

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXI—No. 15

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

AT THE END OF THE YEAR 1869, a General Council of the Roman Catholic Church was assembled in Rome by Pope Pius IX. The main, or at least the most publicised, result of this Council was the Declaration of Papal Infallibility which, after extremely bitter controversy, was finally proclaimed on July 18th, 1870. A few weeks later, after the outbreak of the Franco-German War, the French garrison, then resident in Rome for the protection of the Pope's Temporal Power, withdrew; and on September 3rd an Italian army entered Rome and abolished the Pope's Temporal Power. Whereupon Pius IX adjourned the Vatican Council *sine die* which has remained in abeyance until last year, 1960, when Pope John announced his intention of resuming it in the course of the next few years. Presumably the resuscitated Council will still bear the name under which the Council of 1870 has passed into history: the Vatican Council.

The Pope and the Council

As has often been noted, the date of July 18th, 1870, represents a most important and significant date in ecclesiastical and, indeed, in general history. For the Declaration of Papal Infallibility entirely changed the whole administrative organisation of the world-wide Catholic Church. Prior to 1870, Infallibility (and along with it, supreme administrative control) had been conceived by Canon Law as resting in the collective hands of the Roman Catholic hierarchy throughout the world, who assembled periodically in order to define in a final and authoritative manner, the doctrine and practice of their Church. (The last Council prior to that assembled at the Vatican, was the Council of Trent, assembled in the mid-16th century, with the primary object of reorganising the Church of Rome against the Reformation). The Papacy, though its representatives presided over the successive General Councils, was bound by their collective decisions and had no power to override them. In more secular phraseology, prior to 1870, the Roman Catholic Church was a constitutional monarchy, with the powers of the Pope (its monarch) subordinated to the control of the ecclesiastical Parliament, the General Council. The Pope alone was not regarded as infallible, nor (as already noted) could he validly overrule the agreed decisions of a Council once officially recognised as an Ecumenical (or General) Council.

The First Totalitarian Regime

The Vatican Council summarily changed all that and, along with it, the entire Constitution of the Catholic Church. For by proclaiming the Pope *qua* Pope infallible, apart from the Council, the Vatican Council actually made all future General Councils unnecessary. All that was left for them to do in future was to ratify the decrees of the infallible Papacy, e.g. previous Councils (Trent, etc.) were Ecumenical Councils and, as such, the infallible legislators of the Church, whereas all future Councils

(including Pope John's resurrected Vatican one) will merely be, in fact can only be, rubber stamps of the Vatican. For the Declaration of Papal Infallibility entirely altered the nature of the Church from what was in effect, a constitutional into a totalitarian, regime. One could even perhaps describe it as the first Fascist dictatorship of modern times. (c.f. my book, *The Papacy and Fascism*, now out of print.) Naturally such an internal revolution, for such it was, carried out under the leadership of the Jesuits, met with bitter opposition. A contemporary opponent of Papal Infallibility who participated in the Council and later wrote an account of it, has vividly described the tortuous intrigues which eventually resulted in the "revelation" of the Holy Ghost that Infallibility lay solely in the Vatican. (c.f. Pomponio Leto. *The Vatican Council—1876*.)

Rome and the Churches

It will be clear from the above that the forthcoming (so-called) Ecumenical Council will actually be nothing of the sort, for it cannot display any independent volition but will merely be an obedient mouthpiece of Papal policy. It is, since 1870, firm Catholic dogma that the individual Pope is the Church and that, accordingly, if Pope and Council should disagree, it is the Pope who is always right. "All the regiment's out of step except our John!" What Pope John presumably wants from this General Council is an official confirmation that the Church is solidly behind his world strategy; an ecclesiastical version of the approved technique in secular totalitarian regimes of holding periodical plebiscites in order to register popular approval of the Dictator's policy. In the present case, the ostensible aim of the Ecumenical Council is to bring about "reconciliation" with Rome, a strategy already foreshadowed by the cordial reception given last year to Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury. Obviously what Rome is trying to do is to cash in on the fear of Atheism and Communism, with the object of representing to non-Catholic Christians that they can only find safety behind the impregnable walls of Vatican Infallibility.

However, the Infallibility decree of 1870 has made any real reunion impossible; for any genuine reunion is surely only possible between equals, and no such reunion is even theoretically possible between the Pope, the sole Infallible mouthpiece of Omnipotence and the merely humanly appointed officials of other Churches. Whilst the forthcoming Ecumenical Council will no doubt meet with vast publicity, and will present an impressive spectacle we do not visualise that it is likely to result in a general rush of the non-Roman Christian Churches (both Orthodox and Protestant) to make their submission (for that is all it would really amount to) to the "One True Church".

The Vatican v. The Kremlin

One may be wrong: particularly since only Popes are endowed with infallibility! But it appears at least possible that the real objective of Pope John and his Vatican

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Pope John and the Ecumenical Council

By F. A. RIDLEY

entourage is not so much to impress the Protestants, the enemies of yesterday, as the Communists, the enemies of today—and tomorrow? For after all, Rome traditionally believes in taking her enemies one at a time, and this is the era of Marx and Khrushchev, not of Luther and Calvin. At least it seems hardly open to doubt that what really pre-occupies (and probably gives severe headaches to) the backroom boys in the Vatican is, what attitude to take towards the rival totalitarian and cosmopolitan regime at the Kremlin. A problem nowadays particularly

urgent since the rapid progress of nuclear armaments is now making Crusades and Holy Wars out of date. But how is it possible for the infallible Papacy to scrap the Cold War and to practise effective co-existence with an officially atheistic regime? The problem is so difficult that it probably requires the combined wisdom of Pope and Council to solve it; so difficult in fact that, if they can solve it, even we will seriously have to reconsider the question of their Infallibility!

God and Sex

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

ONE OF THE MINOR REASONS for my atheist position is that I cannot believe that a beneficent being, such as the Christian god is alleged to be, could possibly impose sex on a creation like the human race in the full knowledge of what it would mean in the way of tragedy and disaster. A huge amount of crime and cruelty stems from sexual feeling. I once put this to a professional religionist. He replied that God gave us sex, amongst other reasons, to strengthen our character against temptation, but he could not tell me why the temptation and why, if a given person had not been trained to resist sexual temptation, he should in God's plan commit rape or a *crime passionnel* of murder, that is, I cannot understand why God planned that such sexual deviation should involve the unjustified termination of the life of an innocent person.

Since, then, God and God's alleged accredited agents have been powerless to do anything but mess the whole sex thing about, it is now necessary for rational humans to try, using psychological evidence in an empirical evolutionary way, to regulate it. But since in its manifestations and practice it is essentially private, this is a very difficult thing to do. The difficulty is increased by the rather natural confusion between affection and sexual desire, both loosely called Love, and thus excluded from interference. In some places adultery is a civil crime, in others such a view is regarded as unwarranted impertinence. The matter is made worse by sacerdotal intrusion with references to our base animal passions ignoring the fact that as "God's creatures" we *are* animals.

The best form of sexual love starts as affection based, of course, on sexual attraction but, at the start, devoid of desire, active or overt. This inevitably comes with the close personal contacts habitual and natural in such relationships. If it all ends in a lifelong monogamous union, sexually happy, inspired by respect and affection, I think this the ideal solution of the sex question. To me both vows of celibacy and promiscuity are equally odious. And extramarital liaisons are necessarily furtive and unsatisfactory and nearly always eventually unhappy, no matter how genuine the original affective tie.

But though the monogamy convention has the tacit approval of all, it is constantly and successfully challenged and outraged. Now we cannot forget that sexual desire is a most powerful and dominating factor in the lives of men and women, though the pitiful Victorian view was that women should not and decent women did not, admit this. Women were supposed not to have such thoughts: they were supposed to be purely passive baby factories.

Marie Stopes demonstrated the falsity and hypocrisy of this view, and insisted successfully that women have a natural desire for, and a natural right to, sexual pleasure in marriage, associated with freedom from the fear of unwanted pregnancy. The result of female sexual liberation has apparently been an increase in irregular

unions which are commonplace amongst the highest and lowest classes, prostitution, and divorce, the regrettable necessity for which I admit in almost all cases even if it is only to free children from the poisonous atmosphere of a contentious milieu. But I think it more than possible this result was due to a greater respect for truth.

One extremely curious phenomenon is the public appearance of the "Nymphet" the young immediately post-pubertal girl, who seeks sexual satisfaction of a purely instinctive kind devoid of affection. In Sydney after the invasion by US troops in 1942, the highest incidence (and it was very high) of VD was in the age group 13-18, and in Melbourne the espresso café call-girls are of that age; one said over TV that she had 7 men a day. These children have no idea of what is happening to them, nor have their parents. In some primitive tribes, promiscuity at puberty is the rule, and a curious feature is that many girls menstruate but do not ovulate and so do not become pregnant; when they do after some years, they are required by tribal law to marry. This they do, irrespective of who the father may be out of many possible candidates. As these tribes are run the result seems satisfactory enough, but in a delicately balanced society such as ours, it would be chaotic. Something like it, however, is going on *sub rosa* all the time in England. (See William Cooper's *Scenes from Provincial Life*). And the case of the notorious Lady C. is not unique. This dame wanted sexual satisfaction, and this not being available at home, she took it where she found it. In terms of conventional morality this is indefensible, but many people do not agree. However that may be, such social facts exist and must be discussed, freely and publicly. The old suppression was just as furtive and unsatisfactory as the things it hid. So that discussion should be especially liberated into freedom by those who thought the thing wrong and the book unfit for human consumption; to refuse to do so is patent hypocrisy.

In the course of my medical life, I saw singularly few really successful marriages, and sexual maladjustment was a common cause. There would be very many more happy marriages if people had a proper knowledge of the place of sex in their lives, its pleasures and its dangers. As it is, frustration, jealousy and sexual hatred cause untold misery.

As God has lamentably failed in this job, only Man can put it right. The sex factor in life needs enlightened discussion free from the hypocrisy, prejudice and false values of organised religion.

—NEXT WEEK—

BUCHMAN'S WAY FOR BRITAIN

By FRANK MAITLAND

Brecht in English

By COLIN McCALL

WITH THE APPEARANCE at the end of last year of Volume One of the *Plays* of Bertolt Brecht (Methuen 25s.) comes the first real opportunity for non-German readers to savour the work of perhaps the greatest of modern playwrights. Here are *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Trial of Lucullus* and *The Life of Galileo*, in what are claimed to be the best available translations; the first and last newly published, the second and third revised. They are, the publishers say, primarily meant to be read, and certainly they read well. They will provide a good introduction for those unacquainted with Brecht's plays, while those who know his work will prize this volume and go to it continually for stimulation.

The Threepenny Opera, based upon John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, is probably Brecht's best known work in England, and recently ran for five years in New York (off Broadway). The revised translation is by Desmond I. Vesey and Eric Bentley, and includes the author's notes. By titling the scenes on boards on the stage, he made what he called "a primitive start towards a literisation of the theatre", a difficult but important conception that can't be discussed here. Suffice it to say that Brecht wanted his audience to stay alive and alert in the theatre, especially intellectually alert. "In drama, too," he wrote, "we should introduce footnotes and the practice of thumbing through and checking up."

The greatness—or one of the greatneses—of Brecht is that, with all his deliberate efforts at "literisation", with all his "formulation", his plays are more living, more vital in every way than those of all but a very few modern dramatists. Peachum's morning anthem in the *Opera*, conveys something of the vitality I speak of (which Gay had too, of course):—

Wake up, you old Image of Gawd!
Get on with your sinful backsliding!
Continue to perpetrate fraud!
Jehovah will do the providing!

Go barter your brother, you bear!
Sell your wife at an auction, you lout!
You think Our Lord God isn't there?
On Judgment Day you will find out.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle, which I haven't seen, comes across beautifully in a translation by James and Tania Stern, immensely helped by the verses by W. H. Auden, from which the following variations from the tender, through the worldly wise, to the cynical are taken:—

Prayers and sighs grew more numerous, tears and sweat flowed faster
As the months passed by, as the child grew up.

In front is red fire
In the rear is red smoke.
Stay wisely in between
Keep near the standard bearer.
The first ones always die
The last ones are also hit
Those in the centre come home.

To love your next-door neighbour
Approach him with an axe
For prayers and saws and sermons
Are unconvincing facts.
What miracles of preaching
A good sharp blade can do:
So, so, so, so Azdak
Make miracles come true.

The Trial of Lucullus, translated by H. R. Hays, was originally written for radio, and contains a fine scene in which a fishwife claims to understand war, against the

protestations of Lucullus. Meeting the boats on the Tiber when they returned from the Asian war, she tells the court that she waited until:

All the ships were empty and my son
Came down none of the gangplanks.

And the Judge of the Dead declares:

The Court recognises that the mother of the fallen
Understands war.

But an atheist like Brecht must inevitably have special appeal on *The Life of Galileo*, translated here by Desmond I. Vesey. Those lucky enough to see the Mermaid Theatre production last year will need no encouragement to read it. For others, some idea of its significance may be gained from this excerpt from Brecht's notes to the American production in which Charles Laughton played the lead:—

The fact is that Galileo enriched astronomy and physics by simultaneously robbing these sciences of a greater part of their social importance. By discrediting the Bible and the Church, these sciences stood for a while at the barricades on behalf of all progress. It is true that a swing-back took place in the following centuries, and these sciences were involved in it, but it was in fact a swing instead of a revolution; the scandal, so to speak, degenerated into a dispute between experts. The Church, and with it all the forces of reaction, was able to bring off an organised retreat and more or less reassert its power. As far as these particular sciences are concerned, they never again regained their high position in society, neither did they ever again come into such close contact with the people.

Galileo's crime can be regarded as the "original sin" of modern natural sciences. From the new astronomy, which deeply interested a new class—the bourgeoisie—since it gave an impetus to the revolutionary social current of the time, he made a sharply defined special science which—admittedly through its very "purity", i.e. its indifference to modes of production—was able to develop comparatively undisturbed. The atom bomb is, both as a technical and as a social phenomenon, the classical end-product of his contribution to science and his failure to society.

Galileo must surely rank among the greatest plays of our time. Whatever one may think of Brecht's Marxist attitude, one is forced to *think* from beginning to end, and of how many plays can that be said? Of its many splendid scenes, one—the enrobing of the Pope—is superb. Urban VIII, formerly Cardinal Barberini, is a mathematician, and his enthronement has encouraged Galileo to resume his forbidden researches into sunspots. Urban has received the Cardinal Inquisitor in audience, and is arrayed in his various vestments as the audience proceeds. It is a short scene, starting with the unadorned Pope's loud, "No! No! No!"; but ending with the full robed Pope's agreement that Galileo should be shown the Inquisition's instruments of torture. As more and more garments and trappings are placed on the man he becomes less human and more papal; more susceptible to the Inquisitor's promptings.

"This wicked man knows what he is doing when he writes his astronomical works, not in Latin, but in the language of the fishwives and wool merchants," says the Inquisitor.

"That shows very bad taste; I will mention it to him," says the Pope at one point.

But at the end the Inquisitor's demands are satisfied.

THE POPE: "The very most that may be done is to show him the instruments."

THE INQUISITOR: "That will suffice, your Highness. Signor Galilei is an expert on instruments."

Bertolt Brecht's irony here, with the other small samples I have given from his wide-ranging, searching inquiries into the human predicament, may send some to Methuen's first volume of the *Plays*. Strange it may seem at first, with much to shock, but most rewarding.

This Believing World

It really is a shame that some of our bishops will "spill the beans", so to speak, and let out a heartfelt truth about the teachings of "our Lord". For example, here we have the *Daily Mail* (March 25th) quoting the Bishop of Ripon as saying, "Any man who lived strictly by the Sermon on the Mount would find himself in the workhouse". We seem to remember in this connection Bishop Magee of Peterborough saying at a Leicester Diocesan Conference in 1889, that "a Christian state carrying out in all its relations the precepts of the Sermon of the Mount would not exist for a week". And he gave some powerful reasons in support.

★

On the other hand we have to hand it out to the Archdeacon of London who has discovered a new reason way, after all, Christ rose from the dead. He claims that even if you don't believe it, you might agree that he "deserved to rise from the dead". In fact, the same agreement would be almost everywhere "unanimous". The Archdeacon has a page in *TV Times* (March 26th) in which he expounds his views finishing up with the obvious conclusion that "Christ is risen from the dead", for naturally he "earned resurrection". It is all just as simple as that.

★

What puzzles us is, however, how the Archdeacon can reconcile his thesis with the two Bishops? Will the New English Bible supply the answer? Will the Sermon on the Mount in the new version convince everybody that, if put into practice everywhere, it will not lead to the workhouse, or that it will not bankrupt a Christian state? Let us put it in another way. The Bishop of Ripon in 1961, just like the Bishop of Peterborough in 1889, basing their argument on the Authorised Version as a true Revelation from God Almighty himself, tried to convince their hearers that, following the words of Jesus therein, a state (or a person) would go bankrupt. If the New English Bible gives us a Sermon on the Mount which, if followed, would not bring us to bankruptcy—which version gives us what Jesus actually said? Or are they both frauds?

★

The "News of the World", with its huge circulation is now trying to get its readers interested in ghosts, following Miss Nancy Spain's firm belief that she has seen one. On its front page for March 19th is a print from a negative sent in by a reader who is firmly convinced that it is a photograph of his dead wife returning as a ghost; though to ordinary people like ourselves, it looks like a badly focused print which can mean anything from Hannibal crossing the Alps to a summer scene in Brighton. It is about as much like the ghosts we all know as it is like a rhinoceros. We surmise that the man who took it knows nothing whatever of photography.

★

What we want to see is a ghost dressed in a nun's habit or a monk's, driving a ghostly 17th century carriage under an archway taken by a modern movie cameraman as part of a job—preferably in colour. In particular, we went to hear the ghostly carriage clanging over cobbles and making a deuce of a row. Even a ghost in chains would be welcome, or one with his bloody head under his arm. We would never, alas, be convinced either by Miss Spain, or such a hopeless "photo" as the one given front page publicity by the *News of the World*.

★

The author of "The Outsider", Mr. Colin Wilson, though confessedly a "non-Christian", was willing recently to open a church fete in a Cornish village, but has been

angrily turned down. This was not because Mr. Wilson was an "unbeliever", but because he had supported an application for a licence for a pub. The local Bible Study Fellowship who were ready to forgive "unbelief" with Christian charity, were aghast at the pub business; while one of its members, a Mr. A. Smith, a local Methodist preacher, is reported to be ready to fight anybody "over the issue". We just love the way practical Christianity is thus sturdily brought into this happy and innocent Cornish village.

★

Oh dear, but the many opinions which sometimes are given publicity on the New English Bible are becoming very, very naughty. The *Daily Express* (March 27th) quotes the Rev. R. Hood, Vicar of St. Barnabas Church, Holloway in London—"The New English Bible out-Picasso's Picasso and has proved itself one of the worst translations in history". So what? It still is God's Precious Word, and it still is selling in thousands, and what more can anybody want?

★

After all, the word "Bible" is a magic one when it comes to sales. The Revised Standard American Version has had world-sales of 8,500,000 for the complete Bible, and 3,500,000 more for the New Testament. J. B. Phillips's translation of the N.T. had sold 250,000 by 1958, while Mgr. Knox's translation (from the Latin Vulgate, by the way) is still selling "tremendously", say the publishers, who never print less than 50,000 at a time. Yet the London *Evening Standard* assures us that "all these sales are dwarfed by sales of the familiar Authorised Version which runs into millions a year".

★

But there emerges one fact from all these sales to which the Churches have no answer. If it is true that the Bible is such an amazing world best-seller, how is it that Christians have to be implored to read it, implored to go to church, implored to pray, to worship, and to step out of the appalling apathy towards all things sacred, all of which they display on almost every occasion. The radio, TV, our national journals, are all roped in for the good work of imploring, and what is the result? This is a question the Churches will not answer.

FAMILY PLANNING SURVEY IN BRITAIN

THE *News of the World*, April 2nd, 1961, reported the first results of what it called "the first organised investigation in this country into the extent that birth control is practised"; a survey carried out by the Population Investigation Committee, in which 2,496 married persons were questioned. Although much material remains to be studied, the figures show a steady increase in family planning.

Seventy-five per cent of couples married since 1950 practise birth control; for those married between 1940 and 1949 the figure is 72 per cent; 1930-39, 66 per cent; and before 1929, 53 per cent.

Of Protestants questioned, 54 per cent said they practised birth control, as against only 35 per cent of Roman Catholics, but a further 19 per cent of Catholics used their own "natural" birth control methods as against 15 per cent of Protestants. And the figures show that: "46 per cent of all Roman Catholics do not practise any form of birth control as against 31 per cent of Protestants. This difference persisted in all social classes".

Moreover, "it is revealed that among Roman Catholics the extent of birth-control practice increases as the intensity of religious belief decreases". And, "Definite disapproval" of birth control "came from 45 per cent of Roman Catholics as against only 10 per cent of Protestants".

THE FREETHINKER

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

TELEPHONE: HOP 2717

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. (Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria Statue.)

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch). — Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.; MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. TRIBE and J. P. MURACCIOLE.

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

INDOOR

Conway Discussions (Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, April 18th, 7.15 p.m.: M. DOMNITZ, M.A., "The Significance of the Synagogue".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, April 14th, 7.15 p.m.: A Lecture.

South Place Ethical Society (Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, April 16th, 11 a.m.: F. H. A. MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "Sin and Morals".

Sussex Branch N.S.S. (Arnold House Hotel, Montpelier Terrace, Brighton), Sunday, April 16th, 3.30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER, "The Resurrection—Fact or Fiction?"

Notes and News

IT WAS ENCOURAGING to see, on *The Guardian* "Mainly for Women" page on April 5th, an article by Maureen Wheeler on Register Office weddings. Mrs. Wheeler described her slight uneasiness on the morning of her own marriage. "Would the registrar be perfunctory . . . Would it seem after all a brief austere affair?" Her fears were dispelled when she entered the marriage room. "Light from the french windows shone on the polished wood floor, there was a bowl of twigs and spring flowers on the table, the registrar was waiting. With quiet seriousness he began to conduct the ceremony. We each spoke the declaration and were married amid the standing company of family and friends". Two women friends who had also been married in register offices were likewise happy about them, though a third "just wanted to get married as quickly and simply as possible: the ceremony, the surroundings, were quite unimportant".

MRS. WHEELER is right, though, in considering the surroundings important. No reasonable person could object to the ceremony, which is extremely dignified, but the same cannot be said for a lot of register offices. Mrs. Wheeler called one, "small, dingy, kill-joy"; she found another above a cycle shop, reached by climbing concrete stairs, though the room itself was charming; and she was surprised to learn that, in this second office, her local registrar carries out at least twenty weddings a year where

the bride is dressed in white with a retinue of bridesmaids. Asked if he felt that prejudice against civil marriages still existed, this registrar replied: "At the actual ceremony I have never encountered it. Except perhaps when I am thanked with particular warmth by a parent or relative: this I sometimes think, indicates pleasant surprise." We are sure it does for, as Mrs. Wheeler says, there are many people who have never been to a civil marriage. More would choose it if register offices were better situated.

WE CONGRATULATE Dr. Walter Rose of Newlands, Cape Province, South Africa, not only on getting a Freethought letter published in the *Cape Argus* (that is nothing new for Dr. Rose) but on taking the second prize in the paper's symposium at the same time. "Although I was brought up fairly strictly in the Church of England", he wrote in part, "I have not, save for an occasional wedding and funeral, attended any church service for over 50 years. This is not from any feeling of indifference towards this important subject, for I have a large library on its many aspects, as well as of other religions, past and present. The reason I do not go to church . . . is simply that I disbelieve and reject the whole dogma and basis of the Christian religion". Dr. Rose has rather a large "fan" following and receives many letters asking for advice on all sorts of subjects, which he modestly says he finds "gratifying".

BE PATIENT in this evil hour, exhorted the Most Rev. TV-star Fulton J. Sheen in *The Texas Catholic*, reprinted in *The Faith* (Malta), April 1961. "I know"—he told the faithful—"Khrushchev, Tito, Mao Tse-Tung are setting the seals and placing the guards against Christ", but "Within 50 years, Communism will be a dim memory . . . one day. Russia will have the faith; its persecutors like Paul will become Apostles, and the risen Christ in His Mystical Body will chant a requiem over its enemies". Neither Bishop Sheen nor ourselves may be able to check his prophesy in 2011, but we suspect he will be proved wrong.

THREE MEMBERS of the National Secular Society, Mrs. A. Colyer, Mr. E. R. Gomm and Mr. F. A. Ridley, are standing as Independent Labour Party candidates for Bermondsey in the London County Council elections on April 13th. In their joint election address they declare, "All being members of the National Secular Society, founded by the famous Charles Bradlaugh, M.P., we shall strenuously oppose any interference in County Council affairs by any religious organisation". The ILP Committee rooms are at 91 Jamaica Road, London, S.E.16.

IT SEEMS THAT a sober note is to be introduced into Blackpool Illuminations this year. The Electrical Services Committee, we read in the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* (1/4/61) has approved in principle "a scheme for an illuminated cross in the area of the Cenotaph", so the Mayor, the Chairman and the Illuminations Director are to meet Church representatives to discuss the proposal.

THE YEAR'S FREETHOUGHT

The Freethinker for 1960

NOW READY

BOUND VOLUME **32/-** (Post free)

Limited number only

THE PIONEER PRESS

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

The Confessions of an Atheist

By C. H. HAMMERSLEY

UP TO THE AGE OF 33 YEARS, I was a believer in God and the Bible. I was nominally at any rate a Christian with almost thirty years of church, chapel and Sunday school behind me; yet now eight years later I find myself forced to reject that which for the greater part of my life I had believed to be the God-given truth. I have no regrets about this and if I had to make my decision again I would choose the same path, because I believe it to be the true one.

My religious beliefs were based on the Bible, as the inspired word of God, for so I was taught from infancy, and up to a few years ago there was no reason for me to believe otherwise. True there were things which were puzzling. How did the world begin? Who was right—Genesis or Science? Perhaps like me, many have thought that this problem could be quite satisfactorily solved if only one had the time to go into it thoroughly; that we should find, as many seem to have done already, that science and religion are not incompatible, but move in parallel lines which never meet; that each is true in its own sphere? Perhaps I might have been able to believe this, had it not been brought to my notice that there were two accounts of Creation in Genesis, and that they were contradictory for instance in:—

Genesis, Chapter 1: The Earth is covered with water (v.2).	Genesis, Chapter 2: Earth is a dry plain (v.5-6).
Fowls created out of water (v.20).	Fowls created out of ground (v.19).
Trees created before man (v.11).	Trees created after man (v.8-9).
Man created after beasts (v.26).	Man created before beasts (v.6).
Man and Woman created together (v.27).	Man created before Woman (v.23).
All created in six days (v.31).	All created in one day (v.4).

Here are six contradictions which are based on the first statement made in the Bible, that in the beginning God created heaven and earth. Six contradictions may be permissible in an ordinary book, but certainly not in a book which is inspired by God, and I was compelled to reject it as such.

It has been pointed out to me by many Christians with whom I have discussed these problems that God's power to communicate with us is limited by the imperfection of his chosen instruments, that is to say, if the divinely inspired writers of the Bible had been perfect then we should have had perfect reception from God and a perfect record in the Bible. As it was, the writers were imperfect like us therefore the record was imperfect, and the Bible too was imperfect, but none the less it is the best thing we have, and the only record of God's word. It seems very unconvincing to me that God should inform one inspired writer that he created man before beasts, and yet another that he created man after beasts. The two statements cannot both be true, although they can both be false. A god who makes such silly mistakes is unthinkable. Is it not possible that the inspired writers in this case were not inspired at all, but merely thought they were? The Bible is full of such mistakes, of broken promises of unfulfilled prophecies.

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, we are told that "this generation", the generation of the Apostles, shall not pass away until Jesus returns. The generation has passed away and many more after it. St. Paul speaks of "In these last days" (Heb. 1,2) and "The time is short" (I Cor. 7,29). It is quite clear that the second coming was expected, as Jesus said it would be, quite soon. It seems

equally clear that Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul and Jesus were all mistaken. Otherwise these things would have to come to pass.

So I am compelled to assume that the New Testament in no more an inspired work than is the Old Testament. But what of Jesus? Although I am unable to accept a "son of God" (any more than *sons* of God in Genesis) I did think for a long time that Jesus was a superior man; that his teachings were original, and that his character was of the best. Now I am not so sure. After further study I have found that none of the statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospels is original, and all may be found elsewhere—in the Old Testament the Talmud or in the writings of Greek and Roman philosophers. Taking the Sermon on the Mount, for instance:

Love thy neighbour as thyself (Matt. 5).
Love thy neighbour as thyself (Lev. 19, 18).
Blessed are the meek (Matt. 5).
Blessed are the meek (Psalm 37, 11).
Blessed are the merciful (Matt. 5).
He that showeth mercy shall receive mercy from the Lord (Talmud).
Turn the other cheek (Matt. 5).
Let him give his other cheek to him that smiteth him (Lament 3, 30).

I have been unable to find even one original moral precept which has not been given long before the advent of Jesus. Moreover his character seems to me to be somewhat erratic—or perhaps it is the "inspired" writers who make it so. Be that as it may, I cannot imagine a balanced person cursing a fig tree, merely because it did not bear fruit out of season (Mark 11); neither can I imagine one who has been described as the "Prince of Peace" telling us that he comes "not to bring peace but the sword" (Matt. 10); or telling his disciples that "He who hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22,36); to which they replied, "Lord behold, here are two swords", and "he said unto them, It is enough" (v.38). Later on Peter uses one to cut off the servant of the High priest's ear.

Jesus's injunctions to make friends of "the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16, 1-13) and to hate one's father, brother, mother and sister (Luke 14, 26) do not strike me as being good things to do; whilst his attitude towards his own enemies, and to those who reject him are opposite to his teaching in Matt. 5 (see Luke 19, 27; Mark 16, 16; Matt. 23, 33).

I do not apologise here for quoting some of the less creditable sayings of Jesus, after all we have heard the others often enough. The point is, why one who is held up as an example of perfection should have made such statements, and having made them, why they should be deliberately softpedalled by Christians in general. I find the Jesus of the Gospels a temperamental and unbalanced person, whom I cannot admire. Neither would I wish to follow him. I have been told by Christian friends that even if what I have said is true (which they will not admit) I should keep it to myself, as it is wrong to hurt the feelings of sincere believers, when I have nothing better to put in the place of the Christian Faith. This attitude I consider to be sheer hypocrisy. No one should be afraid to state openly what he sincerely considers to be true. No one should be afraid to listen because his feelings might be hurt; this is sheer cowardice. What shall we put in place of Christianity? In place of its supernatural teachings, *nothing*. I have proved to myself, as

have thousands of others, that no substitute is necessary. The moral teachings which have been with us from time immemorial will still remain, because they are necessary, and desirable. It is a fallacy to think that one rejects morality when one rejects religion; if this were so, our prisons would surely be full of nothing but Atheists, which is not the case. Indeed where statistics relating to crime and religion are published, we find that the reverse is the rule, and the Atheist in prison is a rarity.

Another fallacy put forward by believers is that one cannot live without some kind of faith. Believe me, one can. Furthermore one can live for the first time without fear. Devils and demons dissipate into the thin air out of which they are made. To the Atheist the things of this world are important, and so are the people in it. Let us make this world a better place to live in, and consign religion and the supernatural to the museum so that we may get on with the job.

[The above article was first submitted to *The Sunday Pictorial*.]

O Tempora! O Mores!

By "RUSTICUS"

More than one ecclesiastic having recently been unfrocked and drummed out of the precincts, it has occurred to me that some of you may possibly be thinking of applying for the vacant benefices. Having, over the years, become a minor authority on matters ecclesiastical, permit me to issue a few words of warning.

Believe me, comrades, the parish priest—especially the rural variety—must be a man of steel if he is to retain his sanity for more than a fortnight after induction. 'Tis the female of the species I would warn you against—you potential applicants for ecclesiastical preferment. Now take Mrs. Compton-Pauncefoot (Mrs. Cholmondeley-Plumley has been dealt with elsewhere in these columns). Mrs. Compton-Pauncefoot, a perpetual thorn in the rector's side, is leading lady of the Women's Institute in our village. She has a great penchant for lecturing. Her thoughts and impressions are widely publicised in the local press. "My Impressions of Ober-Ammergau," undoubtedly a minor *tour de force*, together with "In the Steps of the Master, Seven Days in the Holy Land", were shining examples of Christian devotion. But, alas, Mrs. C's attitude to the working classes appears to lack that Christian charity one expects to find in a prominent member of Holy Church. She bitterly regrets the passing of the spring-gun and man trap, instruments which undoubtedly tended to keep the *sansculotterie* in the places to which God had called them. A passionate supporter of the Conservative candidate, she deplores the numerical strength of the lower orders, and would firmly support any Act of Parliament designed to deprive the workers of the pleasures of the bed—their sole remaining consolation. How would you propose to deal with her?

Then there is Lady Fanny Farquhar-Farquharson, proud possessor of the £5,000 mink coat—wild mink—for the making of which garment one hundred animals died lingering deaths in steel traps. Her ladyship enjoys national fame as a propagator of love and kindness to our dumb friends, via one of the animal welfare societies.

And what of Hilda and Henry Green, joint proprietors of the village shop? On one occasion Hilda was observed breaking an acid drop into two portions, to make up the precise weight of two ounces for an old age pensioner. And on more than one occasion Henry has been caught picking currants off the dusty shop floor, and throwing them back into the box from which customers are served.

Both Hilda and Henry are devout Christians.

And I must not forget Miss Penninah Poopington-Potters. Her sole interest is Royalty, domestic and foreign. She worships the Royal family with an adulation and uncritical devotion of such intensity that the mere mention of Mr. Foot makes her shudder. The walls of her *sanctum sanctorum* are covered with Royal portraits, cut from the Society magazines and placed in neat expensive frames. The happiest day of her life had been the occasion when minor Royalty had suffered the tragic mishap of a puncture when motoring through the district. The shining Daimler had come to rest exactly opposite Penninah's little cottage, and she had daringly presented Royalty with tea. Royalty had immediately responded by presenting the blushing spinster with an invitation card to a Palace garden party. That night the loyal virgin had thanked God on her knees for this signal proof of His Personal Regard for her—this accident He had organised for her especial benefit.

These, then, are the people you will be up against. The Christians I have mentioned constitute a fair cross-section of almost any congregation of a village church. If you defy them they will destroy you, root and branch.

No, chaps, don't be tempted. Now that vacancies are occurring with quite alarming frequency in the ranks of Cantuar's troops, I beg of you to think twice. Even our old friend Gibbon was once tempted by "the fat slumbers of the Church". Even slumber apparently becomes a bore: two or three clerics have, seemingly, found it necessary to take to the tiles in order to relieve the ghastly monotony. The old firm of Father, Son and Holy Ghost is not what it was. Stick to your lasts, chaps. Judging by my shoe repair bills there's more money in keeping pedestrians on the move than in mucking about with bell, book and candle.

Points from New Books

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

TOM CRICHTON, author of *Salt Water Vagabond* (Robert Hale, 18s.), found himself the master of a small ketch but otherwise penniless. In his amusing book he tells us about his varied adventures in the Mediterranean, both ashore and afloat, while he was living on thin soup and rich experiences. Most amusingly he describes a Holy Week Procession he witnessed in Seville:

"The image of the Virgin enthroned upon the float was pricelessly jewelled and wore a heavily brocaded cloak more than ten feet long. As it approached a man several yards away from me suddenly and spontaneously burst into a piercing Arabic wail that was the first note of a *saeta* or sung tribute to the beauty of the image before him. The *saeta* immediately hushed the noisy crowd, and the man sang on in a high and emotion-packed voice, but when I took a close look at him I saw that he was so drunk two friends had to hold him up during his song . . .

"I was very much impressed with the first Virgin in the procession, but a man standing next to me waived aside my enthusiasm. 'She's no more than routine,' he said, 'just wait till you see our Esperanza!'

"The Virgin of the Esperanza (or hope) is the pride of the Gipsy neighbourhood of Triana, and its appearance in the long procession was greeted by wild shouts and cheers. *Saetas* burst out from all directions, and when the last of these was sung the crowd began to chant, 'Rock her! rock her!'

"The gang under the float knew what this meant and had been trained to expect this request, and they began

to tip and right the float so that the effect upon the Virgin of Hope was to give her rather a naughty wriggle, and this caused the men in the crowd to groan with pleasure."

For the other side of the Catholic medal, one can turn to a remarkably detailed and interesting survey by Alistair Horne, *Canada And The Canadians* (Macmillan, 30s.). Mr. Horne, writing of Quebec, says there must be more nuns and priests per square inch of its narrow streets than in any other city in the world. The result: the leading paper, *Action Catholique*, refuses to advertise films—deeming them immoral.

But for those who fight the good fight of trying to lead rational and enriched lives, there is a wonderful new book by a young wife who refuses the easy comforts and simplifications of false creeds and conventions, and who struggles to live with emotional adulthood in the mad world which priests, politicians and other parasites have created. Indeed I cannot recommend Christine Billson's *You Can Touch Me* (Scorpion Press, 15s.) too highly to those who want to run and read and think! Here are three short extracts which I hope will convey something of Mrs. Billson's quality:

"At midnight a crow fell onto an old man's face and he woke up. Looking around his life he saw *black* railings. So, taking a paint-brush of real sable and a philosophy from the nearest book, he painted the railings *white*, and died happy."

"The laughter within me rattles like rain on a dustbin lid."

"Eternity! Eternity! Why does the earth smell so unnatural?"

CORRESPONDENCE

CONSISTORY COURT

Like, I imagine, many of your readers, I followed the case of the Balham Vicar to its end. But I was impressed by one aspect of it. A far lower standard of fairness prevails in the Church courts than in the ordinary civil or criminal courts. The verdict is reached by one man and there is no jury. He stands in a professional relationship to the bishop who is the accuser, prosecutor and judge. Proof beyond all reasonable doubt does not seem to be demanded, whilst standards of corroboration in evidence are apparently far lower than would be the case in an ordinary criminal court. In itself, it is bad that a court can exist which falls below normal criminal procedure and it emphasises the fact that the Church of England should not be allowed to maintain a court of this kind. But it is overlooked by all too many people that this court is a statutory court and not a mere disciplinary tribunal. It could not be sued in a civil court whilst a Jew, Turk, infidel or member of the National Secular Society could be made just as amenable to it as any clergyman, granted the appropriate circumstances. These two facts taken together go far to suggest the level of justice which would prevail in England if our national Church ever gained social control. I should like to suggest that the time has arrived when a group should be formed among freethinkers and humanists generally to watch ecclesiastical ramifications and to take appropriate action when necessary. For example, is the NSS willing to accept a position where one of its members could conceivably be hauled in as a witness on *sub poena* before a consistory court and possibly branded as a perjurer by some diocesan chancellor because his line of evidence did not fit the ordinary church approach? Yet this is a position which could conceivably arise. I would like to see bodies like the NSS and the Humanist Council undertake a full-scale campaign for disestablishment with disendowment. The particular item which arises from the contemporary event would be covered by it.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT.

"SIN"

Mr. G. I. Bennett's article on page 98 is more suitable for a church magazine. Its implication is that we should all return to Christianity. The Golden Rule is earlier than Christianity. It is the logical result of human experience. "Sin" is an offence against God, and since He is purely imaginary, so is "sin". Hence the inverted commas.

W. E. HUXLEY.

Theatre

Irish Fun

Those who enjoy gaiety, irreverence, and above all, hearty laughter, are again well served at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, London, this time by the new Irish musical, *Glory Be!* The author, Fergus Linehan, effectively satirises aspects of Dublin and Dubliners. Among the latter may be mentioned the tweedy Protestant spinster whose presence alongside Roman Catholics on the Arts Festival Committee (which has a Canon for Chairman) demonstrates Irish respect for religious freedom; and the two members of the Society of St. Malachy the Militant, who believe that "you can overdo toleration", and who are "looking forward to being dead" because heaven's their destination.

But there are many clever (and, I repeat, uproariously funny) character sketches; there is a charming heroine (Patricia Cahill); and there is a lovable earthiness about Milo O'Shea's jarvey-narrator in his battered bowler. Above all there is an infectious spirit in the music by Aideen Kinlen and Paddy Murray and in the playing and singing by the whole cast, ensuring that a good time shall be had by all who go to the Theatre Royal. C.McC.

OBITUARY

We regret to announce the sudden death in Brighton on March 22nd, of Douglas P. Stickells, for many years a member of the National Secular Society. Mr. Stickells was in his 74th year. We send our condolences to his wife, Mrs. Grace Stickells.

The death is also announced of Cordelia Dirs, wife of George W. Dirs, of Pinner, Middlesex, at the age of 58. Mrs. Dirs had been ill for some time. A service was conducted by the General Secretary of the National Secular Society at Ruislip Crematorium on April 4th.

MRS. E. RIDLEY

Mr. F. A. Ridley thanks all those readers of THE FREETHINKER who have so kindly written to him with reference to the recent death of his wife, Mrs. E. Ridley, on March 22nd. He is deeply grateful for their kindness.

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.

FRANCO'S PRISONERS SPEAK (from Burgos Central Prison).

Price 1/6; postage 4d.

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.

THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK By Hector Hawton.

Price 5/-; postage 7d.

HUMANITY'S GAIN FROM UNBELIEF. By Charles Bradlaugh.

Price 2/6; postage 5d.

ROBERT TAYLOR—THE DEVIL'S CHAPLAIN. By H. Cutner.

Price 1/6; postage 4d.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE. 18 of Chapman Cohen's celebrated pamphlets bound in one Volume. Indispensable for the Freethinker.

Price 5/6; postage 8d.

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.

MATERIALISM RESTATED (Third edition). By Chapman Cohen.

Price 5/6; postage 7d.

MEN WITHOUT GODS. By Hector Hawton.

Price 2/6; postage 5d.

FREEDOM'S FOE: THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott.

Price 3/-; postage 6d.