

# The Freethinker

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THIS IS A MODERN PARABLE. I tell it to readers of THE FREETHINKER in the pious hope that those whose faith is faltering may discover God anew. That cynics who question the power of prayer may know that the Lord still is mindful of His own and remembers His children. It concerns the Hierarchy of the Church of England—simple men paid some thousands a year to live the good life—and the wonderful way in which they were delivered from the embarrassment of an unspeakable vicar. Before the celebrated Consistory Court case of March 15th-28th, 1961, very few people outside the secular and clerical Left had ever heard of the Rev. Dr. William Bryn Thomas.

Early in the year a friend had told me his case was pending, but the name meant nothing to me. But he was by no means unknown to the Anglican Episcopate. Till 1950 and 1955 respectively, while Mervyn Stockwood was still awaiting elevation, Dr. Thomas was a member of the Church Assembly and a Church Commissioner. But it was not in connection with his ecclesiastical offices that this vicar had come to the attention of these great and good men. Let them and related events speak for themselves. (I quote from letters I have myself read.)

## Surprise and Embarrassment

The Bishop of Gloucester (Dr. C. S. Woodward) September 28th, 1948: "I was considerably surprised to receive a couple of days ago a letter inviting me to a meeting organised by the Communist Party at which you are to be the Chief Speaker". In 1949 the Christian Evidence Society reported on the outstanding success of Hyde Park meetings addressed by Dr. Thomas. In 1950, if his recollection is correct, he received a letter, now mislaid, from the Rev. F. H. Harfitt, Secretary of the Society—President, the Archbishop of Canterbury—asking him to resign, owing to pressure from above. It may have been Above. The following year he went to Vienna for the World Peace Congress, then to Hungary, and became first Chairman of the British-Hungarian Friendship Society. In 1952 he asked Mrs. Hewlett Johnson to open a bazaar at his Church of the Ascension, Balham Hill. Some of his parishioners signed an ultimatum in protest. When threatened with legal proceedings they withdrew it.

On returning from a visit to Hungary in 1957, a year after the Hungarian uprising, he was to broadcast his impressions on the BBC. They were pro-Russian. So, on behalf of the Corporation, the Rev. D. Stewart, November 12th: "I have read the script which you sent in to Mr. Hoskins, and I am sorry that it is not suitable for our programme". In the Society of Socialist Clergy, like embarrassment occurred, Canon Stanley Evans assuming spokespersonship of the anti-Russian strictures—the popular view which I hold myself.

In 1958 there began a relationship between Dr. Thomas and Industrial Research and Information Service (IRIS) Ltd., when they called him a "Communist". There also

began a relationship between Dr. Thomas and the Rev. George Neely—a man whose picturesque background had brought him to the notice of the Chatham magistrates—when he made himself known in the parish. The following year the vicar sued IRIS Ltd, at the Queen's Bench on May 20th, and was awarded costs and damages. On behalf of the Bishop of Southwark, the Suffragan Bishops of Kingston and Woolwich instructed Dr. Thomas to commence the part-time training of Mr. Neely for the priesthood.

## Hungary and East Germany

Also in 1959 the vicar went again to Hungary, and on October 2nd broadcast from Radio Budapest.

On December 9th, 1959, the Rev. J. R. Satterthwaite, General Secretary of the Council on Inter-Church Relations, of which the President is the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Vice-President the Archbishop of York: "It seems unfortunate to me that a priest of the Anglican Church should voice the opinions which you did in a country which so desperately needs the moral support of all Christians." On December 14th, 1959, the Bishop of Southwark (Dr. Mervyn Stockwood): "I have been sent a copy of an alleged broadcast given by you in Hungary. I find it impossible to believe that you really did say what you are alleged to say and I should be grateful if you would let me have the facts. I should be horrified to think that any Christian minister could approve the deplorable behaviour of Russia in 1956".

In 1960 Dr. Thomas went to East Germany, and broadcast from Berlin Radio on January 16th.

On February 4th, 1960, the Rev. Mr. Satterthwaite: "The enclosed statement was broadcast . . . News of it has reached the Bishop of Coventry who was greatly disturbed by the substance of your message, and I have been asked by the Archbishop to discover if you have in fact been quoted accurately by the German radio." It would appear that everybody's favourite aunt, the BBC, obligingly provides, at public expense, an international monitoring service on behalf of the Anglican Episcopate: and that the paternal care of these indefatigable prelates extends to the doings and sayings of their vicars even when, in a personal capacity, they travel to other countries.

Dr. Thomas sent the Archbishop of Canterbury his parish magazine for February, 1960, where he wrote about Christianity and Communism.

On February 10th, 1960, the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Geoffrey Fisher): "I gather that this misleading concatenation you broadcast on the Berlin Radio".

On can sympathise with the indignation these saintly princes of the Church must have felt towards this unspeakable vicar. What country would he go to next? What fresh horror would appear in his parish magazines? At a time when the Archbishop of Canterbury was composing the opening bars of his overture to Rome as the historic swan-song of his archiepiscopate, there flourished within the very ranks of the Church of England a "fellow-

## VIEWS and OPINIONS

### More Light on Bryn Thomas

By D. H. TRIBE

traveller" bidding fair to outstrip the Red Dean. But what to do? Besides endowing its bishops with richly deserved powers and privileges, the Establishment of the Church of England has given powerful statutory rights to vicars. As far as I know, there are only three ways to remove a vicar:—securing a conviction for heresy, for dereliction of duty, or for immorality. It seemed a forlorn hope. Though impatient of theology Dr. Thomas had never repudiated it. In performing his sacred offices he was punctilious. His private life and character were unimpeachable. And even if there were some awful secret, who would face self-incrimination by coming forward?

#### Enter the Heroine

If, however, you had feared lest the Church of England would have to bear its cross indefinitely, then you would have reckoned without God. Forty years ago He had created a being baptised Elsie Mary Mitchell, and later to be immortalised under the name Mrs. Brandy. This bespectacled divorcee and Sunday School teacher was not only willing to come forward, but, according to all reports, told her story with panache, and even gusto. Briefly, it was a saga of adultery with Dr. Thomas that, for a man of 62 suffering from lumbago, was little short of miraculous.

This affair terminated, said Mrs. Brandy, in September, 1960. She confessed to Mr. Neely, who told Canon Stanley Evans on October 10th. At the trial, Dr. Thomas and Mr. W. G. Kendall, businessman and Church Treasurer, gave evidence that they had seen Mrs. Brandy and Mr. Neely in a position consistent with adultery on November 2nd. Dr. Thomas said that Mrs. Brandy had collected a letter referring to this matter on November 5th. Mrs. Brandy seemed to know of a letter, but claimed never to have received one. On November 11th, Mr. Neely proposed Dr. Thomas as Chairman of the South London Branch of the Christian Socialist Movement, and Canon Stanley Evans spoke in support.

A lady would have come forward as witness to state that on the Sunday before the November Parish Magazine Distributors' Monthly Meeting, she had been asked to help organise a protest over the political content of Dr. Thomas's parish magazines; and that on the following Sunday she was told that this protest had not been organised as the originators had "thought of something else". Dr. Thomas's solicitors decided not to use this witness so as not to introduce politics.

On December 3rd there was a wedding in the parish, followed by a reception attended by Bacchus and seventy odd parishioners, many, including one significant family, uninvited. A teenage girl present, subsequently to make allegations against Dr. Thomas of assaults early in 1960, saw more horrifying sexual offences committed by the bridegroom in that one afternoon than most people see in a lifetime. Her allegations started a fracas. Dr. Thomas, who had left early, was asked to investigate. In common with the local police, the vicar found no grounds to proceed. This he told the Bishop on December 5th. He had some difficulty making an appointment, as the Bishop's telephone number is ex-directory. If readers should ever face a spiritual crisis, they must seek pastoral first-aid elsewhere. Mr. Neely was also there. "I believe he phoned for an appointment", said Mrs. Neely at the trial. Dr. Thomas asserts that the Bishop said to him, "I suppose you know you can be unfrocked for marrying a drunken man".

On December 7th, 1960, the vicar in a letter asked the Neelys, the Finbows, and the bridegroom to withdraw themselves from parish activities till general satisfaction

was reached. A copy was sent to the Bishop. On December 10th Mrs. Brandy's celebrated confession also reached Dr. Stockwood, who was apparently too overcome with grief to investigate it pastorally.

On December 15th Mr. Ernest Mason, company director and diocesan lay reader, believed not to be popular in certain quarters in the parish, had his licence suspended. No reason was given. December 22nd brought the Inhibition Order against Dr. Thomas, suspending him from holding services, outlining the charges against him, and giving 10 calendar days to enter a plea of guilty or not guilty before the Consistory Court. He went to Lee Bolton & Lee, solicitors, the only ecclesiastical specialists. Not surprisingly they had already been engaged by the Bishop, but they were good enough to recommend two firms that knew something about Church matters. So it turned out that Dr. Thomas was defended by a senior partner of Messrs. Bower, Cotton & Bower, Mr. Hugh Montgomery-Campbell, son of the Bishop of London. A plea of not guilty was entered. The vicar learnt there is no Legal Aid certificate for Church courts.

On January 23rd, 1961, I hear Canon Stanley Evans and the Rev. Edward Charles came to Dr. Thomas as friends and emissaries of the Bishop to ask him if he would, in his own interest, change his plea. On March 1st came *further and better particulars of the complaint*. They may have been better: they were certainly different.

I propose to say nothing here about the notable conduct of the trial which began on March 15th. I have written about Consistory Courts before (*THE FREETHINKER*, May 19th and June 30th). The vicar's solicitors had estimated costs at £300-£500. On March 21st, the sixth day of hearing, he recalls, they told him his costs were already £1,500, and if he lost he would be liable for the Bishop's costs as well, making a total of over £4,000. To enable the case to continue, he signed a contract with *The People* to tell his life story.

#### Finale

On March 28th he was found guilty and deprived of his living, and on May 14th "unfrocked" as a gesture of support for his act of relinquishing holy orders on April 10th. When presented with the Prosecution's bill of costs, he found himself called on to provide, inter alia, £362 for shorthand writers, £336 for the hire of the Court, and £150 for booking it.

As if the findings of a Consistory Court aren't good enough, many have sought proof of guilt elsewhere. They have seen it in his decision not to appeal to the ecclesiastical Court of Arches. Legal Aid certificates do not extend to this court either. And in *The People* articles. Being compulsorily ghosted, they protested innocence in ambiguous terms. Posters and headings "The Vicar Confesses" showed *The People's* real interest in him.

So I come to the end of my tale. The unspeakable vicar has been ruined. Mrs. Brandy has been wuffed from her parents' poky house in Balham to a spacious ground-floor flat in Streatham. Mr. Finbow, who had unsuccessfully sought election as Church Warden, is now Church Warden. Mr. Neely emerged to anticipate ordination as priest on Trinity Sunday. (The Devil, I fear, has scored here, but only temporarily.) The Bishop of Southwark speaks to us weekly from the pages of the *Evening Standard*. Dr. Fisher steps into his life peerage.

When I was a Sunday School student—not at Balham—I was once given as a prize *One Hundred Thrilling Tales*. The book consisted of astonishing accounts of miraculous answers to prayer. So if I were asked to give a sub-title to this parable, here published for the first time, I would call it *The Hundred and First Thrilling Tale*.

# The "Something" That Others Haven't Got

By PAT SLOAN

IN THE *Daily Express* of April 10th this year it was reported that an Anglican curate had been converted to Rome by reading Father Francis Ripley's *This Is The Faith*. Said the curate: "The Roman Catholic Church provides something the Church of England does not".

Eager to discover this "something" I secured a copy of the book which is now in its sixth impression since its publication in 1951 and which has sold 150,000 copies in the USA. It is described as a "standard text book of instruction on the teaching of the Catholic Church".

The book starts with a well-worn-out "proof" that God exists. There are "many ways" of proving this, we are told, but only one is given. This is the old analogy between God and the supreme watch-maker. While the creator, God, is "Goodness, Wisdom, Love and Power", and created the world, He "permitted evil to exist in it" (p.4) and any questioning as to how a good God could do such a thing is swept aside with the assertion that "it is absurd for us to sit in judgment on God. Reason alone tells us" (a favourite phrase when propounding the most unreasonable assumptions) "that He is to be trusted by us" (p.5).

Evolution is neatly dismissed on the ground that it "refers to the development of matter, not to its making" (p.5). We are assured that animals have souls, "but their souls are not spirits", angels are not souls because "they do not animate a body", and animals' souls are, incidentally, "material" (p.9).

As far as religion and its opposite are concerned, free-thinkers are clearly evil: Religion "is necessary to human nature and entirely natural" while "irreligion is a vice . . . Only by accident can a man be moral without believing in God, for God is the only basis of morality" (pp. 17-18). Having permitted evil to exist, God ought to know.

The author considers that it is essential to regard the Bible as an "authentic document", by which he means that God "inspired different human authors . . . to write just what He wished" (p.29). But to show that it is an "authentic document" he simply deals with the New Testament, and primarily the Gospels. The alleged authenticity of these, we are told, lies in the fact that "from the second century there exists an unbroken line of Christian writers who state explicitly that there are four Gospels" (p.25). At this point anti-Semitism is dragged in, with the assertion that since AD 88 the Jews "have added a bitter curse against Jesus to their most solemn daily prayer" (p.25).

The author declares that the Evangelists give us "the facts", which he says "are confirmed by non-Catholic historians, particularly Josephus" (p.26). The credulous will accept this, while sceptics will resort to Josephus where they will discover mention of half a dozen different Jesuses of whom Jesus of Nazareth gets a single mention only. This is a bare reference to what his followers believed, and is in such terms that many are convinced that it never came from the pen of Josephus at all, as he was a very orthodox Jew.

In order to skate round the very contradictory accounts of identical events which appear in the Gospels, the author admits "minor errors . . . in later copies of the translation" (p.29). But he does not explain how this could be possible in books "which have God for their authority" (p.29) and which have been *ab initio* under the direct supervision of the "infallible authority of the Catholic Church" (p.31).

We can only assume that an all-powerful God who permits evil has also decided to allow untruthful statements in His inspired works.

God is presented as a sort of Super-Narcissus, at least until he started creating. First, God "for endless ages . . . rejoiced in the knowledge of Himself and in knowing Himself" (p.102). This self-indulgence in contemplation appears to be the lot of those of us who finally are to reach Heaven, for "death is really the beginning of life" (p. 5). The sort of life has been defined by St. Augustine and is quoted here: "Heaven consists before all in the vision of God and in the full possession of the Truth, of perfect Truth" (p. 344).

The order of events, then, is as follows: First, for an eternity, God—the eternal Narcissus—rejoices in Himself alone. Then he starts creating, permitting evil within the realm of his creation. Good men, on dying, rise to Heaven, and they rejoice for ever after, looking at God and contemplating Truth. But this is only for the élite. There is a whole hierarchy of states of existence from heaven to hell, including paradise, purgatory, and limbo for the poor beings not lucky enough to have been baptised.

As to Hell, we are told that this really exists. "It seems from sacred scripture that it is within the earth, though there are many theories on this point" (p.340). As regards *hell fire*, "theologians agree that it is a real fire, but the Church has never condemned the opposite opinion" (p.341). All the same, "A decree issued by the Holy See in 1890 forbids priests to give sacramental absolution to those who deny the reality of hell" (p. 342).

On science, the author claims that the Catholic Church "has always been and always will be Science's *Greatest Friend*" (p.293). For the benefit of the credulous and un-enquiring he lists Roger Bacon as a Franciscan friar, but does not mention that he spent 14 years of his later life in prison because of his views. Copernicus is claimed as "a cleric and a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic, a founder of modern astronomy" (p.290). But it is not mentioned that the Church completely banned his works for 100 years after his death and as late as 1829, when a monument was erected to him in Warsaw, not a single Roman Catholic priest would attend. Finally, in a potted Catholic history, century by century at the end, we find: "Widespread persecution, Galileo". From the context the reader is left to guess whether Galileo was a persecutor of the Church or *vice versa*.

It is of course impossible for a modern textbook on Catholicism not to contain an attack on Socialism and Communism. Private property, we are assured, is based on "Natural Law, and it is approved by the positive law of God" (p.295). Man needs property, we are told, such as "a plot of land", his wage "is indubitably his", and "he can invest it, buy land with it, save it up and eventually purchase a business of his own" (pp.395-6). We are also told that in such matters as property "the right of the family is prior to the right of the State" (p.396). In which case, obviously, the Roman Church should be campaigning against all death duties.

There are the usual homilies against misuse of wealth, and it is this misuse to which the evils of capitalism are attributed. Nationalisation "cannot be condemned in principle on grounds of Christian ethics" but may not

(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

So one of Leicester's churches is to enter the insurance business. What has the new Archbishop of Canterbury to say to this blasphemous flouting of the precious words of Jesus? In the most solemn tones, "our Lord" denounced all insurance when he thundered, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow"—a command which makes all Christian insurance agents on a commission basis tremble with horror.

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Of course, the Rev. K. Middleton who is helping the scheme, wants the families in his congregation heartily to respond, for his church "will benefit from the commissions" which is no doubt quite true. But it is against everything Jesus stood for. And after all, there are other ways of making money for Christ. Look how the Rev. B. Graham rakes in the shekels by just repeating the simple Message of Christ Jesus as found in the Gospels. Or the Church Commissioners could be asked how a little investing in industrial shares or house property can swell Church funds by millions of pounds. There is no end in the monetary value of true and pure Christianity.

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That very devout Christian sect the Plymouth Brethren—almost unknown except to the tiny number of its devotees—appears to have got into a row in Dereham, Suffolk, because one of its members insists on having pious services in his mortgaged council house. No doubt, had it been Roman Catholic, not a word would have been said; but a Plymouth Brother was too much of a good thing for the very religious council who claim that the house was for residential purposes only, and they want the mortgage, £1,750, back immediately. Praying to Almighty God was not in the contract—at least not the Plymouth Brethren brand.

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Our popular contemporary "Today" asks "Have Parsons Forgotten How to Preach?", the emphasis being of course on the word "how". Well, with few exceptions, it can be said that no matter how they preach or what they say, somebody will always ask the same question. But in this article, the Very Rev. N. Hook, Dean of Norwich, prefers not to answer it, and turns his devout wrath on unbelievers—"I have only met one man who claimed to be an atheist and I soon discovered that his claim was impertinent".

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Whether Dean Hook ever met that particular but unnamed Atheist is a matter for many of us to question; but if he imagines that this person was or is the only one who claimed to be an Atheist in this country or ours, it's a pity he should publicly disclose his own vast ignorance. Any Atheist who knows his Atheism would easily show that it could be the Dean who was impertinent for believing that he could prove the actual existence of Devils, Angels, Miracles, Heaven, and Hell. Belief in such twaddle is a disgrace.

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It is astonishing how quickly our journalists react when some person is converted to Catholicism. We are given full details—as in the case, for example of Mr. J. Walter of *The Times*. And very little is said—if anything—about converts from Romanism. For instance, our national papers publish the glad news that 17 Anglican ministers have become Roman Catholics, but Col. Hornby, the information officer of the Church Assembly points out in a letter to the national press, out of 18,146 clergymen of the Church of England in 1959, 31 had at some time or other come from the Roman Church.

Here we have the Rev. A. C. Bridge of Christ Church, Lancaster Gate, London, blithely admitting, not to his congregation but to children on the radio programme, "For the Schools", on June 30th last, that the Garden of Eden story is pure myth. It would be safe to say that the Creation story in Genesis is taught as true in Sunday Schools and state-schools.

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Yet, insists Mr. Bridge, we now know it is nothing but myth—that there never was an Adam, or Eve, or a Hebrew-talking Serpent. There was no real "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (nobody appears to have explained at any time how a tree could have had any such "knowledge"; not even the people who believed in the tree)—in fact, from the very wordy talk we heard from Mr. Bridge, all we got was that the "Jews" made up the yarn; though, if the Biblical date is right, there were no "Jews" then. But the one thing Mr. Bridge carefully and discreetly hides is the fact that if there was no Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve "sinned", there was no Fall of Man; and therefore the special object for which "our Lord" died could not have been to save Mankind, for that also is pure myth. Would Mr. Bridge tell us exactly—for what reason was Jesus "crucified" if it was not to save Mankind from the Sin of Adam?

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This "myth" business applied to Biblical stories so fervently believed as coming straight from Almighty God is brilliantly displayed in many of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For example, in one of them we get the story of Abraham and his beautiful wife who was taken from him by force by Pharaoh Zoon. She saved Abraham's life, and God himself took a hand in keeping Pharaoh and Sarah "apart" through a pestilential wind and plague. Naturally, all believers in the Bible claim that this story is "apocryphal"—a kind of synonym for "myth"—but wherein does it differ from the "true" story of Abraham in the Bible?

### THE "SOMETHING" THAT OTHERS HAVEN'T GOT (Concluded from page 211)

"reach such proportions as to amount to a practical denial of the right to private ownership. The State has no authority to abolish what is natural to men" (p.397). The evolution of the Church's own attitude to such a "natural" practice as usury is not touched upon, nor is there any proof given that finance capital is "natural".

It is on this level of argument that the reader is expected to accept the statement that "Real Socialism and Communism both deny . . . the law of nature" and lead to "untold misery" (pp.397-8). There is no word, of course, of the untold misery in such typical Roman Catholic strongholds as Spain, Portugal and Southern Italy.

We could discourse endlessly on other aspects of this book. The "Real Presence" in the bread and wine, which preserves the rite in its full cannibalistic significance, the worship of the BVM on the ground that "immediately next to being God is being the Mother of God" (p.324), and her perpetual virginity; the reluctant admission that despite the Church's infallibility the Reformation was partly caused by "the worldliness of some of the successors of St. Peter" (p.388), and the description of the English Reformation centred on the adultery of Henry VIII.

But we have quoted enough detail. It seems pretty clear that the "something" that Anglicans have not got is a level of dogmatic mythology to which no Protestant Church, because of its past traditions of relative freedom, could ever hope to aspire to, however many Archbishops may yet pay court to the Bishop of Rome on highly publicised visits.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S.. Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria Statue. (Platt Fields), Sundays, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. SMITH and G. A. WOODCOCK.

Marble Arch N.S.S. (Marble Arch), Sundays, 12 noon: MESSRS. F. A. RIDLEY, D. H. TRIBE, C. H. CLEAVER and G. F. BOND.

Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE and H. A. TIMMINS.

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

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, July 9th, 11 a.m.: PROF. T. H. PEAR, M.A., "Brain Washing, Facts and Inferences".

## Notes and News

AT ITS Annual Conference in London at Whitsuntide, the National Secular Society passed a resolution deploring the attitude of the Portuguese Government towards the people of Angola and condemning the recent massacre. A copy was sent to the Portuguese Ambassador, but was never acknowledged. Now, however, we have been favoured with a duplicated circular from the Embassy, giving "Two Independent Opinions on Angola". Both are by Americans. Mr. Gregory Thomas, a former US Embassy Counsellor in Lisbon, declared that, "Portugal has a good cause to fight for and a great and honest man leading the Nation", while General Frank Howley, former Commander of the American Forces in Berlin, believed that, "The Portuguese are giving the best example I ever hoped to see of how to bring progress to an underdeveloped region". "The friendly and brotherly relations which exist between coloured and whites", he said, "assured the easy transformation of all the Province into a civilised Society" and he concluded: "I consider the news of atrocities spread by Communist propaganda exclusively intended to discredit before the eyes of the World the great and real work of the Portuguese in their persistent effort to better the social and economic conditions of all the Angolan people". For its next circular, the Embassy should ask General Howley to elaborate on the Communist opinions of the Baptist missionaries who have lately described the brutalities of the Portuguese in Angola. It should make even sillier—and more tragic—reading than his present contribution.

FOLLOWING THE MALTESE banning of *Reynolds News* of June 4th, at least partly because it contained a picture of two pretty girls in two-piece bathing suits (this column last week), comes news of an alert to Roman Catholic "decency squads" to "deal with scantily-clad tourists on Italian beaches this summer" (*Daily Herald*, 23/6/61). And Catholic Action members have been urged to display posters such as "On Your Behaviour Depends the Purity of Our Children". Think then, you sun-worshippers, how many innocent bambinos you may corrupt in practising your cult on those Mediterranean shores.

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LONDON MAY HAVE been spared the Billy Graham crusade this year (though his Manchester meetings were specially relayed to Southern churches) but it will be the scene, later this month, of "the biggest religious convention ever held in Britain". Jehovah's Witnesses from all parts of the world will attend, and 60,000 delegates are expected. When do they expect the end of the world now, by the by? We don't seem to have the latest prediction.

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AND, RETURNING TO THE Rev. Dr. Graham, we note that he was present at St. George's Tron Church, Glasgow, on June 25th to hear the minister, the Rev. T. Allan, say: "I believe Billy Graham is a man specially called and endowed by God for our generation" (*The Guardian*, 26/6/61). By now Dr. Graham will be back home in North Carolina, no doubt pretty satisfied with his visit to Britain. True, it started with laryngitis, and the "converts" are likely to be as illusory as ever, but the BBC must have tumbled over itself to get that face on TV and that voice on radio. And it isn't everybody who is entertained by the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

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MENTION OF THE Queen reminds us of the foolish way in which she is constantly prevented from seeing the world as it is. There have been many instances reported in the press recently. Here is one of our own. One platform at Euston was cleaned and painted and, of course, decked with flags; a large sign, "Gentlemen", was covered with black cloth and hung with white nylon. It would be terrible if the Queen should realise there are Ladies' and Gentlemen's lavatories on Euston station, wouldn't it?

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DURING THE COMMITTEE stage of the Rating and Valuation Bill in the House of Lords (June 20th), Lord Iddlesleigh sought to include contemplative religious communities along with nursing and teaching convents for 50 per cent mandatory relief and 50 per cent discretionary relief. In extolling the merits of the contemplative life he referred to St. Teresa of Lisieux, "by far the most popular Saint of modern times" and said: "I have heard from two sources that when French troops were having a difficult time in the 1914 war their morale was immensely encouraged by reminders of the life of that young contemplative nun. Strange, but she contributed to the defence of Verdun". The Earl of Longford told the House that he had intended to make "some little speech" in support of the amendment but after what Lord Iddlesleigh had said, "it would be impertinent and almost sacrilegious to try to develop any spiritual arguments". After this mush it was a relief to hear the decision of the House in its Judicial capacity in 1949 in a case called *Gilmour v. Coats* cited by Lord Hailsham. In that case, he said, "a contemplative Order was held not to be a charity by the House of Lords, which decided that the benefit to the public of intercessory prayer is not capable of legal proof".

## “Five Lives”

By H. CUTNER

MR. C. BRADLAUGH BONNER'S excellent review of *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (THE FREETHINKER, March 31st), made me anxious to read it which, through a reader's kindness, I now have done. It is a highly detailed account of one of the most brilliant of Victorian women, and for those Freethinkers like myself who love to delve into the highways and byways of mostly forgotten Freethought history, it is a mine of information.

If the age of the first Elizabeth produced some of the greatest men in the history of this island, the age of Victoria can lay claim to some of our greatest women. In many of the arts women like the Brontes, George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti, as authors and poets, artists like Lady Butler, actresses and opera singers too numerous to mention, to say nothing of workers in sociology like Josephine Butler, and in nursing, Florence Nightingale, all contributed to the greatness of the age. And certainly, especially as an orator with something to say, there was Annie Besant.

Her “first” life as an adult began when, at twenty, she married the Rev. Frank Besant “in all innocence” as to what marriage entailed. Why her husband should be blamed for her “innocence” I have never discovered; but it is interesting to note that the author of the *Five Lives*, A. H. Nethercot, adds, in discussing the marriage, “one cannot help feeling a shadow of sympathy for young Frank Besant . . . perhaps he was as uninstructed as his girl-wife”.

It must be said here that before her marriage, Annie was very religious with hardly a doubt unsettling the even tenor of her work as, later, a clergyman's wife—that is, it should have been an even tenor. Annie however was not cut out for such uninviting and unrecognised work as the domestic help to a clergyman. Mr. Nethercot gives as an apt quotation the famous editor W. T. Stead as saying, “She could not be the bride of Heaven and therefore became the bride of Frank Besant. He was hardly an adequate substitute”. But then so many Victorian clergymen must have been like him—for example (as Mr. Nethercot notes) Samuel Butler's *Theobald Pontifex* is a portrait of his own parson father, and a pretty grim one at that.

In any case, in spite of the fact that Annie bore her husband two children, a boy and a girl, there could be only one outcome for such a marriage, and Annie took it. She went to London in 1872 and heard the Rev. Charles Voysey preach. Voysey was actually a Theist (as distinct from a Christian) and gathered a congregation of liberals, halfway sceptics, and others, and over the years was the centre of much controversy. She began to see that her “first” life, that of a believing Christian looked like ending. Even her meeting with the famous Dr. Pusey—he wanted, and did not want, at the same time to be a Roman Catholic—did not shake her growing unbelief. Pusey's advice was not to read any more theological works, but to pray; and when she insisted that she had to have “evidence”, he quoted “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed”, which evidently did not impress Annie.

Later, she met Thomas Scott—also a Theist but a very broad one. Scott published numerous pamphlets, many of them still of great value, by various writers. His *English Life of Jesus* (in which he was helped by Sir G. W. Cox) is a very keen analysis of the Gospels, and the Epistles

of Paul. In my opinion, it is of far greater value from any point of view than Renan's *Life of Jesus*. Many of the pamphlets he published after his meeting with Annie Besant were written by her anonymously at first.

She did not become an unbeliever at once though; only gradually did she get to her “second” life, that of the Atheist Mother. Before this, she tried speaking in her husband's empty church and found—to her delight—that she had what her brother-in-law, Walter Besant, described as “a fatal facility for speaking”. It was my good luck to hear her a few times early this century, and the way she poured out a flood of words commanded my admiration, though I rarely understood her Theosophy.

Annie Besant's *My Path to Atheism* (1877) gives a full account of her pilgrimage—which, incidentally, was by no means easy. It meant separation from her husband (fully described by Mr. Nethercot), and a very stiff time to earn her living. She met Moncure Conway and his wife, and then “the leading Freethinker in England, the *bête noir* of the Churches, the terror of the Conservatives in politics—Charles Bradlaugh” in 1874. Annie had heard of him of course, but thought that he was “rather a rough sort of speaker”; and she must have been astonished when Mrs. Conway told her that “he is the finest speaker of Saxon English I have ever heard, except, perhaps John Bright, and his power over a crowd is something marvellous. Whether you agree with him or not, you should hear him”.

The reader should go to the very interesting chapters dealing with their first meeting at the Hall of Science, where she found herself one of a packed crowd enthusiastically welcoming the renowned “Iconoclast” to learn how Annie joined the National Secular Society, how she became “Ajax” of the *National Reformer*, and how Bradlaugh became “the noblest friend that woman ever had”. She soon became one of the NSS's most popular lecturers—with her good looks and her magnificent voice, to say nothing of the complete mastery of her subject whatever it was. Her knowledge of French and German made her work invaluable to the *National Reformer*, and her nimble and devastating replies to opponents from the platform and as Ajax in Bradlaugh's journal made her more and more popular in Freethought circles.

And then came her “third” life—as a Malthusian. The story of the Knowlton pamphlet trial which merely meant in the ultimate that the poor should have no access by law to contraceptive information has often been told. The row really began with the publication of Dr. George Drysdale's *Elements of Social Science* (in 1854), a work which made the members of the old Christian Evidence Society chortle with joy in their attack on Freethought, for it was uncompromisingly Atheistic. Drysdale believed also in “free love”, and this was the theme of all their attacks on Bradlaugh and Foote. Looking back, I always find the horror they so hypocritically expounded intensely amusing.

Annie Besant was in her element in defending in court not only Knowlton but birth control (then known as Neo-Malthusianism); and her speech in defence is a masterpiece. It enhanced her reputation enormously—though she did not altogether impress young Foote. He is described by Mr. Nethercot exactly as some of us found him much later—“Whether he was talking about Whitman, Shelley, or Jonah and the Whale, he pulled no punches,

nor did he care whether they landed on vulnerable areas . . .". No. Foote never liked "our Annie".

Mr. Nethercot gives the Knowlton Trial a great deal of factual space recalling many little incidents before and after, which are apt to be forgotten these days. It is a

splendid record and triumph for free thought which had to be fought in those days against a religious intolerance which Christian history no doubt would now like to forget.

(To be concluded)

## Varieties of Christian Theology

By E. C. VANDERLAAN

THE INTENTION HERE is not to outline the minor subdivisions of Protestant thought. But since we find ourselves in controversy with all types of Christianity (though not in opposition to those elements of Christian ethics which happen to coincide with rational ethics) it may be worth while to survey those major varieties of Protestant thought which cut across denominational lines. For example, the more or less modernistic theologians of Union Theological Seminary, Yale, Harvard, Chicago, etc., have no particular controversy among themselves as Baptists vs. Presbyterians, Methodists or whatever Church they happen to belong to, but are under attack from the strict believers and heresy-hunters of their own sects. Likewise, a very conservative Presbyterian theologian, when writing a textbook, may indicate wherein he thinks Lutherans are mistaken, or may refuse to follow those sects which predict the near end of the world; but his supreme anxiety is about those liberals whom he accuses of cutting the heart out of Christianity and preparing the way for complete unbelief. So, if you meet a defender of "Christian truth", he may be classifiable under one of various heads.

General Protestant orthodoxy stands on the proposition that, except for a few obviously figurative statements, whatever the Bible teaches is true. As I recall my first studies in theology, we started with the famous Arguments for God, such as "The world must have a Maker", etc. We then argued that such a God must have given men a revelation; and this revelation we discovered in the Bible. There was no awareness that the Bible contains several distinct theologies; instead, discrepancies were glossed over or harmonised by misinterpretations, and the whole Bible was more or less forced to yield a single, unified system of doctrine.

Now the fact is that Protestant orthodoxy, although it imagines itself to be based solely on the Bible, is really guided also by those complicated doctrines about God and Christ which several great Councils of the first four or five centuries defined, on the basis of selected Bible passages. And the fact is also that every one of the great early heresies, condemned by the Church and now known only to Church historians, equally based itself on Bible passages, using a different selection.

Here then, omitting many details, is the orthodox Protestant system of doctrine. The disobedience of the first human pair transmitted to all their descendants a disposition to sin, which merits everlasting punishment. God's forgiveness is possible only if the penalty of sin is borne instead by an adequate substitute. To this end "the Son of God", a fully divine Being, came to earth by being born of a virgin, thus becoming one person with two "natures", divine and human; paid the penalty of our sin by his death on the cross; rose from the tomb and ascended to heaven; whence he will return to bring human history to a close in a final judgment of all men. But the benefit of this divine act accrues only to those who by faith accept him as their Saviour. Logically this should mean that not only the indifferent and the wilful dis-

believers, but also the heathen who has never heard this extraordinary story, will be damned eternally. But some of the orthodox hope that the heathen, who has not had a chance, may be judged "according to his lights".

There is one more complication. Grateful piety demanded that this "Son of God" be held to be fully divine, eternal and not a created being. And at the same time the "Holy Spirit" (which must originally have meant a special inspiring activity of God) had been sometimes spoken of in the Bible as if it were a separate Person. The early Church thus seemed faced with three Gods. Yet it had inherited from Judaism a fierce insistence on monotheism. The dilemma was solved by inventing the famous doctrine of the Trinity—that God is in one sense *one*, and in another sense *three*. Perhaps few Christians have ever succeeded in holding this doctrine clearly in mind without falling into one or the other of the ancient heresies; but it is considered perilous to reject it.

Fundamentalism may be defined as orthodoxy with a specially fierce spirit of No Compromise. The word was invented in the 1920's by the editor of a Baptist paper. Alarming word had got round that some in the supposedly orthodox Churches were not adhering strictly to the old teachings. The inclusive complaint was that some no longer "believed the Bible". Several groups of extreme conservatives drew up lists of fundamental doctrines by which one could tell a true Christian believer from a modernist traitor. Such fundamentals included the inerrancy of the Bible; the Virgin Birth; the substitutionary atonement; the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ; his second coming and with special emphasis, rejection of the theory of evolution. For a time it seemed that the liberals or modernists would be thrown out of the orthodox denominations, but in the end somehow this did not come about. Some of the fundamentalists then founded separate sects, but many remained where they were, and continued to growl. Fundamentalists do a great deal of broadcasting in America—"The Old-Fashioned Revival Hour", "Back to the Bible" and many others.

Oddly enough, for all their distrust of science, fundamentalists do not insist on a flat earth, though that is just as Biblical a view as any of their other teachings.

Moderate modernism or liberal orthodoxy is a zoo containing many species of animal. In general their desire is to maintain a continuity with the historic faith, yet some of its doctrines in their traditional form are just more than they can accept. The way out, for such troubled would-be believers, is to find some essential meaning within the unacceptable doctrine, and try to express this in modern terms. This is what infuriates the fundamentalists—"Who are you, to improve on what God has told us?" As these modernists study the Bible with the aid of modern literary and historical criticism, the miraculous element tends to disappear. They can pretty well recognise which passages are unhistorical, legendary, or even mythological. Many can see how hard it is to piece together an accurate picture of the man Jesus. Yet, as if to reassure themselves, they keep hammering away at their favourite

slogan: "God is revealed in Christ". It is usually left in just this vague form, and so, for the present, I cannot tell what it means or why they think it is true. Many of these liberals also speak confidently of the "resurrection" of Jesus, but seem careful not to specify exactly what they think happened on that occasion. One thing must be said for these liberal Christians. They are not so likely to turn persecutor as are the fundamentalists.

The Unitarians and Universalists (now merging) were avowed heretics from their beginnings. Unitarians were originally so called because they rejected the Trinity in favour of the unity of God; and hence regarded Jesus as a purely human teacher. Universalists originally took this name because they held that a good God would ultimately save all men. I do not know which heresy was more painful to the orthodox of that day—the reduction of Jesus to a mere man, or the abolition of an eternal hell. As heretics, both sects have always been strongly for freedom of thought, but at the outset they had no idea how far this freedom would take them. Today the religion of these bodies ranges all the way from a very much simplified Christianity, through varieties of "theism" in which the meaning of "God" becomes more and more indefinite, all the way to pure humanism in increasing measure. Observe that in the move to keep Church and State separate, or to ward off the intrusion of religion into the public schools, you count on the Unitarians right along with Secularists.

And now one last group, some of whom do not like to be called Protestants. These are the Anglicans. Uninformed reporters sometimes spell this Anglicans; but the word has nothing to do with angels; it refers to England—the Church of England and its daughter Churches in the United States, Canada, Australia, etc. Characteristic of this group is a strong sense of the continuity of the Church with the undivided Church of the first centuries. Thus you may find the doctrine that the Holy Spirit inspired not only the Bible but also those first great doctrinal Councils, before Rome usurped authority. One group in this body regrets that the American branch of Anglicanism bears the name "The Protestant Episcopal Church", for they say they are just as Catholic as the Romanists—in fact more so. So today if you meet an Anglican (or Episcopalian) he may turn out to be like the liberals described above, or an orthodox Protestant with a little extra "churchliness", or he may be a high churchman or Anglo-Catholic, whose religion may be roughly defined as Catholicism without the Pope. Considering the strength of this latter wing, it is perhaps surprising and certainly encouraging that the recent Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops throughout the world came out in favour of planned parenthood.

(Reprinted from the American Freethought magazine, *Progressive World*.)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### NOT JUST JEWS

Mr. P. G. Roy's letter (23/6/61) prompts me to ask if he or any of your readers is familiar with the books of Douglas Reed, one time Foreign Correspondent of *The Times*, who resigned when he found his information was not being used.

In *Lest We Forget* (1943) he refutes statements by the Bishop of Chelmsford and the Archbishop of York about the "worst cruelties" being "reserved for the Jews" and the persecution of the Jews being "unique in its horror" and "unprecedented". These statements are untrue, he writes. "I saw Hitler's work with my own eyes from the day he came to power until the eve of this war. Nineteen Twentieths of the inmates of his concentration camps were non-Jewish Germans. Nineteen Twentieths of his victims outside the German frontiers are non-Jewish and non-Germans. This distortion of the picture has gone on since 1933".

And a little further on: "The only authentic extermination that I know . . . was that of every Czech man, woman and child in the village of Lidice. Similar though smaller massacres have been committed on Frenchmen, Serbs, Norwegians and Greeks". I have no axe to grind on behalf of or against Jews, Gentiles, Hottentots or Eskimos, but the figure of 6 million Jews which is bandied about so loosely by the popular press is not good enough for me, and the above excerpts may prompt other people to ask how it is reached.

A. GREGORY.

### A TEST

Last week I saw an accommodation advert in London which not only specified "No Coloured", but "Gentiles only". I telephoned the number advertised and asked for some clarification.

The woman who replied made it quite clear that there was no objection to Jews or coloured people as such, but there were the neighbours to think of, and in any case, she wanted all the people in the house to be Christian.

I told the lady that I was Jewish and she sounded rather cooler. I said, "I am in urgent need of a place. I see you are asking three guineas a week. I will be quite willing to pay you eight guineas". At this, her voice brightened. "When can you come to see the room?" I then made the excuse that I would look round further and if I found nothing, I would ring again. The fact is, I am in a very good place along with coloured and white people, and I am not a Jew. Does it not show, however, the hypocrisy and lack of principle of these Christians? They follow, or pretend to follow a man who, assuming he ever existed, was Jewish and probably coloured. They make it clear that they are not prejudiced, oh no, always the other person. Of course, the sight and sound of cash makes a lot of difference.

T. R. MCLACHLAN.

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