

The Freethinker

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LOOKING THROUGH MY BOOKS RECENTLY, I came across a most informative and interesting booklet entitled *The History of the Leicester Secular Society*, published in 1900 by the Leicester Secular Society itself and written by their then Organiser and Secretary, the late F. J. Gould, who the previous year had succeeded Joseph McCabe, then recently emerged from the Roman Catholic Church, in the above position. Mr. Gould, who later became a well-known speaker and writer on behalf of the Rationalist Press Association, here gives a most instructive outline of the history of Leicester Secularism from the time of the French Revolution to the end of the 19th century. His small, but heavily documented and most enlightening booklet, not only gives the main facts about what can nowadays claim to be the oldest surviving Secular Society in Great Britain, but also throws some interesting light on that stormy, but little known period, the first half of the 19th century, which witnessed the origins of Secularism and Freethought, not to mention of English Socialism, Radicalism and Republicanism. For even today in so different an epoch, the Leicester Secular Hall in Humberstone Gate, preserves better than any other place I know, the authentic atmosphere of what I may perhaps term, generically, the English Radical tradition in Church and State, and in English society, the age of such intrepid Radical pioneers, fighters, and (not infrequently) martyrs as Thomas Paine, Robert Owen, Richard Carlile, George Jacob Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh, all of whom were connected with Leicester at some time or in some capacity.

Origins

English Radicalism, Republicanism and Secularism, all date back to the French Revolution which "cast the Kingdoms old into another mould". In England, French Republicanism failed as an article of export, but none the less set up a massive backwash here amongst the poorer classes. To this the then dominant political aristocratic oligarchy replied with a vigorous and sustained repression not only in Leicester where Richard Phillips got 18 months for selling the seditious works of Thomas Paine, the arch-apostle of both political dissent and religious heresy, but throughout Britain both agitation and repression were much in evidence. Thomas Paine himself we learn, corresponded with a Mr. Hall in Shambles Lane, Leicester, and as far back as 1785 (before the outbreak of the French Revolution), a Revolution Club was formed in Leicester significantly named after the Protestant Deliverer, William of Orange, the hero of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688-9. In 1792, as part of the wave of democratic agitation then sweeping the country, the Leicester Constitutional Club demanded the reform of the unrepresentative Parliament (with its still unreformed rotten boroughs), and laid down the categorical political principle that "all civil and political authority is derived from the people".

Secularism in Leicester

The present-day Leicester Secular Society takes its rise

from the second major wave of agitation in England, the contemporary Owenite and Chartist, movements which reached their zenith in that period of acute social misery, the Hungry Forties. In 1839, an Owenite missionary, George Fleming, opened a social institution in Leicester, to be followed by other Owenite propagandists, including the great Robert Owen himself (1770-1858), the "Father of British Socialism". Owen, we learn, visited Leicester in 1839, and gave four lectures there which naturally aroused much discussion. The Owenites, unlike their contemporary Christian Socialists, combined criticism of Church and State, of Capitalism and Christianity. Robert Owen him-

self only paid a fleeting visit to Leicester, but another leading Owenite, George Jacob Holyoake, established a life-long connection with Leicester Secularism. Holyoake (who was still alive when Gould's *History* saw the light in 1900), incidentally coined the word "Secularism", which seems to have been first used in or about 1852. The term is here defined by Gould as "denoting the philosophy of life which ignores theology".

Leicester Secular Society

In *The Reasoner*, April 6th, 1853, appeared a notice as follows: "Leicester Secular Society, 148 Belgrave Gate: lecture and discussion every Sunday evening". From which date on, some kind of organised Secular group appears to have existed in Leicester. But direct continuity with the Leicester Secular Society of 1961 can only be established since 1861, an exact century. For at a public meeting on January 7th of that year, at the Russell Tavern, Rutland Street, the formal decision was made "That there be a society formed and that it be named the Leicester Secular Society". Subsequent resolutions passed at this same meeting defined subscriptions and other conditions of membership. Twenty two members were enrolled at this historic meeting which may be regarded as the authentic birthday of the Leicester Secular Society which has been continuously in existence since and which thus antedates the National Secular Society founded by Charles Bradlaugh in 1866, by five years.

The Secular Hall

The early years of the Society were marked by much activity, many lectures and debates eventuated, but considerable difficulty was found in getting a regular meeting-place on account of orthodox opposition. Eventually, on the proposal of Josiah Gimson (later President of the Leicester Secular Society), the bold resolution was taken to get "a place of our own". In 1872, a fund was started for this purpose and on March 6th, 1881, a red letter Jay still commemorated in the annals of the Leicester Secular Society, the present Hall in Humberstone Gate was officially opened in the presence of a distinguished gathering which included *inter alia*, such famous names as Charles Bradlaugh, George Jacob Holyoake, Annie Besant and the poet, James Thomson (BV). The auspicious occasion caused much searching of heart in Leicester

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Leicester Secular Society 1861-1961

By F. A. RIDLEY

Church circles. This was pontifically summarised by a Leicester ecclesiastic, Canon Vaughan, in the following oracular pronouncement which I reproduce verbatim from Gould's text:

... alluding to the promoters of Secularism he [Canon Vaughan] said: "Even if they feel themselves able to resist the enervated, demoralising influences involved in their denials or disavowals of God and Immortality, and to live virtuous, honourable and useful lives in the strength of, or in spite of, their own agnostic principles, yet who can doubt what the tendency of those denials and disavowals must be and that from their new Hall in Humberstone Gate there will radiate influences most injurious to morality amongst us."

However, notwithstanding this weighty warning, no crime wave seems to have originated in or in connection with the opening of the Secular Hall in Humberstone Gate.

The Leicester Jesus

Probably the most discussed feature in the new Hall opened in 1881, was the group of five famous busts (still standing) of Voltaire, Paine, Owen, Socrates and—most controversial of all—Jesus! The last-named naturally aroused much indignation in Christian circles in Leicester. "I suppose" declared one preacher, "there is something in the life and teachings of Jesus which even in them, awakens a dim perception of the beautiful and true". Whilst Mr. Gimson and other Leicester Secularists defended this choice (by rather peculiar reasoning), I must

confess that this particular selection has always appeared rather bizarre to me at least, though it is rather intriguing (if a little far-fetched) to imagine that in some remote future age archaeologists who stumbled on this still surviving bust, might not only deduce from this fortunate find, the belief that Jesus Christ was an historical character, but might even arrive at the conjecture that Jesus was a Leicester man born in Humberstone Gate towards the end of the 19th century, a theory not perhaps less—or more—plausible than some which have actually been mooted? (This theory is copyright!)

A Sequel Please

In his final pages, the late F. J. Gould gives many further interesting details, including a list of the more famous lectures in Humberstone Gate: a long and distinguished list which includes G. B. Shaw, Prince Kropotkin, William Morris, G. W. Foote, Annie Besant, H. M. Hyndman, etc. It is a great pity that his narrative only extends to the turn of the century. Cannot the Leicester Secular Society commission one of its more erudite members with access to the archives of the Society to complete the task so ably begun by F. J. Gould, and so bring the annals of our oldest Secular Society up to 1961 its first, but we hope, not last, centenary? It would be an intensely interesting, as well as rewarding task.

The Big Stick of the Saints

By P. G. ROY

FOR A LONG TIME the idea had prevailed that the early Christians lived in a communistic community. However, being essentially dispossessed artisans, landless peasants, slaves and *lumpenproletariate* they lacked the means of production and theirs could only have been a community of consumers.

Things were different with the Essenes. They worked in the fields and as artisans and whatever they earned through individual or collective labour, was pooled as common property—as is still the practice within the Jewish *kibbutzim* in Israel. In contradistinction, the early Christian communities could be compared with Hitler's Reich, in that the Nazis expropriated first their own Jews, then those of the surrounding countries, and they could have gone on and on in exploiting, as drones (although, of course, they had a production of their own), the world, so long as the countries of the world remained disunited and allowed themselves to be terrorised. This comparison may seem odd, but let us see what the facts are.

Acts 2, 41 ff. reports that in one day "three thousand souls" were added to the community; after they had accepted the Christian doctrine, were baptised and remained steadfast, they were admitted to the "breaking of bread and in prayers", i.e. they were allowed to partake of the community meal.

And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need . . . And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (43-47).

The multitude of the believers did not own anything individually, nor did anybody lack in sustenance,

. . . for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold. And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need (4, 32-36).

However, there was a man amongst them, a certain Ananias, with Sapphira, his wife, who sold his possession, but "kept back part of the price, his wife also being

privity to it" (5, 1 ff.). The apostolic Gestapo was obviously well organised and knew of that embezzlement, and when Ananias laid only part of the proceeds at the feet of the apostles, St. Peter furiously told him he had dared cheat the Holy Ghost, whereupon the wretched man "fell down and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things". "And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out and buried him". Unaware of what had happened, his wife came three hours later to inquire about the whereabouts of her husband. Peter cross-examined her, drew out the admission of the full price and told her that his SS, the "young men", waited already to bury her too; upon which she also "yielded up the ghost" and the executors carried her out and "buried her by her husband". "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things".

Plato reports (*Politeia*, vol. X) that Socrates once called the poor, "hornets", and in the late Roman Empire the wealthy lived in eternal fear from these hornets; and Acts does not mince words to remind the rich that the apostles or saints had a "Prætorian Guard" to deal with those unwilling to part with their possessions. Jesus himself gives a wealthy young man the advice, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19, 21), upon which the young man "went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions".

Like commercial travellers the "saints" were continuously out of search for new milch-cows, and it seems that this missionary activity was done also on a commercial basis. Whilst renouncing this income for himself, Paul in his first letter to the Christians at Corinth states in Canon J. B. Phillips's translation (9, 14), that "those who attend the altar have their share of what is placed on the altar. On the same principle the Lord has ordered that those who proclaim the gospel should receive their livelihood from those who accept the gospel", whilst the

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Dialectical—and other—Materialism

By COLIN McCALL

ON JUNE 9TH, in reviewing the Spring 1961 issue of *The Plain View*, and particularly an article by Mordecai Roschwald on "Eschatology and Political Ideals", I referred to a "special form of materialism (and one that I don't share), dialectical materialism". Since then I have had a friendly letter from a reader suggesting that my attitude to dialectical materialism may "unconsciously" be that I "do not wish to be associated with Communism". I replied privately to the reader, but have now had a second letter from him, and it occurs to me that the matters we have raised may be of some general interest.

I must say right away that it is, of course, impossible for me to know my *unconscious* motives in rejecting dialectical materialism: I can only give my conscious reasons for doing so. But I would plead that this is hardly a personal peculiarity. Marx may have had unconscious motives for formulating dialectical materialism, but they are outside the scope of philosophy. Here we must treat the matter on the conscious level. We have to deal with dialectical materialism as the product of Marx's reasoning. I think there are reasonable grounds for rejecting it, and if this is so, unconscious motivation is irrelevant. My criticism of dialectical materialism, then, will be philosophical, not psychological or political.

When I say I am not a dialectical materialist, I mean that I don't share what are basically Hegelian ideas that Marx incorporated in his philosophy. In replying to my critic, I instanced the famous "dialectical triad" of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis as being unacceptable. In his rejoinder, he said he did not think we need bother too much about Marx's and Engel's interpretation of Hegel. There is one thing however, he continued, "that Materialist Dialectics does do, and that is attempt to fill in a philosophic vacuum by advancing a theory of change; but whether this is universally applicable, who can say?" It seems to him, nevertheless, that "if properly understood, this theory does give a very general framework in many cases of 'change'", and he regards it as "a very valuable clue in the 'riddle of the universe'". He means the so-called transformation of quantity into quality, which in fact, also derives from Hegel.

Is this really "a very valuable clue in the 'riddle of the universe'"? I doubt it. It is, to my mind, typical Hegelian verbalism. "Merely quantitative changes beyond a certain point pass into qualitative differences". At first this might sound impressive, but does it in fact tell us anything about the universe? I suggest not. For example. It might be said that a quantity of trees becomes a wood, and a quantity of human beings becomes a crowd, and that these involve qualitative changes. But at what "point" does the qualitative change occur? How do we differentiate, for instance, between a few trees, a clump, a wood and a forest? Obviously there are no clear lines of demarcation and, indeed, the differences are principally quantitative: it is the number of trees, and their proximity to one another, that dictates our choice of terms. It is true that a forest differs in some respects from a large number of widely-separated trees (and a crowd differs from a large number of widely-separated people) and that many things are affected by this—soil, animal life, etc.—but we must not overlook the fact that two trees differ from one tree.

My correspondent argued that evolution implies "quantitative development only", whereas "qualitative changes

take place and must be accounted for". But repeating a slogan doesn't account for anything, and what does "qualitative change" mean anyway? Apart from the tautological "change in quality", it would be hard to define. (And is not size, in itself, a "quality"?) Fortunately the term is unnecessary. We need only refer to "changes of varying degrees", and look to the scientific expert to itemise particular cases. These will, of course, be complex, but that can't be avoided. The world is complex, and we should beware of false simplification. Dialectical materialists, in so far as they rely on Hegel (upside down or no), are guilty of this. If they would cease their verbalistic juggling—for that is what it is—in striving to demonstrate "negation of the negation", "unity of opposites", and the rest; if they would give up trying to fit the world into a formula, their philosophy would gain, not lose, in consequence.

An evolutionary materialist outlook embraces all sorts of changes, and is by no means restricted to "small" ones (as I take it my correspondent believes). But when all comes to all, each phenomenon is an individual phenomenon requiring, at least to some extent, individual treatment. It is impossible to describe all phenomena, all processes, *en bloc*, and all attempts to do so are so vague as to be valueless. The point was well made by Eugenio Rignano when discussing the Hegelian triad. "This classification or 'framing' of successive phenomena of reality in thesis, antithesis, and synthesis is always possible", he said, "owing precisely to the great vagueness of these concepts. So that, even if the evolution of the world had followed another course, the same classification would still have adapted itself without any difficulty . . . This great vagueness of concepts . . . would be fatal for constructive reasoning, which aims at producing mentally and consequently foreseeing new facts. But it is of the greatest advantage for metaphysics, because it shelters the intentional *presentation* of the whole of reality, as it already exists, from any possibility of contradiction on the part of reality itself". (*The Psychology of Reasoning*, p. 244.)

I obviously share a great many ideas with dialectical materialists, but these are essentially materialist ideas. I tried, within the brief limits of my *Plain View* review, to put the essence of materialism as I see it, namely, assertion of the material basis of all phenomena, including mental phenomena. All dialectical materialists would agree with this, as with its corollaries, acceptance of an external, objective world that existed before life and before conscious life; on which, and from which, indeed, life evolved. There is no room in this for the belief in "a Creator calling into existence the original materials and setting the process going", which my correspondent ascribes to "some evolutionists". Such people are not evolutionists at all, and certainly not materialists: they are religionists who, recognising the scientific basis of evolution, try to reconcile it with their theism—in vain, I hardly need add. Materialists, by contrast, build upon the findings of science, and I would claim that the findings of science are continuously substantiating the materialist position.

Is this important? I think it is. Contrasting English and Scottish university education (in a review of the book, *The Democratic Intellect*, by George Elder Davie, in the

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This Believing World

What the New Zealand "Woman's Weekly" calls "uncanny evidence" is given as proof of "life after death" — based of course on Christianity. Actually, the "evidence" comes from the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical Study, a Fellowship formed by "clergy and laymen" in the hope that Spiritualism will prove it regardless of what Christianity or to receive "eternal bliss" in Jesus. Or alternatively, that Spiritualism will prove it regardless of what Christianity or Jesus says.

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Behind the "evidence" is a doctor, Dr. R. Crookall, and a lady, Miss Banks, M.A. and they both vouch for meeting people who *almost* died and who tell us what they saw or experienced when they *nearly* passed out for good. Naturally, they all "stepped outside their own bodies" and saw "the next plane", or spoke to dear, dead relatives in the other world. They all *said* so, anyway, and what better evidence is there than that?

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In case you are still sceptical, here is what the Bishop of Southwark says: - "I have no patience with people who just write the whole thing off as humbug or fraud. The work the Fellowship is doing is important because it is a subject that demands careful and thoughtful inquiry. The weakness of the Church has been its refusal to consider the evidence or discuss it". But surely no *evidence* is required? "Our Lord" said that in him will be found Eternal Life, and who is a mere Bishop to question such a clear and unequivocal statement?

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However, if you are still sceptical, you can try a book just published by Gollancz for 21s. Its title is *A Life After Death* by Dr. S. R. Harlow — though we profoundly regret that some of its conclusions were even too much for *Psychic News*. It boosts up the one-time famous medium, Mrs. Margery Crandon, whose exposure as a huge fraud by Houdini was at the time sensational. She then tried to bamboozle the Society for Psychical Research and its Report was devastating—as even *Psychic News* has had to admit. Yet this journal gives her portrait as if she were as "immaculate" as D. D. Home. Whether Man really wants "eternal life" whether with Jesus or with say, a top footballer, may be a matter of opinion. But there isn't a scrap of evidence for it.

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A branch of that sturdy and stern body of Fundamentalists, the Mothers' Union at Cove has been given what can be cynically termed "a smack in the eye" by the Rev. L. Houchin who has closed the branch because the union rules "seem alien to Christ's teachings". As most people know, the Mothers' Union bitterly opposes divorce; drunkenness, fiendish cruelty, insanity, adultery, must all be born with Christian fortitude once two people are married. One object of the Union is "to uphold the sanctity of marriage", and woe betide any Christian woman who manages to get a divorce if she belongs to that medieval group; while Hell has no fury like a Mothers' Union if a divorced woman *tries* to become a member.

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But what about the Union rules and Christ's teachings? We have all over the country branches of the Mothers' Union, and the one thing they have always been proud of is that they have never deviated from the teachings of Christ by a hair's breadth. And here comes a parson who insists that the Union rules seem "alien" to Christ's teachings. It just proves that true Christianity, and particularly what Jesus meant, are always so simple that a child of four can understand them.

THE BIG STICK OF THE SAINTS

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Authorised Version puts it "that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel".

Paul explains (in the rendering of the New Bible Translation): — And now about the collection in aid of God's people: You should follow my direction to our congregation in Galatia. Every Sunday each of you is to put aside and keep by him a sum in proportion to his gains, so that there may be no collecting when I come. When I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to persons approved by you, and send them to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it should seem worth while for me to go as well, they shall go with me (1. Cor. 16, 1-4), and Remember: sparse sowing, sparse reaping; sow bountifully and you will reap bountifully. Each person should give as he has decided for himself, there should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsion. God loves a cheerful giver. And it is in God's power to provide you richly with every good gift (2. Cor. 9, 6-15).

Coupled with occasional threats of terror (set in my italics); the Holy Salesmen tell their prospective recruits that, as it is impossible for the rich to enter heaven, they had better sell their properties, have the proceeds distributed and become poor themselves, since God pays heavenly interest, particularly after the needy brethren have joined in prayer to bless their benefactor of the day. Irenaeus (2nd century) and even Lactantius (4th century) untiringly depicted the unique attraction in paradise, not only for the body but even the senses. There will be time here on earth—said Irenaeus—when vine will grow in such abundance that each grape will yield two jugsfull of wine. "Pretty damsels will be happy in the company of young lads; and even the old will enjoy the very same gifts as the young, and their sorrow will give way to utter happiness" (after Corrodi: *Chiliasm*—a critical history).

Don't be under any illusion: you cannot make a fool of God! A man's harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows. If he sows for his own lower nature, his harvest will be the decay and death of his own nature. But if he sows for the Spirit, he will reap the harvest of everlasting life by that Spirit . . . (Gal. 6, 7, after Canon Phillips).

However, if a man wanted a better security for pie-in-the-sky, he was fleeced by other means. A late example is the story of Pinianus, a Roman patrician, and his wife. We learn from St. Augustine's letters (354-430 AD) that in the company of Bishop Alypius they went to Hippo, a town in North Africa and the episcopal seat of St. Augustine. The "Select" (i.e. clergy) of Hippo thereupon schemed how to terrorise and rob the Roman couple. In the middle of the Bishop's sermon, they started a row; in the ensuing confusion the couple were kidnapped and forced to declare under oath not to leave the town. Alypius who had been fortunate enough to escape, in a letter to St. Augustine, implored his friend to assist the Roman couple in regaining their liberty, pointing out that an oath under duress was invalid; and the mother of Pinianus reproached the Saint for having permitted this sacrilegious rumpus in his church. St. Augustine, however, insisted: An oath is an oath and to break it is a deadly sin; it is even sinful to turn and twist the meaning of a promise once given.

Only after the Roman had made over all his estates to the Christian community of Hippo was he allowed to leave for home.

If this piece of barefaced blackmail—admitted by nobody less than a Christian saint—could be perpetrated in the 4th century AD, how much worse must have been the terror exerted in Nero's Rome to extract money from the rich?

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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Notes and News

WE VERY MUCH REGRET that, owing to increased postal charges, subscription rates for THE FREETHINKER will have to be increased from the beginning of next month, October 1st. The new rates will be—13 weeks, 9s. 6d.; 26 weeks, 19s.; 52 weeks, 37s. 6d. These will apply to the British Isles only; overseas rates are unaffected.

AN ARTICLE that it gives us special pleasure to print this week, is "The Faith Narcotic—Old and New". The author, John Christophers, is still at Grammar School, though he hopes to go to university soon.

THE FOURTH EDITION of *Freedom's Foe*, by the by, is almost sold out, and a fifth is in hand. It is hoped that it will be on sale sometime next month. Mr Pigott, readers will be pleased to know, has written a new series of articles for THE FREETHINKER on Catholic Action. These, too, will probably appear in September.

FOLLOWING THE LETTERS from outraged Buchmanites printed in *The Glasgow Herald* on August 11th (and referred to in this column last week) came the retorts (August 15th). "It is but rarely I feel impelled to congratulate *The Glasgow Herald*", said one lady, but she did on this occasion. Ineed, she thought the Buchman obituary-writer "erred on the side of being gentle, so unlike his opponents". Although the obituary was unfavourable. A. Alasdair Lonie thought "it was a competent expression of a point of view with which majority opinion is in agreement". As for the film, *The Crowning Experience*, described as "great" by the Marchioness of Graham, Mr. Lonie found the acting "reminiscent of a

television commercial" and the plot "simply a fairy tale", while the direction had "a home movie *non sequitur* quality".

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THE GROWTH OF BUCHMANISM, said *The Glasgow Herald* in its Editorial comment on the correspondence (15/8/61), "has hardly been accompanied by a commensurate expansion of intellectual content or deepening of individual thought; and it is the historically familiar pattern of such circumstances that the simplicities of assertion should pass for proven truths, the volume of testimony assert its verity". The "few departures from uniformity of phrase", it went on, "admitted chiefly a variety of abuse, which is indeed an odd sponsoring for a discipleship that includes 'love' among the absolutes enjoyed on its members".

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TWO RATHER different Roman Catholics have visited the Pioneer Press bookshop recently. The first, a young man, rather pompously asked why Mr. Adrian Pigott didn't offer "something positive", "some alternative", instead of just being critical in *Freedom's Foe: The Vatican*. When asked if he had read the book, the young man confessed that he hadn't, but he could tell what kind of book it was from seeing it in the window. Indeed one line of it would suffice, he said. The second visitor, a rather shy Irish lady, asked if we bought books, because she had a lot she didn't want. Some of them, she knew, were religious, but she couldn't tell us any more about them because, "I'm Catholic you see, and they're the other religion".

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THE ETHICAL UNION publication, *News and Notes* has recently been considering the desirability of memorial meetings instead of funeral services. Not having the body or ashes present would "humanise" such occasions, was one view, but Mr. Laurence Kotkas disagreed. The "lack of the remains", he thought, "would surely take away something elemental". The editorial view was against him, viz.: "Besides the morbid element of the dead body, there is a very real practical problem involved in funeral ceremonies. Some tens of thousands of people die each year. Who is to take the service in a community in which Humanism is prevailing? The Churches have thousands of priests who can undertake funerals amidst their other duties but with their passing there will be a gap. The problem may well be solved if simple meetings can be held conducted by a relative or close friend of the deceased. Nothing would help such a custom being established more than the elimination of the corpse, the presence of which tends to intimidate many people".

DIALECTICAL—and other—MATERIALISM

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New Statesman, 11/8/61) Sir Charles Snow pointed out that "Scottish metaphysics in the early 19th century served to glue the country's intellectual culture together". "Clearly", he went on, "we cannot revive Scottish metaphysics, period 1800. But, though we can patch and mend our educational system and remove its more anti-social follies, we shall still find it difficult to avoid educating for a set of skills, since a society like ours does not possess any common ground of intellect". That common ground must, I believe, be sought in the philosophy of materialism.

NEXT WEEK

JOHN'S NIGHTMARE THROUGH SOCIALIST EYES

By F. A. RIDLEY

“Man of Reason”

By H. CUTNER

Man of Reason. The Life of Thomas Paine. By Alfred Owen Aldridge. The Cresset Press, London, 1960. Price 25s. nett.

DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY and earlier appeared a number of so-called biographies of Thomas Paine as well as hundreds of friendly and very hostile articles and pamphlets. Two of the biographies, those by “Francis Oldys” (that is, George Chalmers, 1791) and James Cheetham (1809), were lying and libellous, though Professor Aldridge claims they were not altogether so. In a number of pamphlets, Ingersoll did his utmost to champion Paine as one of the greatest of contemporary Englishmen, and of course Richard Carlile, followed by many English Freethinkers, did his utmost to defend him against his Christian detractors—though “detractors” is a very mild word considering that most of these true followers of gentle Jesus were utterly unscrupulous liars.

Even an Agnostic like Sir Leslie Stephen did not scruple a moment in attacking Paine in his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876). He actually took the libellous *Life* by James Cheetham as his “authority”! It called forth one of the finest pamphlets John M. Robertson ever wrote—I think it is his finest—and there was little left of Stephen when Robertson had done with him. Needless to say, Stephen completely ignored *Thomas Paine: An Investigation* which appeared in 1888 when Robertson was not at all known in the literary circles frequented by Stephen.

It was not until Moncure Conway wrote his classic *Life of Thomas Paine* (1892) based on much hard work digging out the truth from all kinds of contemporary documents, that Stephen sat up, and very lamely admitted that he had written in “pure ignorance”. After doing his best “greatly to malign” Paine himself, he admitted in the *National Reformer* (September 11th, 1892) that Paine had been in the past “greatly maligned”.

In spite of this, Stephen did not retract some at least of his gross depreciation of Paine as a writer, and John M. Robertson took him severely to task again in the *National Reformer* for August 27th, 1893. Stephen still smarted from the drastic drubbing he got from Robertson in 1888, and nothing would have pleased him more than once again to ignore such an “unknown” journalist. Robertson found in his latest essay (in the *Fortnightly Review*) that while admitting his former criticism was wrong, Stephen maintained he was still quite right in many things. Paine was, said Stephen,

what we politely call an idealist—a man who lives in a region beyond all reach of facts and experience . . . To speak of Paine as a political philosopher is to mistake dogged assertion of crude theories for grasp of argument. To compare him as a reasoner with Burke, whose thoughts have influenced all subsequent speculation, is absurd. Paine's service was simply to express with singular clearness—a suicidal clearness at times—certain theories which did and do exercise an enormous influence.

Robertson had no difficulty in annihilating Stephen's “confused thinking” (as he called it) especially as he “as good as admits the utter futility of Burke's reasoning immediately after asserting its immense superiority”. Even when Stephen had to deal with Paine's Deism, “Mr. Stephen's handling”, says Robertson, “is seen to be hopelessly one-sided”. As an Agnostic, Stephen easily dealt with Paine's Deism, but because of this, said he “can not take Paine seriously as a philosopher”. And so on. I have deliberately dealt with Stephen a little because here we have a gentleman, a scholar, who is so brow-beaten

with his own admittedly “sheer ignorance” and prejudice that even when shown to be completely wrong, he still stubbornly held out that after all he was right any old how! If such an example can come from an Agnostic, can we altogether blame the hundreds of Christian liars who for a century and a half never ceased foully to attack and libel a very great man. It is true that many of these attacks are now forgotten and difficult to trace; but they were the stock-in-trade of most Christian believers all this time—and even now we get echoes, especially from those who go to Sir Leslie Stephen for their “authority”.

It was not until 1892 that the first fully-documented biography of Paine appeared, written by Dr. Moncure Conway; and though quite a few biographies have been published since, Conway's has held the field until Professor Aldridge's—though, in my opinion, this has not displaced the older one in spite of the enormous amount of work it obviously has entailed. Professor Aldridge has certainly come across some contemporary documents and records perhaps unknown to Conway, but the “all-over” result is not quite as great as he may have thought.

Both Conway and Aldridge say little or even nothing at all of the devoted championship of Paine by great Freethinkers like Ingersoll, Carlile, Foote, and many lesser writers. Conway, it is true mentions, Robertson's *Thomas Paine*—Aldridge ignores him as he does Ingersoll; but he may excuse himself on the grounds that they were not contemporaries. The fact remains, it was these writers who kept the memory of Paine alive in the teeth of bitter Christian opposition. They deserved well even from Aldridge. After all, he does call attention to *Thomas Paine in America, 1774-1787*, by A. K. King (1951) and he was not “contemporary”. Having said this, let me at once give Professor Aldridge's splendid work unqualified praise.

There is no “this side of idolatry” in the book, but a very careful appraisal of all that Paine did for humanity. The chapters dealing with *The Rights of Man* give us the history of a brilliant book which helped quite as much as the later *Age of Reason* to make Paine notorious and hated by the British Government. There is little doubt he would have been hanged if it could have captured him. It should be added that it was the Second Part of *The Rights of Man* which caused the venomous hatred of all those who believed in the Divine Rights of Monarchy in general. Paine was, of course, a convinced Republican and he remained one all his life.

The almost unknown “stay-maker” (as Thomas Carlyle called him) when he landed in America in 1774, was not long before he directed attention to himself through his literary contributions—the first of which was “an introductory essay on the ‘Magazine in America’ which he wrote for *The Pennsylvania Magazine*” and which Aldridge calls “a commentary remarkable for its vigorous support of the new world and modern times against the old world and antiquity”. Later contributions showed “a decided anti-clerical bias—for modern readers”, proving that it was not altogether the unbelieving French writers who influenced him in *The Age of Reason*.

But of course it was the American War of Independence which absorbed all Paine's enthusiasm, and which produced *Common Sense* which, says Aldridge, “became the rallying cry for the new nation. It appeared at just the psychological moment”. Conway insists that “of the paramount influence of Paine's *Common Sense* there can

indeed be no question". It sold in thousands for it was written in a style that the rough colonists who were arming against England easily understood. This has always been the foremost quality in Paine's writings, and has always accounted for the malignity and malevolence of the Christian critics of *The Age of Reason*. No one can understand the tremendous influence of *Common Sense* if he does not understand the causes which led the colonists to revolt, and which both Aldridge and Conway described in detail, as well as the great part played by Thomas Paine in the revolt.

So also we are told of the tremendous enthusiasm for the rebellion which, later, the successive numbers of *The Crises* helped to maintain. The opening sentence of the first number has become one of the most oft-repeated slogans of even our own day—"These are the times that try men's souls"—whenever trouble appears on the horizon. Paine was exceptionally felicitous in such phrasing—"And the final event to himself [Edmund Burke] has been that as he rose like a rocket, he fell like the stick" and, "The sublime and the ridiculous are often so nearly related, that it is difficult to class them separately. One step above the sublime makes the ridiculous, and one step above the ridiculous makes the sublime again".

We must not or should not expect Paine to be "infallible". He was much further advanced than most of his contemporaries in many ways; but naturally he could

not easily get away from the eighteenth century. Professor Aldridge stresses some of the conclusions put by Paine as being erroneous, but surely this is to be expected. At all events, when the War was at last won by Washington, Paine, who was always of a scientific bent, began "bridge-building" and, according to many of his early biographers, "invented" an iron bridge. Aldridge maintains that "Paine did not 'invent' the iron bridge or the principle of the single arch", and points out that a French architect had executed a model in 1779 which Paine may have seen in 1781 during his first trip to France. Conway also deals very fully with the problem.

Both Conway and Aldridge discuss very fully *The Rights of Man*, the first part of which was published in 1791. By 1793, 200,000 copies had been sold. Conway claimed that "from the ashes of Rousseau's *Contrat Social* burnt in Paris rose *The Rights of Man*, no phoenix, but an eagle of the new world, with eye not blinded by any royal sun". To learn of the fortunes and misfortunes of Paine and his world-famous book, the reader should go to Professor Aldridge's illuminating chapters—or for that matter, to Conway's. I have no space in a review, though in the next article I would like to show how both biographers have dealt with *The Age of Reason*—still a world best-seller, still unanswered, still doing its work against orthodoxy, for Man's captive reason.

(To be concluded)

The Faith Narcotic—Old and New

By JOHN CHRISTOPHERS

CHRISTIAN BELIEF can basically be listed under two headings: (a) modern "can't-disprove-it" faith in a phenomenon, which is detected by the illusionary sixth sense and which is labled "God" just for convenience; and (b) belief in the old-world God so renowned for the part he played in the age of devils, angels, etc., when he frequently hailed fire and brimstone down upon the unforgiven sinners.

The one is an attempt by contemporary "new-face" theologians, and other such eminent "wise men" who set their hopes upon unreality, to view God in a completely new perspective, for science and education are fast killing the "sheep-trade". Instead of allowing their imaginations to project their hopes and their ideals onto a screen of myth, they now project these onto a brand new cinema-scope screen of "modern thought and philosophy".

The other is based upon Christ himself (though which Christ this may be from that era of so many virgin-born saviours, no one knows, except the all-wise God). This basis for the Christian religion is indeed the only one needed, as the name Christianity implies. Such a religion is undoubtedly the more "authentic" of the two, inasmuch as one could call it authentic, for it was born of so many diverse Gospels, Epistles, Saints, Churches and other such "true witnesses" of some non-historically "proved" event, which "took place" many years prior to the times of those "witnesses" anyway.

The new explanation of God, about which present day theists so humbly utter many vague and often incomprehensible platitudes, is, in all truth, absolutely inconsistent with the "unquestionable" "first-hand" picture of God, as has been exemplified for us in and by Christ, the Evangelists, the prophets in touch with God's will, and the whole of the divinely-inspired Bible. Furthermore, who are these theologians to put forward new concepts, when the Bible already provides us with so genuine and so full a portrait of the God, who loves the universe so much as to let chaos prevail?

This present-day concocted, indescribable God—we are told it is indescribable, because a finite mind cannot conceive the infinite—is, when you unravel the truth of the matter, nothing but a non-material, yet super-intelligent being, which no one can detect by any scientific means, let alone by the five senses, and for which no one has any means of proving or disproving the existence. Indeed any person could imagine for himself yet another such mind, and then say that it cannot be described or detected. In that case the person himself thereafter will never know for sure that it exists, for he could not possibly prove or disprove it, even though he thought it up in the first place. By similarity, such is the foundation of modernised "intellectual" religion. But what's more, that person could also puff up this man-created fancy into anything he wished, provided that he generalised his sparse definitions, made them so indefinite, as to avoid scathing attacks and, at the same time, as to render a mystic touch to these very "realistic" "phenomena".

By comparison with the old conventional beliefs in God, Christ, angels, devils, Virgin Birth, and indeed all the Old and New Testaments, this conveniently vague "can't-disprove-it" religion is hardly a religion at all. It is devoid of all the personal touches of the old-world God, whose many resemblances are to be found in most Mediterranean religions: And of the two schools of religious thought, we can safely say that the old is the more authentic to the belief in Christ as God.

Atheists of course reject both, in particular the latter, and indeed all other such relics of those ages, when the unknown was explained away by deities and spirits, etc., and when the numerous deified aspects of life were, in varying degree of importance, worshipped to win favour. The new ethereal God is typical of our theologians today, spending their time arguing about a deified, generalised inexplicable nothingness! Finally though, the reason for their vagueness must be noted. There is a complete contradiction of the old-world God—one survivor of the many now-unworshipped gods—before our very eyes. The portrait of God painted for us by his various witnesses could not be more inconsistent with the world around us.

CORRESPONDENCE

INDIFFERENCE

Top marks for "The Papal Attack" by "D.W."! This article certainly pointed an accusing finger at freedom's greatest enemy, the Church of Rome. Like the writer, I am surprised at and disturbed by the fatal way non-Romanists close their eyes to the sordid activities of the Vatican agents as they work for the day when Popery can once again "liberate" Britain from the awful grip of "heresy". I am shocked by the utter indifference displayed as the Black International digs the graves of their peace and liberty. Many refuse actively to oppose Catholicism on the grounds that one should "live and let live". This sounds very nice but is not realistic. It suggests an ignorance of the true nature of the Catholic Church. Once in power it does not demonstrate much tolerance. Consider this: A few months ago a Catholic priest entered the Pioneer Press bookshop and demanded the withdrawal from the windows of anti-Catholic literature. Needless to say, his insolent demand was rejected. With this sort of thing taking place in a non-Romanist country how on earth can anyone imagine it is indecorous to attack Popery?

DEREK GREEN.

THE COMMON MARKET

Mr. C. W. Brand has enquired for some details about the Press crusade for advertising Popery—which he queries. For his edification, below are some specimens of articles which have recently been published in *Today* and the *Sunday Express*.

Could Britain have a Roman Catholic premier?

The rise of the Roman Catholics.

Is the English Church swinging towards Rome?

Will Britain go Roman Catholic?

Why can't Dr. Fisher behave like the Pope?

All these articles were loaded with half-truths and Papal propaganda. I wrote to the editors pointing out the falsities—but no reply was printed. In London editorial offices it is obvious that there is very considerable Roman Catholic influence, and Messrs. D. Green and "F. Walsingham" have done a public service by drawing attention to this. Mr. Brand should realise that many patriotic citizens are more aware than he is about the Roman Catholic menace to our welfare. We certainly do not desire to descend to the low levels of backwardness which prevail in Roman Catholic countries like Eire, Spain and Latin America. Mr. Brand is quite right when he observes "Some people see Vatican threats everywhere".

One can hardly wonder!

ADRIAN PIGOTT.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, August 16th: Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Arthur, Barker, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornbrook, Johnson, Mills, Tribe, Mrs Ebury, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. The meeting expressed its regret at the death of Mr. E. J. Fairhall. It was likely that the date of the unveiling of the Bradlaugh plaque (fixed for October 13th) would have to be altered, but no new date was known yet. The British Transport Commission had stated, in connection with the Legion of Mary hut on Euston Station, that if any other society took a similar interest, the Commission would be pleased to meet them

World Union of Freethinkers

Conference at Beatrice Webb House, Holmbury St. Mary, near Dorking Surrey

September 8th to 10th, 1961

Friday evening, September 8th:

8.30 p.m.: Lady Barbara Wootton, F. A. Ridley, J. Hutton Hynd and J. Cotereau.

Saturday morning, September 9th:

Professor Oliver Lutaud (Sorbonne), "Early Freethinkers in England and France, 1633-1688", and Professor Sargent Florence (Emeritus, Birmingham), "Religious Obstacles to Development in Backward Countries".

Saturday afternoon—free.

Walk for those who so desire.

Saturday evening:

Fenner Brockway, M.P., "The Challenge of Africa".

Sunday morning, September 10th:

Professor Marcel Homès (Brussels), "Plant Physiology and Hunger in the World". Dr. Maurice Burton, "Scientists May Burst Bubbles"; and G. A. Kirk.

A few places left; please write immediately to Colin McCall, National Secular Society, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

and discuss provision of similar facilities. The Treasurer reported a generous gift of shares from Mr. and Mrs. J. Collins of Surrey, and the Committee expressed its grateful thanks. New members were admitted to Chester and Marble Arch Branches which, with Individual members made 7 in all. Manchester and San Juan Branch matters were dealt with. Mrs. Ebury reported on the legal position regarding adoption after an examination of the HMSO publications on the subject. It was agreed that the Secretary should write to the Home Office in connection with Atheists and other unbelievers adopting children. Leaflet suggestions were held over until the next meeting, as was the possibility of purchasing a tape recorder. Mr. Ebury handed over the usual North London Branch monthly donation of £5 to the Building Fund. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, September 20th, 1961.

WANTED

I am looking for a copy of *What Freemasonry Is, What It Has Been and What It Ought To Be*, by Charles Bradlaugh. Can any reader kindly oblige?—JOHN BELLAMY, 14 Elrington Road, London, E.8.

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