

# The Freethinker

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IN ITS ISSUE of October 25th, the *Daily Mirror* contained a short summary of a speech by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, now translated into Lord Fisher of Lambeth via the agency of a life-peerage. The speech was delivered the previous day on his retirement from his past office of President of the British Council of Churches, a post in which he has now been succeeded (presumably *ex officio*?) by the present Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey. The contents of Dr. Fisher's valedictory address appear to have passed almost unnoticed, upon which fact we can only comment that times change, for had an outgoing Archbishop made any such statement in say, 1861, in the hey-day of the age now known by the name of its titular figurehead, Queen Victoria, the statement would have probably provoked an immediate demand for his impeachment. Failure to comply with that demand would probably have then led to the downfall of the Government. A wave of righteous indignation would have swept the country in which no one would have concurred more rigorously than those two loyal defenders of the Protestant religion as by law established, Victoria by the grace of God Queen, and Henry Temple, Viscount Palmerston, then Prime Minister of Great Britain. For in 1861, England was still a Protestant country inhabited by what a future Cardinal (Manning) described as "a stiff-necked Protestant people". How times have changed!

## The United Front

We quote from the *Mirror's* brief but significant report: "The Church of Rome has become an ally of British Protestant Churches instead of an enemy", Lord Fisher of Lambeth, former Archbishop of Canterbury said yesterday. He described this as a 'stupendous change and a complete new chapter in world history'. Lord Fisher said he had been accused of trying to lead the Church of England into a Pan-Protestant movement, a union of Christians which would exclude members of Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. 'Now, thank God, nobody can say this because Rome is in it as fully as we are' he added. Or, in a sentence, the manoeuvre known in politics as the united front, is now concluded between Rome and the Protestant Churches, including the Church of England. But a united front against what? This, the Archbishop is not here recorded as stating, but a comprehending glance at the contemporary world is sufficient to disclose its underlying cause. For the first time in their long history, the Christian Churches—Catholic and Protestant alike—are compelled to form a united front against the common enemy, one unknown to them in earlier ages, Atheism.

## Shade of Guy Fawkes

By a rather curious irony, Dr. Fisher's declaration of a henceforth permanent armistice between Rome and Canterbury, was made only a few days before that annually-commemorated Protestant festival, now well on

in its fourth century, Guy Fawkes' Day. For the annual commemoration of that brave but fanatical Catholic conspirator, whilst now mainly a juvenile saturnalia for letting off fireworks *ad lib*, began, and indeed long continued, as an important demonstration of the steadfast determination of a Protestant England to defend the liberating principles enunciated (if not always observed) by the Reformation. But it seems clear that today, Protestantism is more and more becoming a spent force in this island; its former liberating mission of asserting and defending the fundamental principles of civil and religious liberty against the totalitarian claims of the Vatican, has now passed over to its historic successor, militant Freethought. Indeed, if we are to take Archbishop Fisher's latest pronouncement seriously, Protestantism has now finally thrown up the sponge, and henceforth we are due to pass into the decisive era long ago predicted by the founder of the National Secular Society, Charles Bradlaugh, the era of the final battle between Rome and Reason. The middle of the road appears nowadays to be left vacant by the passing over of the Protestant Churches to the side of the Vatican-led reaction which forms the current reality behind the facade of the united front.

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## United Front of Churches—and God

Since I started writing for THE FREETHINKER some twenty years back, I have never disguised my submission that the age of Protestant Fundamentalism which was the religious norm of Victorian England, and against which most then contemporary freethinking propaganda was necessarily directed, now becomes increasingly obsolete. Its place as Freethought's Public Enemy Number One is increasingly being taken over by Rome. The Vatican today is launching what may well be its last fling, a "Counter-Reformation" this time not as in earlier centuries against such then current "heresies" as Protestantism and Deism, but against a new and far more devastating enemy, Atheism. It is "the spectre of Atheism" that, at present, haunts the dreams of Pope John and his "back-room boys" in the Vatican, like King Charles's head once haunted the dreams of the famous Mr. Dick! Atheism and its spectacular advance in this age of world industrialisation, represents the unseen magnet to which more and more the current world strategy of the Vatican responds.

(At present the Rome-led Christian counter-offensive proceeds under the ostensible banner of "anti-Communism". But this prevalent slogan seems actually to be deceptive. It is not the Communism—to which the Church of Rome is no stranger—but the Atheism of Bolshevism which today constitutes the Kremlin as the arch-enemy of the Vatican. The Russian and Chinese Revolutions were the first major *Atheistic* revolutions in human history and it is this fact that constitutes their major crime in the eyes of the Vatican.)

The present projected united front of the Churches is only conceivable insofar as it operates against advancing Atheism. Today, all the Christian Churches unite against Atheism: tomorrow it may be all the religions!

In such present and prospective alliances, what is likely

## — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

### The United Front Against Atheism

— By F. A. RIDLEY —



to be the role filled by the Church of Rome? Its vast experience and world-wide extension guarantee the Vatican a leading, if not *the* leading role in any such united front. Rome is, today, playing for high stakes: world power or final downfall. By the year 2061, the critical observer will then perhaps be in a position to decide which.

### A FURTHER DISPATCH FROM THE UNITED FRONT

"IT IS NOT PROTESTANTS who are the great enemy of the Roman Catholic faith," said the Rev. Sean Kelleher at the annual academic High Mass for Queen's University undergraduates in Belfast on October 29th. "The great enemy today, he declared, is materialism, indifference and neo-paganism" (*Belfast Telegraph*, 30/10/61). Father Kelleher called for a "positive approach to the problem of re-unity". "It is admitted by all," he said, "that the Church was sadly in need of reform in the first half of the sixteenth century . . . it was imperative to stress, as the reformers did, the necessity of personal religion . . . It was also necessary to emphasise, as Calvin did, the transcendence of God . . .". The tragedy of the Reformation, said Father Kelleher, was that it "divided rather than reformed Christendom".

"Nevertheless," he continued, "Protestantism today still retains some of the positive values of the Reformation", and "To some of these revealed truths it gives an even deeper emphasis than we do". Anglicans and Presbyterians, he said, would gain if they returned to the Catholic fold, but, on the other hand, "We must humbly submit they have something to teach us".

Humility might immediately give way to arrogance—"They will not enrich us substantially, because as Catholics, we are in full possession of the truth"—but Father Kelleher's speech was noteworthy. It is rare, after all, for a Roman Catholic priest to admit from the pulpit that the allegiance of Protestants "will certainly give new and deeper dimensions to our Christian lives".

It shows how Father Kelleher fears the "great" enemy—Atheism.

### CHARITY AND CREDULITY

The Portiuncular Indulgence for the Holy Souls—readers of the Bulletin of the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady, Deptford, were told—could be gained either from noon on All Saints' up to midnight on All Souls' or from noon the following Saturday (November 11th) to Sunday midnight, but it could not be gained on both occasions. Conditions for gaining the "Great Indulgence" were given as follows:

"You must visit the church and say six Our Fathers, six Hail Marys and six Glory Be's for the Holy Father's intention. You must also go to Confession and Holy Communion within eight days. You can gain *another* Plenary Indulgence each and every time you enter the church and say these prayers. To make a separate visit, it is only necessary to go out of the door of the church and then return for the next set of prayers."

It was explained that, "Each and every Plenary Indulgence which you gain can deliver one Holy Soul from Purgatory"; all were urged to gain as many Indulgences as they could; and "we ask parents to explain it to their children and to encourage them to do likewise".

Joseph McCabe, it may be recalled, described "Portiuncular" during his childhood days in Manchester. "Men, women, and children", he wrote (in *The Popes and Their Church*), "we bobbed in and out of that church all day long. We pitted our records against each other. Crowds came from all parts of Manchester for the glorious free privilege. You could hardly cross the threshold for legs, as one naturally remained near the door so as to get in and out so many times in the hour. Outside there were booths selling beads, scapulars, medals, and other indulgence-laden curiosities".

No doubt it was similar at the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady at Deptford, for, as McCabe said, "The field for charity is illimitable. It is hardly less vast than the field for credulity".

## Heaven's My Destination

By A. O. SNOOK

HIS GRACE OF CANTUAR having kindly intimated that he anticipates meeting some of our readers in Paradise, it occurred to me that Cantuar's magnanimous declaration deserves wider publicity. The See of Canterbury has condescendingly recognised, rather belatedly, that some of us aren't such bad chaps after all, nevertheless I fear that not all members of the National Secular Society will view the Right Reverend's guarantee of celestial bliss with enthusiasm.

Britain's premier parson has recently stated that he considers that some atheists will be found within the pearly gates. Presumably our senior medicine man is referring to those who lead decent lives without benefit of clergy; people he would class as "really Christians"—a phrase popular with parsons who are at a loss to account for kindness and good character in unbelievers. Incidentally, I am perennially amazed by the arrogance, smugness, complacency and conceit of Christians who assume themselves to be worthy, without any doubt, of elevation to the sphere vaguely known as heaven. As I understand it, heaven is reserved for saintly characters (e.g. Generalissimo Franco, once described by a British Tory War Secretary as "a Christian gentleman"). That Dr. Ramsey should publicly intimate that he himself is a "cert" for heaven seems to indicate a certain lack of Christian humility.

This, however, is a digression.

What worries me is that some of us may find ourselves in paradise willy nilly—to coin a phrase. The ordinary man is at liberty to choose between heaven and hell. The "good" atheist is not, apparently, given any choice. He will be wafted up to the Throne, no matter how sincere his preference for the other place. He will be, in the words of the hymn, "with God eternally shut in". Here, in paradise, the poor devil will be forced to listen to Cantuar reciting the Thirty-nine Articles before breakfast every morning, Billy Graham banging the big gong for lunch, Pontifex Maximus intoning a Latin grace before tea, whilst during dinner his soul will be lifted up by background music provided by the Salvation Army, after which repast, Graham Greene will give a short talk on "Sex and/or Religion". Evening prayers will, there seems little doubt, be offered up by the Reverend Doctor Leslie D. Weatherhead, M.A.(Manch.), Ph.D.(Lond.), D.D.(Edin.), etc., etc., and we shall then be escorted to our little beds on pretty pink clouds by flocks of Brides-of-Christ; the sexes separate, of course, men in the northern hemisphere, women in the southern. And all this, mark you, after having subscribed to the heathen in his blindness, never attended a church or said a single hallelujah, hosanna or hail Mary, or contributed to the Band of Hope or Catholic Action.

We've been put on the spot, chaps. Cantuar has spoken. Where do we go from here? Man may be vile, but the prospect does not please. If any reader can suggest a way out of the impasse in which we now find ourselves—those of us who are "really Christians"—I herewith authorise our sorely tried editor to present the said reader with one year's free subscription to THE FREETHINKER and a bottle of holy water from Lourdes.

NEXT WEEK  
THE SUNDAY PICTORIAL IN SEARCH  
OF SPIRITS

By H. CUTNER



# The Bradlaugh Celebration

London County Council  
**CHARLES BRADLAUGH**  
 1833-1891  
 Advocate of Free Thought  
 lived here  
 1870-1877

SO READS THE PLAQUE on the small terraced cottage, 29 Turner Street, Stepney, which was unveiled by Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, accompanied by his charming wife, on Wednesday, November 8th, 1961, in the presence of the Lady Mayor and Councillors of Stepney, representatives of the London County Council, and, of course, many members of the Ethical Union, Leicester Secular Society, National Secular Society, South Place Ethical Society and Rationalist Press Association, among them, Charles Bradlaugh Bonner and Basil Bradlaugh Bonner, Bradlaugh's grandson and great grandson.

It was a fine, sunny afternoon after one or two morning showers, and a Union Jack draped the plaque when we first arrived. It may—as the Chairman, Mr. Joseph Reeves remarked—have taken the LCC more than fifty years to put up the plaque, but wars and various other vicissitudes had interfered with the plans. Now, thanks largely to the impetus of Mr. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright (who just made the ceremony in time after a Press Dinner in which he dined “not wisely but too well”) the plaque was there, and who more fitting to unveil it than Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, engaged as he is on his own struggle to take his seat in the House of Commons?

Mr. Benn congratulated the Humanist Council and the LCC on co-operating in this commemoration, and said that no greater honour could be done to any Parliamentarian than to be asked to perform the unveiling. His own radical grandfather had been born in the East End of London, only a few hundred yards away from this very house. Though not himself an atheist, Mr. Benn had enormous admiration for Bradlaugh and, of course, had a strong personal interest in his struggle—and success!

Mr. Charles Bradlaugh Bonner followed, quoting from *The National Reformer* of May 20th, 1870, the reasons for his grandfather going to live in the house while his wife and daughters went to live at Midhurst. He had lived there for seven years, seven critical years in his career, renting two rooms at 3s. 6d. a week. In the summer, said Mr. Bonner, it wasn't possible to open the window because of the “fragrance” of the district.

From the house where Bradlaugh lived to the House from which he was ejected—as G. W. Foote said—“like a taproom brawler”. This time, though, Bradlaugh was being honoured in the House of Commons. And all present agreed with Mr. Reeves when he hoped that Mr. Benn wouldn't have to fight as many years as Bradlaugh had before he could take his seat. Mr. Reeves drew attention to the fruitful co-operation of the Ethical Union, National Secular Society and Rationalist Press Association on the Humanist Council and then again called on Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn.

“Probably only those who are Parliamentarians will recognise what a privilege it is”, said Mr. Benn, “to be asked to pay this tribute to the greatest Parliamentarian of them all”. All his life Bradlaugh had worked for the idea that a man ought to apply his own mind to the problems of society, and to act in accordance with his conclusions.

Among the masses of causes he took up were women's

suffrage; abolition of flogging in the army; Ireland; Egypt; and India. How pleased he would have been at the establishment of the Indian Republic! And he was a man of foresight, looking forward to a Channel tunnel, advocating payment of Members and the right of peers to participate in elections. An atheist, prayers were said for him on his deathbed, so much was he respected. “Thrown out of this House by ten policemen, he never let bitterness enter into the conflict on his side”, and as a Parliamentarian, he succeeded in converting the oath from a means of repression into an expression of independent thought.

He did as much as any man to entrench Parliament in the social life of the community. “He built a bridge between Parliament and the people”. The loyalty he built up with the people of Northampton really founded the Parliamentary system firmly on the people. “And the last thing I particularly remember about him”, said Mr. Benn, “a personal touch this, was that he won!” He died without knowing that the House had expunged from its records all references to his expulsion, but he died a respected Parliamentarian. It was, Mr. Benn concluded, “appropriate to honour and remember him for the work that he did to make the British Parliament what it is today”.

Again Mr. Charles Bradlaugh Bonner followed, and he linked those two tiny rooms in Turner Street at 3s. 6d. a week with the palatial House of Commons. Bradlaugh gave up his home and moved to Turner Street to devote himself to politics and Freethought. His home had been broken through the alcoholism of his wife, and his business had had to be given up largely through religious opposition. When about to give a lecture at Bury, he received a telegram informing him that his son was dying. Family and home were denied him, but from that denial he gained even greater strength for the struggles he was engaged in. And what struggles! The trial of *The National Reformer* ended in victory, but at great expense. He had fought his first election at Northampton two years before going to Turner Street; he fought others while he was there. In fact, in that poor quarter of London he was working to the great struggle that was to bring him into the House of Commons, where we were honouring him today. “It was not surprising”, concluded Mr. Bonner, “that Charles Bradlaugh died at 57. As he said himself, he had not only burnt the candle at both ends, but in the middle too”.

Mr. Reginald T. Paget, O.C., the present Member for Northampton, told how the Bradlaugh radical tradition had endured in the city. Bradlaugh had had an enormous moral influence which Mr. Paget himself felt when he first went there. And he was proud to carry on that radical tradition. “It would be hard” Mr. Paget said, “to find a more conservative-looking town, yet it returns people like me, because of the radical tradition put into the town by Charles Bradlaugh”.

Then Mr. Paget expressed his pleasure at the presence of “Tony” Wedgwood Benn, who was fighting a similar battle to that of Bradlaugh, and of Mr. Bonner. Bradlaugh's son had died, but the Bradlaugh tradition was ably carried on by his grandson.

Mr. Reeves then concluded a very happy occasion in which one hundred and fifty admirers of Charles Bradlaugh had taken part. It is impossible to mention all, and it would be invidious to mention a few. Perhaps then, just

(Concluded on next page)



## This Believing World

The other day, on Mr. Grisewood's popular radio programme, "Any Questions", one of the questions was whether it was better to believe in "an eye for an eye" than "to give the other cheek"? Miss Nancy Spain averred that she wished sometimes to be of the Jewish faith so that she could believe in an eye for an eye; but all the other members of the panel preferred "the other cheek" and naturally instanced Jesus as the supreme example of always giving the other cheek. Which just goes to show how little they knew their Bible. When did Jesus give the other cheek?

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Take that marvellous example of God-like behaviour, Jesus whipping the money-changers out of the Temple. Did he give the other cheek then? The money-changers were doing a legitimate job of work, no worse than the people who keep a stall at Westminster Abbey selling postcards; but Jesus lost his temper badly. He had no more right to attack them than anybody these days has the right to attack the postcard sellers at the Abbey. But in any case, did he turn the other cheek?

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Although the "Sunday Pictorial" had a shrieking headline the other Sunday across its pages, "It's Blasphemy". It is difficult to find out where the "blasphemy" really is. The accompanying picture showed a typical European face of a bearded man representing Jesus talking very, very, kindly to his mother (a thing he never did) who has a typical jug on her shoulder—for all Eastern women this jug is as symbolic as a handbag is for Western women. It is a "still" photo taken from the current Hollywood film, *King of Kings*. The truth is of course that for the "working-classes", Jesus has always been represented as a working-class carpenter, one of themselves so to speak. But for all other Christians he is always a "Prince" or a "King". And for Hollywood, he must be the "King of Kings"—though he never was a "King".

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Of course, as is the case with all representations of, or attempted representations of, "our Lord" on the screen or stage, there is a shriek of horror from most believers that *anyone* should represent such a sacred—and historical—character as Jesus, and this is what has happened in America where any *human* touch given to Jesus is bitterly resented. But it surely is most amusing to read what one reviewer says: "The chief impression the film gives is that the directors were bored to tears with *their* Christ, and were really trying to make it the story of a gallant Barabbas whose heroic Jewish rebellion failed because Christ would not help him". So that is the awful "blasphemy".

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Just for a further record: the film has been called "anti-religious, corny, phoney, and the most monstrously vulgar of all the big Bible stories Hollywood has told in the last decade". And all this perhaps is because "our Lord" wouldn't help Barabbas in his heroic rebellion—of which of course history has no record!

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The "Sunday Express" (October 29th) asks its readers on its "Book Page", "Are they unfair to their faith?" giving at the same time three portraits of Evelyn Waugh, Muriel Spark, Graham Green—all Roman Catholic authors—and adding that the following popular writers also are all Roman Catholics: Compton Mackenzie, Siegfried Sassoon, Gerald Fairlie, Alan Hackney, John Braine, Pamela Frankau, Christopher Sykes, Barbara Ward, Doris Leslie,

A. J. Cronin, Margaret Trower, Naomi Jacob, and Dennis Wheatley—though later, Mr. Wheatley said he was *not* a Roman Catholic. Still, the list is a formidable one, and what has surprised Mr. Pitman in his article is that not all of them show Roman Catholicism as so utterly immaculate as they say is the conception of the Virgin Mary.

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In truth, it is almost impossible to talk about the "Church" by which is meant nearly always the Roman Church on stage or screen except in hushed and reverent tones; or to represent a priest on stage or screen who is nor overflowing with love and compassion. Rarely does this happen with a Protestant parson who in general is made a figure of fun—naive and stupid, and always talking in a "parsonic" voice.

### THE BRADLAUGH CELEBRATION

(Concluded from page 363)

one: Ian White, the National Secular Society's youngest speaker, who dashed straight from school to be with us at the House of Commons.

The following was issued by the London County Council Press Bureau.

IT WAS IN 1905 that the Historical Records Sub-Committee of the London County Council decided to adopt a suggestion made by Mrs. Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner that a tablet be erected at 20 Circus Road, St. John's Wood, where her father had died in 1891. However, the owner of the house refused consent on the ground that she objected "on principle to the expenditure of public monies in the way suggested".

The matter was raised again in 1939 when the Parks Committee approved a similar suggestion. On this occasion no further action was taken owing to the outbreak of war, and the house was later demolished after bomb damage. In 1947, the Town Planning Committee considered the possibility of erecting a tablet at one of Bradlaugh's two other surviving London residences, 92 (formerly 15) Warner Place, Hackney, where he stayed for a time in 1855, and Turner Street, Stepney. No action was taken, as the only evidence for these addresses came from a single source for which corroboration could not then be found.

Last year, Mr. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright wrote to the Council adducing further evidence of Bradlaugh's residence at 29 Turner Street, and the Town Planning Committee decided to adopt his suggestion that the house be commemorated. It was in 1870 that Bradlaugh, according to his daughter, Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, "took two tiny rooms at 3s. 6d. a week at 29 Turner Street", a small early Victorian terraced cottage. In February 1877, she records later, "we removed to Circus Road, St. John's Wood . . . as his books were bursting all available bounds at Turner Street".

### PAPERBACKS

Common Sense and The Crisis by Thomas Paine (double vol.) 8s. Miss Lonelyhearts and A Cool Million by Nathanael West (double vol.) 2s. 6d.

Memoirs of a Nun by Diderot, 3s. 6d.

My Childhood by Maxim Gorky, 3s. 6d.

Children of the Sun by Morris West (illustrated) 2s. 6d.

Six Days or Forever? by Ray Ginger (The story of the Tennessee "Monkey Trial"). 4s.

Man and His Gods by Professor Homer W. Smith (500 pages), 12s.

One Woman's Fight by Vashti McCollum. Revised Edition, with a Postlude by Paul Blanshard, a Preface by George Axtelle and the complete text of the Supreme Court Decision (the "McCollum Case"), 13s. 6d.

Available from the PIONEER PRESS, Postage 8d.



# THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25).

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m. MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE.

(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.

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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, November 19th, 6.45 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Bingo or Bango?"

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 21st, 7.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Christianity and Islam—and the Challenge of Communism".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 19th, 6.30 p.m.: FILMS, "Inside the Kremlin" and "The Bolshoi Ballet in USA".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, November 19th, 7.15 p.m.: G. N. DEV, "World Population Problems".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, November 19th, 2.30 p.m.: G. W. SNEESBY, B.Sc., "South Africa Today".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday November 19th, 11 a.m.: DR. MAURICE BURTON, "Modern Man and the Animal Kingdom".

West London Ethical Society (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8), Sunday, November 19th, 6.30 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "Extra-Sensory Perception".

## Notes and News

THIEVES BROKE INTO the offices of the National Secular Society and the Pioneer Press on the night of November 9th-10th, forcing a few locks in the process. In addition to cash, they took crossed cheques and postal orders already prepared for payment into the bank. There is little likelihood of their being able to use these, but there is even less that we shall get them back. Naturally we are taking all steps to have cheques stopped, but it would be helpful if all who remitted postal orders in the week or so before the robbery would let us have the counterfoils for presentation to the Post Office. And we ask correspondents to make allowances for delays caused by the disruption in our affairs.

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ALL FAIR-MINDED PEOPLE (whatever their views on nuclear disarmament) must have been shocked by the severity of the sentence at London Sessions on George Clark, of the Committee of 100. What sense of justice can reconcile a nominal fine for the violent act of throwing eggs at Jomo Kenyatta with nine months' imprisonment for inciting

people to sit down and cause obstruction. Certainly not ours.

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"CERTAINLY," said *The Universe* (3/11/61), "there are priests who forsake the Church. But their numbers are minute and of these nearly all have failed to live up to their high vocational calling through human frailty—immorality, intemperance, lack of obedience and mental sickness. Those who have disagreed on faith or morals or on the basic teaching of the Church are numerically negligible". It is impossible of course, to say definitely how many priests leave the Roman Catholic Church, because such departures are seldom publicised, but we estimate them to be far from negligible. There are, for instance, five ex-priests on the editorial staff of the New York Protestant magazine, *Christian Heritage*, who openly express their disagreement with the Church of Rome. No doubt many who leave succumb sufficiently to "human frailty" to get married and thereby provide nasty-minded Catholics with ample "evidence" of immorality! But what we should like to ask the editor of *The Universe* is: if "immortality" is one of the main reasons why priests leave the Roman Church, how can it be said that those who have "disagreed on faith or morals . . . are numerically negligible"?

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THE SAME ISSUE of *The Universe* referred sarcastically and anonymously to an "emancipated Oxford, Cambridge, or possibly 'red-brick' don—they are nowadays barely distinguishable, except that some swing from the lower branches—has remarked that 'the Christian God the Father, the God of Tertullian, Augustine, and Aquinas, is the wickedest thing yet invented by the black heart of man'." This, continued *The Universe*, "was not murmured with a deprecating smile over the port in Common Room, but printed in a newly-published book for the better instruction of the commonalty". *The Universe* certainly didn't intend to aid and abet the instruction of the commonalty by naming either book or author. It happens to be *Milton's God* by Professor William Empson, which Colin McCall reviews in this issue.

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ON THE SUBJECT of the Roman Catholic Church and books, the American magazine *Church and State* (October 1961) pointed out that the Vatican Index of Forbidden Books "is now relatively unimportant in the Church's total scheme of censorship, since too many books are being published for inclusion in the ordinary editions of the Index". The censorship now works principally through Catholic bishops. "It would appear to be the present policy of the Church", wrote the Jesuit Father John J. Lynch, "to restrict to a minimum the number of books explicitly condemned and to depend more and more on the general principles of Canon Law to guide the faithful in their recognition of forbidden matter". Roman Catholics are, of course, forbidden to read all books which directly attack Catholic dogma or defend "heresy" or "error", or which defend birth control. "In these matters", Father Lynch said, "the voice of the Church is the voice of God and commands the same unquestioning obedience which is due to the word of God Himself".

★

A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LADY, Mrs. G.B., on holiday in Bavaria recently, came across a small shrine in the hills and wrote to the *News of the World* (29/10/61) about it. "It was beautifully kept", she said. "There were fresh flowers. And inside the glass case alongside the Virgin Mary, was a picture of Adolf Hitler!" "Who could possibly be so mixed-up?" she asked. Alas for humanity, quite a lot of people were not so very long ago.



# Our Greatest Epic

By COLIN McCALL

"I AM ANXIOUS to make my beliefs clear at the outset, because the revival of Christianity among literary critics has rather taken me by surprise," says William Empson in his new book, *Milton's God* (Chatto & Windus, 25s.). "I think the traditional God of Christianity very wicked, and have done since I was at school . . .". The greatness of Milton, as Professor Empson sees it, is that "he could accept and express a downright horrible conception of God and yet keep somehow alive, underneath it, all the breadth and generosity, the welcome to every noble pleasure, which had been prominent in European history just before his time".

Shelley, it will be remembered, held that, as a moral being, Milton's Devil was superior to his God, Professor Empson agrees.

Most critics [he says] are now agreed that there is a gradual calculated degradation of Satan, but this bit of understanding gets obscured by a hunger to argue that he is very bad from the start. The chief merit of the shape of the poem, I think . . . is that it presents the change in Satan with such force. We first meet him certain of the righteousness of his cause though defeated, follow him into doubt and despair, switch back in the narrative of Raphael to find him confident that his cause will be victorious as well as just, then return to the story and find his character rapidly rotting away.

But, Professor Empson insists,

Satan is not meant to become contemptible until his character collapses after he has doubted his own thesis upon Niphates' top.

It is, in fact, God who is contemptible, though Milton struggles to make him appear less so, while still keeping close to the sacred text. Indeed, the chief source of the "fascination and poignancy" of *Paradise Lost* is due to this conflict in Milton's own mind.

Professor Empson can't agree with the formidable Dr. F. R. Leavis, who has said that, Milton "is not really interested in the achievement of precise thought of any kind; he certainly hasn't the energy of mind needed for sustained analytic and discursive thinking". Milton was, on the contrary, "an experienced propagandist, very capable of deploying his whole case so as to convince his readers of what he had already decided they should believe", and Professor Empson knows from experience (in China) that Satan's first great speech "goes over as a direct political speech", which is what T. S. Eliot said the style of Milton could not do. I should think it impossible to doubt the terrific impact that speech makes, but Mr. Eliot's fundamental difficulty might well be (as Professor Empson suggests) jibbing at imagining angels who hated God like Milton's do.

Unlike many modern critics, Professor Empson refuses to treat *Paradise Lost* in a purely aesthetic manner. It is, he maintains, a mistake to try this, and surely he is right. Apart from being the greatest epic poem in the English language, *Paradise Lost* is an attempted justification of Christianity, the dominant religion in the Western world, the religion in which most of us have been brought up, and which has largely conditioned our thinking.

Like Professor Empson, I find the Christian scheme of things repulsive and immoral. It made a great mind like Pascal's argue that belief in Christianity was reasonable since, if it turned out to be true, the believer stood to gain and the unbeliever to lose enormously. Even Milton couldn't make Jehovah moral, but he did his best. He cut out, says Professor Empson, "both the torture-horror

and the sex-horror, and after that the monster seems almost decent". On another occasion, God is compared most aptly to "Uncle Joe Stalin"—"the same patience under an appearance of roughness, the same flashes of joviality, the same thorough unscrupulousness, the same real bad temper".

*Milton's God* is a remarkable and stimulating book: stimulating alike to the student of literature and of religion. If you happen to be both it is indispensable. "Clearly," says Professor Empson, "if you have reduced your morality to keeping the taboos imposed by an infinite malignity, you can have no sense either of personal honour or of the public good". Milton's devils refuse to obey God "merely out of cowardice" and, "Their position is thus identical with that of persons such as Milton who had dared to deny that Charles I had Divine Right". Identical morally, that is, for Milton believes that God actually had Divine Right and Charles hadn't. Whether the rebels can be blamed for initially doubting God's credentials, "before God had supplied false evidence to encourage the doubt", is hard to tell, "but once they have arrived at a conviction they are not to be blamed for having the courage to act upon it".

*Paradise Lost* explicitly sets out to justify the ways of God to men, and Professor Empson believes the phrase is not just poetical rhetoric. Milton, he suggests, genuinely considered God to be in need of defence, and this view is supported by quotations from Milton's posthumously published prose work, *De Doctrina Christiana*. This work, written in Latin, reveals Milton as an Arian and, as such, a disbeliever in the Trinity. Milton (then blind) confessed himself "unable to perceive how those who consider the Son of the same essence with the Father can explain either his incarnation or his satisfaction". When the poet began *Paradise Lost*, he was, says Professor Empson, "in exactly the position of the Satan he presents, overwhelmingly stubborn and gallant but defending a cause inherently hopeless from the start". And the Professor adds that, "Milton only just managed, after spiritual wrestling and the introduction of a certain amount of heresy, to reconcile his conscience or keep his temper with his God".

One can hardly expect *Milton's God* to be well received by fervent Christians, but its author is prepared for that. It is, in fact, inevitable that they should dislike it: made so, not only by Milton's treatment of the Christian myth, but by the very nature of the myth itself. And Professor Empson's final chapter is devoted to that myth and what is wrong with it. "Among the various universal religions", he says, ". . . Christianity is the only one which rattled on the progress, the only one which dragged back the Neolithic craving for human sacrifice into its basic structure". Men always try to imitate their gods, the Professor notes, therefore to worship a wicked one is sure to make them behave badly. "But no god had ever known before how to be so eerily and profoundly wicked." No man of honour could go to Heaven, said Shelley, because the more he revered the Son who endured, the more he must execrate the Father who was satisfied by his pain. This, says Professor Empson, is the basic moral objection to Christianity. "The Christian God the Father, the God of Tertullian, Augustine and Aquinas, is the wickedest thing yet invented by the black heart of man".



# William Archer as a Freethinker

By H. GEORGE FARMER

IN THE YEAR 1892, there appeared an article entitled "The Coming Menace" in *The National Reformer*, a Secularist journal, once edited by the famous Charles Bradlaugh, but at that time directed by John M. Robertson. The author of that article was Ernest Newman, the highly esteemed music critic of *The Sunday Times* in later years. On that occasion Newman was prompted to read a homily on the pig-headedness of factions in religious and non-religious movements in this fashion:

A hundred sects tore at each other's throats over the meaning of some wretched formality, or burnt or slew each other for a difference of opinion in a paltry case of biblical interpretation. . . . The instructive point to be noticed in this picture is that this revulsion of feeling is not at all due to the character of the beliefs in question, but to the characters of the men who profess the beliefs.

Only those who are *au fait* with the prevailing opinions in the Secularist movement at that date can grasp precisely why Newman was harping on that particular theme. It so happened that schismatic strife had arisen in the Secularist movement. Whilst Bradlaugh held the reins as President of the National Secular Society there was little or no dissent in the matter of methods of propaganda, save for the few Holyoake mediocrities—and by that medial term I only refer to the latter's followers. In 1890, however, Bradlaugh was stricken by an illness so grave that he felt that he had to resign the Presidency into younger hands, when he personally nominated G. W. Foote as his successor, whereas many had thought that he would have chosen his lieutenant and sub-editor John M. Robertson for that office. Foote's militancy in THE FREETHINKER and on the rostrum had captured many of the newer type of Secularists, and whilst THE FREETHINKER was increasing its circulation, that of *The National Reformer* was languishing after the death of Bradlaugh, and by 1893 ceased publication. Meanwhile a schism arose among the Secularists—a Foote party and a Robertson party—and John M. Robertson opened up a regrettable barrage against Foote. It was that dissonance which offended the sensitive ears of Ernest Newman.

Eventually Robertson joined forces with another Secularist disconsolate—Charles Watts—who was running a Rationalist Press Committee, from which evolved the present Rationalist Press Association in 1899. Robertson never forgot the triumph of Foote in the Presidency and in the success of THE FREETHINKER—which naturally became the mouthpiece of the National Secular Society—and when Foote brought about his *coup* in the foundation of the Secular Society Ltd., the greatest legal triumph in the annals of Freethought, it must have nettled Robertson, although the Rationalist Press Association reaped equal benefits with the National Secular Society.

This preludial matter would appear—at first sight—to be quite irrelevant to the question at issue. Yet the fact remains that—as I strongly suspect—it is the key to the glaring omissions of Robertson in his book entitled *William Archer as a Rationalist: A Collection of his Heterodox Writings* (1925). In that work Robertson totally ignored Foote, although he was privy to the fact of Archer's admiration of Foote, and that the former had contributed to Foote's journal *Progress*, under the *nom de guerre* of "Norman Britton". When G. W. Foote was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment in April, 1883, Dr. Edward Aveling and J. M. Wheeler took upon themselves the editing of THE FREETHINKER and *Progress*,

and in the latter many eminent writers volunteered their services to keep that monthly going, and they included Eleanor Marx-Aveling, Edward Carpenter, Paul Lafargue (Marx's son-in-law), J. L. Joynes, Friedrich Engels, E. Belfort Bax, Henry S. Salt, and others. Those articles contributed by William Archer ("Norman Britton") were:—"A Realist in Fiction", "Faith and Art", "Richard Wagner", "Carlyle and Emerson", "The Gospel of Matthew Arnold", "Vernon Lee", "Kielland Again", "Zola and the French Stage", "George Eliot's Essays", and "Cremation", all during 1883-84. Why were these articles by William Archer ignored by Robertson? Why did he only include in the collection the articles which had appeared in *The Literary Guide* and the *R.P.A. Annual*?

How different the attitude of Archer's biographer, his brother Lieut.-Col. Charles Archer. In his *William Archer: Life, Work, and Friendship* (1931) we find several references to Foote, the first of which—actually a letter from Archer to Robertson, dated 26/10/1881—runs thus: "I heard Foote lecture for the first time last Sunday night: what a first-rate speaker he is!"

When Foote was sent to prison for blasphemy, Charles Archer penned a most sympathetic account of that event (p. 119):

The misfortune which at this time overtook the Secularist writer and lecturer, G. W. Foote, with whom Archer had associated on terms of some intimacy during his first years in London, and whose breadth of reading and powers of mind he greatly admired, threw upon him a good deal of unpaid work of a kind which only loyalty to a friend and a sense of public duty would have induced him, at this juncture, to undertake. He had willingly agreed to contribute to a monthly magazine, *Progress*, started by Foote; but, before many numbers had appeared, a prosecution for blasphemous libel, founded on a series of illustrated articles in THE FREETHINKER, Foote's weekly journal, sent the editor to prison for twelve months. The magazine, a struggling undertaking at best, was threatened with extinction. . . . Disapproving strongly, from the point of view of taste and policy, of the incriminating matter, Archer disapproved yet more strongly of the use of the criminal law in what seemed to him an attempt to suppress freedom of speech. He threw himself, then, into the effort made by Foote's friends to carry on the magazine, with his name on it, during his seclusion; and to this end not only wrote regularly for it himself, but also exerted himself to induce others to contribute. His work continued until the editor's release in February 1884, and for some time after.

To return to Robertson. He knew all about the struggle to keep *Progress* in progress. Why was Robertson silent about Archer and Foote? Pretending that I did not know, I wrote Robertson concerning the identity of "Norman Britton". He knew that I was friendly with Foote and so evaded the question by saying that he was "not at liberty to disclose" that identity. Incidentally, it was William Archer who introduced Bernard Shaw to Foote in April 1885. Previously he had only known Foote as an orator and writer, but since Shaw's biographers—and even GBS himself—have made so much of his intrepidity in those days, it seems rather strange that Shaw—admittedly little known as a writer—was so backward in coming forward when a *reveillé* was sounded for a "fall in" of contributors to *Progress*. Perhaps he thought it too dangerous "to bid the tyrants defiance". He was certainly careful enough to evade the police at the Trafalgar Square demonstration—generally known in Labour Circles as "Bloody Sunday"—1887, leaving it the John Burns and Cunningham Graham to suffer "durance vile".



## ABORTION AND THE LAW

The Annual Meeting of the Abortion Law Reform Association was held at Conway Hall, London on November 1st, and was ably chaired by Mrs. Dorothy Thurtle, widow of a former Secretary of the Rationalist Press Association and daughter of the late George Lansbury. The main speakers were Miss Joan Vickers, Conservative MP for Devonport, on "The Status of Women Commission" and Mr. R. S. W. Pollard, J.P., on "Practical Problems of Getting the Law Amended".

Mr. Pollard's, at times heartbreaking, account of tardiness in the process of law reform was illustrated by reference to divorce. A big majority of the 1912 Royal Commission on Divorce had recommended that desertion for 3 years shall qualify as grounds for divorce but it was not until 1937 that this passed into law. Noteworthy was the fact that the House of Lords had approved the Commission's report in 1920, but no time could be found for the measure in the House of Commons. Also instanced were the struggle to permit marriage to one's deceased wife's sister, and the 33 years' fight for reform on some points of the law relating to illegitimacy. Constructive proposals put forward by Mr. Pollard included the setting up of a Ministry of Justice, a law reform council consisting of persons professional and lay to be attached to the Lord Chancellor's Department, and a resuscitation of Professor Laski's proposal that resolutions should be passed and not involved in long drawn out Bill procedure. (These resolutions would have gone to a committee and the Government would then be forced to give them time in the House of Commons.)

Miss Vickers spoke of feminine emancipation, and illustrated the type of problem still to be dealt with by recounting how a Sudan UNO representative maintained that ritual operations on girls (clitorectomy) should be regarded purely as an internal question for his country! Rather startlingly, Miss Vickers, although a Christian herself, thought that perhaps there were too many Christians on The Status of Women Commission.

What can be done? A century ago a small, unrepresentative faction of our nation, passed a law forbidding abortion. Even if this was a fair assessment of the nation's wishes then it is not now, as recent University debates and Sunday paper opinion polls have revealed. But with a sizeable Roman Catholic vote in Britain and narrow voting majorities at General Elections, what political party is going to commit suicide by including Abortion Law Reform in its parliamentary election programme? The Government has said it sees no likelihood of reform measures being included in its parliamentary programme in the foreseeable future. And, accepting that the Labour Party commands approximately 75% of the Roman Catholic vote (as any canvasser for that party will tell you) it is unlikely that it will antagonise this disciplined voting faction. Private Members' Bills are obstructed by Romanists (1953 and 1961), and when they come up, most MPs find they have pressing engagements elsewhere. (Perhaps these Bill's should come up just after the weekend instead of on Fridays.) Unless the Humanist movement (allying itself with progressive persons in the non-secular field) can present a better front than the Roman Catholic, I feel we are up against an insoluble problem. Yet the struggle must continue for, as Mr. Justice McCardie has said, "I cannot think it right that a woman should be forced to bear a child against her will".

C. W. MARSHALL.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE OLD BRIGADE

It was sad to see in your issue of October 27th, that Archibald Robertson and C. E. Ratcliffe had died. Robertson for many years served on the Rationalist Press Association board with me. The old brigade goes and we can do nothing to stop it.

GEORGE J. FINCH.

### HOW PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS HAVE FOUND EACH OTHER

This question was discussed during a week-end meeting held by Protestants and Catholics at Hedenesse (Zealand, Holland) in September.

A parson, the Reverend de Ridder, emphasised the fact that, after the second world-war, Catholics and Protestants have become less reserved towards each other. "An explosion of contacts" can be observed the last few years. . . . "The political situation in the world is such that we are forced to notice one another."

Father Carpentier, head of the monastery at Jette near Brussels spoke more precisely.

"A growing fraternisation has occurred since 1914," he said, "and this in relation to the second world-war and the common struggle against rising Marxism."

A. M. van der GIEZEN.  
(Netherlands).

[See Views & Opinions this week.—ED.]

## NEVER?

"This Believing World" (3/11/61), in referring to the Archbishop's broadcast appeals for prayer for peace as "Sheer twaddle", tends to perpetuate the all-too-prevalent idea amongst sceptics that Churchmen are simply "woolly-minded", "clinging to outworn superstitions", etc., but sincere. This is no mere "twaddle" from the Archbishop who, highly-paid though he be, probably earns every penny by his efforts on behalf of the class he really represents.

The Church has never taken the lead in any progressive, humanistic movement and when it is compelled by sheer urgency and pressure of circumstances to make any pronouncement only does so: 1, To filch the credit for any progress already attained (usually in the face of open or scarcely-concealed hostility of the Churches) or 2, to distract and deflect the activities of the "rebellious" masses in seeking some practical measures for alleviation of their distress.

Here, the latter motive is dominant, and what the Archbishop really means by his unctuous phrases is—"Do not join a Nuclear Disarmament Campaign; do not join any revolutionary movement or seek by either political or industrial action to secure the twin purposes of freedom and security from want and fear. Keep your eyes rolled up to the skies; that way you will neither see what is happening around you nor in any way embarrass the war-and-profit mongers".

Beware of very utterance or action of Church and Churchmen. It is always purposeful and never, never, departs from its fundamental purpose of keeping the broad masses of peoples in ignorance and subjection to maintain the privileges of the few.

J. ALLAN.

[We can't agree with Mr. Allan's last paragraph.—ED.]

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