, making a total of 29 flowers.

What fascinating, fantastic, beautiful, homely or grotesque names have been given to our English wild flowers. Many of the names date back many centuries. Dozens are named after mammals or birds, such as cat's-foot, cockscomb, coltsfoot, cowberry, cowslip and oxlip, crowfoot, cuckoo-flower, dog-violet, dove's-foot, duckweed, foxglove, goose-foot, harebell, hawkbit, hogweed, pignut and sowthistle, horse-mint, sheep's-bit. Then there is the "lady" group, beautiful names, these—lady's bedstraw, lady's fingers, lady's smock, lady's tresses, lady's mantle. Many of the Orchis family also bear names of other living things, as bee orchis, butterfly orchis, frog orchis, spider orchis—not to mention that lowest form of life—man orchis.

Pellitory-of-the-wall, poor-man's-weatherglass, touch-me-not, forget-me-not, bloody crane's-bill, brandy bottle, Venus's looking-glass, codlins-and-cream, Jack-by-the-hedge, Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon, Jack-in-the-pulpit—the list is endless. Jack-in-the-pulpit, or cuckoo-pint, also known as Lords and Ladies, brings back memories of childhood days in a Somerset village—at least for this writer—where we boys had a very Anglo-Saxon name for this plant, a name ten time more appropriate than those given here! Connected with bulls—some of you may remember!

I fear our editor will curse my long-windedness, and so I will conclude "August" with the tip that wild mushrooms may be early this year: I found my first on July 29th at the main entrance to our village "castle". I am afraid my farmer friends would take a poor view of my broadcasting this information, so.

PLEASE SHUT THE GATE.

CORRESPONDENCE

SIR LESLIE PLUMMER

I am not one of those who consider THE FREETHINKER and N.S.S. unduly perturbed by Sir Leslie Plummer's Racial and Religious Discrimination Bill, especially when it gains endorsement by, of all organisations, the National Council for Civil Liberties. It was as long ago as November 1959 that I first raised objections to legislation of this sort, objections that I see the Secretary of the N.C.C.L., Mr. Martin Ennals, has at last taken cognizance of (THE FREETHINKER, page 234). But so far as I know, no clarification of the Bill's prime intent has yet resulted: indeed if it did the measure would show itself to be redundant or unenforceable.

We are frequently told that Crusades, Inquisitions and witch hunts were products of a now obsolete approach to religion, that they could never happen again. I do not feel it sensational to say that if the principle of medieval theocracy were ever to recur, the practice of medieval inquisition would presently be found at its side. It may seem a far cry from Blasphemy, Lord's Day Observance, Censorship and similar laws to a theocratic state: but we must remember that totalitarianisms do not arise overnight. They grow up as tender plants in a climate of mild hysteria, of communal back-slapping, of mounting self-righteousness, of declining free speech. The borough librarians who vet the new lists, the school governors who "reluctantly" dispense with the services of heterodox teachers, the corporations that "redevelop" speakers' corners, the newspaper editors who watchfully compile their correspondence columns, the B.B.C. producers who are—alas—so short of broadcasting time when certain scripts are submitted, the priests or parsons who "advise" their congregations what to read or omit reading, the well-meaning politicians who introduce legislation to stop people from saying what they don't want to hear—these are the people who nail up the coffin of our civil liberties. The dictators merely carry it away.

D. H. TRIBE.

Mr. McCall's leader (22/7/60) was most illuminating, and I did enjoy reading it. Apparently Sir Leslie Plummer wishes to have it both ways, and that simply will not do. All success to THE FREETHINKER and the way it is opening eyes in the right direction.

I see from the *Daily Express* (23/7/60) that the Recorder of Carlisle, Mr. Edward Wooll, Q.C., has been quite unnecessarily "shocked" because a probation officer had no religious faith and did not take the oath. I refused to do so when I was (1) appointed a magistrate many years ago (2) when I was appointed Councillor of the Royal Borough of Kingston-on-Thames (3) at the high Court in London, when giving evidence; and in each case I carried my point that I had no religious faith. It needs some pluck, that is all.

T. C. ROWLAND-HILL, J.P.
(Lt. Col. Retired)

DR. RICHARD HOPE

In reply to your contributor Dr. Richard Hope; he need not have temerity to write as he thinks, this is THE FREETHINKER.

He considers that my Atheism is for me an escape mechanism against the absurdity of existence and that it brings me the same comfort that a god-saviour is presumed to bring to Christians. I believe the latter claim to be as false as I know the first to be.

I take my Atheism seriously because I know the record of the Church, of the effect of the Christian creed and the Bible, on society, and fear it. From the use of knives and forks to the heliocentric theory, the Church has stood in the way of human progress. Knives and forks and the heliocentric theory have won, Christians and Churchmen now use the one and accept the other. I could laugh myself silly, only the smoke of the faggots, the smell of burnt flesh, the cries of the tortured and the clank of the dungeon, crowd on my imagination. Was it not serious for those who bore the brunt of the battle against the axioms of the Church?

Can I laugh at the thousands of women murdered for a silly command in a silly book? Can the fifteen hundred years of Jewish persecution, because of a childish fable, raise a smile? Can I laugh today, because the Vatican, in a terror-stricken world, foments a "god-inspired hatred" and waits impatiently to bless a New Crusade?

EVA EBURY.

Dr. Richard Hope (29/7/60) suggests that Eva Ebury may be too serious about her own illusions and not serious enough about those of the religious. Unfortunately he has not illustrated this astounding observation.

Whatever she does write appears to me, as it must do to most rational men, as something, of which the soundness and veracity may easily be tested. Whereas religious doctrines are necessarily meant to be taken as prescribed by the "doctors" of the church, in liberal doses accompanied with the magic ingredient "faith".

If Dr. Hope is a doctor of Medicine, surely his groundwork of

study must give him some idea of how self sufficient the universe is, or how absurd man is, without taking the word of a lay-woman. If he is a doctor of Divinity or Theology, then he is adopting a truly neutral policy in his letter which would not be true to his type. And, if perchance he is a doctor of Music, then from this day forth I am a sworn rock-n-roller and skiffle fan.

This paper gives much to think freely about as it does not expound any dogmas which have to be taken in, and believed in because the editor or someone higher up says so.

C. V. BELMOUR.

Dr. Hope thinks Christians are happy. Their minds are full of feelings of sin, guilt, fear and anxiety. As a child, I was indoctrinated in Roman Catholicism. Thanks to people like Eva Ebury, I am now free of such mental misery. I can never repay my debt to Freethought. The phrase "anthropomorphic illusions" will arouse a desire in Christians to burn Dr. Hope in his Ivory Tower. "I get the feeling" that Dr. Hope has enshrined his ego and worships it "obsessively".

L. J. MURRAY.

MORE INITIATIVE

It seems to me that Freethinkers, Rationalists, Humanists or whatever name they choose to give themselves, must definitely take more initiative, more courage if you like, to disseminate their views. I have often reflected on this. There are many whose religious beliefs are nil, but for some unaccountable reason they pay lip service to religion, or do not definitely oppose it. I think fear is the basis.

As for Christianity, it is a coward's castle, as Chapman Cohen said long ago. That this is so, is borne out by my own experience. When challenged to defend their beliefs, Bible-saturated intellects are inadequate, and they take refuge in the conspiracy of silence. Press, radio and TV allow them to propagate their views without contradiction.

FREDERICK E. PAPPS.

- 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 1/3.
- 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.
- ROBERT TAYLOR—THE DEVIL'S CHAPLAIN.**
By H. Cutner. Price 1/6; postage 4d.
- 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.
- RIGHTS OF MAN.** By Thomas Paine.
Price 2/6; postage 5d.
- THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK.** By Hector Hawton. Price 5/-; postage 6d.
- HUMANITY'S GAIN FROM UNBELIEF.** By Charles Bradlaugh. Price 2/6; postage 5d.
- MEN WITHOUT GODS.** By Hector Hawton. Price 2/6; postage 5d.
- JESUS, MYTH OR HISTORY?** By Archibald Robertson. Price 2/6; postage 5d.
- THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF GOD.** By Grant Allen. Price 3/6; postage 6d.