

The Freethinker

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AS WAS NOTED in these columns some little time ago, the Vatican has taken the unprecedented step of creating a professorial chair of Atheism for the purpose of studying, and of presumably refuting, the tenets of Atheism. As we remarked at the time, this not only represents an entirely new departure for the Roman Catholic Church, but is a flat contradiction of its immemorial attitude towards Atheism and its professors. Hitherto the unvarying teaching of the infallible Church has been that there is not, and in the nature of things, never can be, any such thing as a *bona fide* Atheist. From the times of the New Testament down to this present century, the Catholic Church has ac-

cepted the dictum of Paul (or whoever wrote the Epistle to the Romans, which along with the Gospel of John, laid the foundations of Christian theology) that the existence of God, of the Divine Creator of the Universe, is self-evident, and that only morons or (perhaps more frequently) men of depraved moral outlook, afraid of Divine retribution, could possibly deny this self-evident belief. To reply to Atheists would be merely to waste time on criminals and lunatics; to burn them at the stake would save a lot of wasted energy. Does not St. James inform us that even the demons "believe and tremble"? From the point of view of theology, proving the existence of God was merely a glaring case of "expatiating on the obvious" (cf. Bernard Boedder, SJ, *Natural Theology*, and Joseph McCabe, *Twelve Years in a Monastery*).

Atheism "Arrives"

The fact that the infallible Vatican, which nowadays represents the last line of traditional theology (since all the more important Protestant Churches are by now honeycombed with varying degrees of Modernist scepticism) has now been forced to change its line and to give so to speak, an official recognition to Atheism as an antagonist, marks a profound change in the contemporary intellectual climate, and one that springs from equally sweeping changes in the nature of the times. For Atheism, if not yet completely respectable, has at least become sufficiently so to engage the attention of the theologians of the Church. The fact is, of course, that whilst individual Atheists (either avowed, like some otherwise unknown writers mentioned in surviving classical texts, or thinly disguised like the Epicureans with their permanently unemployed gods who did nothing for all eternity) have existed in pre-modern, pre-industrial societies; yet they were for the most part obscure, and where lucky, barely tolerated by their contemporary public opinion. (cf. Cicero—*On the Nature of the Gods*, for some mention of these long forgotten Atheists of antiquity.) It is, perhaps, the gravest retrogression for which the rise of Christianity was responsible that, as soon as the Christian Church acquired power in the 4th century AD, even this limited toleration promptly came to an end. In the long Ages of Faith, heresy, including Atheism—where it existed—as the worst of all possible heresies, incurred

that most horrible of punishments, burning.

Pantheism and Atheism

Under these dire circumstances which lasted in most European lands for some twelve centuries (c 400-1600; in Spain the stake remained the appropriate punishment for heresy until the beginning of last century) most Atheists to whom "the thought of the stake had a chilling effect upon the blood" (as Voltaire once wrote to a freethinking

correspondent) took shelter under the convenient *nom de-plume* of Pantheism, from Averroes in Muslim Spain to Spinoza in Calvinist Holland, and the exponents of the Atheistic philosophy took shelter under the traditional name

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Evolution of Atheism

By F. A. RIDLEY

of God. But at the same time, by identifying their "God" with the Universe, they stripped the word of all real meaning, for in the words of Gilbert, "Where everybody's somebody, nobody's anybody". This description is a very apt one when applied to the philosophy of Pantheism, where everything that exists, good or bad, becomes automatically part of "God". Schopenhauer has classically defined Pantheism as "an easy-going way of getting rid of God". Actually, this rather transparent camouflage does not appear to have been very successful in shielding its cautious advocates, for the Catholic Church burned the Pantheist, Giordano Bruno, whilst both the Jewish and the Calvinist Churches in Holland would have burned Spinoza if they could. However, historically speaking, it was under the protective covering of Pantheism that Atheism made its cautious entry upon the stage of history. I suggest that the evolution of Atheism has to include, and to recognise, Pantheism as a *bona fide* form of Atheism, if only because of the actual circumstances of its origin one could accurately term it the Atheism of the age of persecution. It preserved the name whilst abolishing the substance of God.

Atheism and the Industrial Revolution

It cannot, in my submission, be repeated too often that Atheism as a mass-movement, only became possible with the Industrial Revolution (c 1700 on). It was only then; in fact not really until the 19th century when the Industrial Revolution got into its stride, that Atheism, whilst still the reverse of "respectable", became strong enough to dispense with its hitherto convenient soubriquet of Pantheism, which can now be relegated to the dictionary with, however, a vote of thanks from all historically informed Atheists for its undeniable services in the age of the Inquisition. And it is only in the present century that Atheism has become a really world-wide force, along with the current process of world-wide industrialisation. Our own age is *par excellence*, the Age of Atheism. Even the most significant political upheavals of this century, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, by uniting revolutionary politics of local origin with the Atheistic Materialism of Marx, have become the first mass-scale Atheistic Revolutions in human annals, a fact which, far more than their professions of Communism, explains their present

vitriolic hatred by the Vatican. Actually, Rome is no stranger to economic Communism; it is the Atheism inherent in the doctrines of Marx, Lenin and Mao-Tse-Tung that spells the real danger to Christianity. Whilst even in the non-Communist West, the advance of Atheism has been so spectacular as to strike terror into the Churches, who tend increasingly to unite against this common enemy. At long last Atheism is recognised as something more than its role in recorded religious tradition as a mere criminal aberration of the human intellect. From being recognised, to becoming respectable, is merely a step; sooner or later it will surely be taken. There will be perhaps, lectures on Atheism from Broadcasting House; perhaps Atheism will eventually attain that hall-mark of bourgeois respectability, it may even be mentioned in Mrs. Dale's Diary. Then Atheism would indeed have arrived!

Freethought Pioneers

By R. W. MORRELL

LOOKING BACK on the struggles of the pioneers of freethought, one finds it hard to realise just how great were the odds these valiant people faced. After dominating Europe for over a thousand years, the leaders of the various Christian Churches took a very dim view of those who questioned the claims of their religion. In fact, those who challenged Christianity literally took their lives in their hands.

It is, of course, only too true that some members of the ruling class in the eighteenth century were in religious matters out and out unbelievers but, while it was one thing for the upper classes to hold unorthodox views, it was another matter as far as the lower order was concerned. But unorthodox views did spread to the lower order. Revolutions in the American colonies and France saw to that, and it was the latter revolution that really set things alight, for out of a French prison came the first effective attack on that holy of Holies—the Christian Bible. The attack in question was entitled *The Age of Reason* and its author an English revolutionary named Thomas Paine. Paine had electrified the revolutionary spirit in the American colonists, giving them hope and courage in their darkest hour; now, under the shadow of the guillotine he had given the world a devastating examination of the Bible. And the Church never forgave him.

Reaction to *The Age of Reason* was quickly forthcoming. Indeed, "replies" abounded. Paine's greatest crime in the eyes of the ruling class was to have written his work in a style that all could understand. This is shown in a preface to the eighth edition of Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible* (which, while being hardly an effective answer to Paine was about the best attempt) published in 1797. The "deistical writings of Mr. Paine", wrote the Bishop, "are circulated, with great and pernicious industry, amongst the unlearned part of the community, especially in large manufacturing towns . . .". Watson's *Apology* failed to stop the spread of Paine's works, and the preface is omitted in the edition of 1819—at least in my copy. To Watson's credit it should be said that at least he made an effort to reply to Paine: other clergy preferred to cast doubt on Paine's intelligence. For example, in his *Plea for Religion*, an Anglican turned Methodist, the Rev. David Simpson, remarks that it is "well known" that Paine is "both illiterate and immoral, insolent and satirical".

The concern felt about the impact of Paine's ideas on the working class is reflected in a letter from one signing

himself "Philanthropos", published in the magazine, *The Satirist*, for November 1st, 1811. While the letter does not mention either Paine or his books, it seems clearly to refer to them, the object of "Philanthropos's" wrath being a "society of journeymen mechanics, and apprentices" who assembled every Sunday to discuss "religious tenets and doctrines; condemning the established Church, and all religious sects whatever". Despite the efforts of the authorities to stem the spread of freethought, efforts which included the persecution of booksellers such as Richard Carlile who sold Paine's works, more and more people began to question the claims of the Church. Many, fortified by the increasing flow of material which struck blows at the foundations of religion, went far beyond Paine's deistical position. Likewise a growing number of booksellers braved the wrath of the authorities, by issuing anti-religious works other than those by Paine. In 1823, W. Benbow issued his *Crimes of the Clergy*, an indictment of clerical morality.

The Christian religion was soon in retreat. Greater blows still were to follow with Darwin and the development of organised freethought, and the fight has been intellectually, if not physically won. There are battles to come, but we can take courage from the example given by men like Paine—and Benbow, who had the courage to dedicate his book to the Bench of Bishops. These men faced far greater odds than we do today.

From Canada

WRITING IN THE CANADIAN magazine *Liberty* (September, 1961), Hugh Garner urged, "Let's throw religion out of Canada's public schools". A former Anglican, who was educated in a Church of England parish school in England and in the Toronto public (state) schools, Mr. Garner deplored "the attempts of the Anglican clergy to turn back the educational clock". They seek, he said "to re-introduce into Canada the Church-dominated school system that we got rid of everywhere in this country years ago, with the exception of Newfoundland and Quebec". The Rev. Fred Payne of Prescott, Ontario, speaking at the Anglican Synod of Ontario, recently expressed concern that Canada was secularising its public schools. "Mr. Payne is either naive or terribly misinformed", Mr. Garner commented. "For everyone knows we had secular public school education until George Drew introduced religious instruction into our schools in 1944. It was not the other way about, as Mr. Payne implies".

In Quebec of course, the Roman Catholic Church has wielded extraordinary power, but there are definite signs that this is coming to an end. At the annual convention of the French-language Canadian Institute of Public Affairs held in Montreal in September, Bertrand Rioux, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Montreal, proposed that "the Church should divorce itself completely from all temporal matters" including education (*The Montreal Star*, 9/9/61). A few years ago, commented the Rev. Louis O'Neill of Laval University, to the same paper two days later, "there would have been strong reaction to blunt statements" like Professor Rioux's, whereas, "Today, while not all would agree with the proposition, there was increasing agreement that the man should be able to express himself freely in such terms". And even Cardinal Leger, Archbishop of Montreal wants "an ever increasing dialogue between the Church and the Laity". The Roman Catholic Church, in short, wants to rescue what it can from the wreck.

J.L.

A Christian on Christian Origins

By H. CUTNER

ONE OF THE BOOKS which for some reason or other eluded me when I was trying to discover (more years ago than I like to think about) how Christianity originated was *The Bible And Its Interpreters* by William J. Irons, D.D., Prebendary of St. Paul's, a book published as far back as 1865. I have never been able to find out how his book was received or any personal details about him, but I have an idea that the Church just ignored him as it did the Rev. S. Baring Gould—and for that matter, as it did Dean Swift. If any parson wishes to get on in the Church let him eschew even a smell of heresy.

Irons's book is divided into four parts, and it is an interesting example of a man delivering some devastating heresies at first, and then slowly reaching back to an orthodoxy based on a completely unreasoning faith. For this reason, I intend dealing mostly with some of the most deadly heresies at first. He never answered himself, and fell back on what Tertullian said in a little different form—"the more idiotic what I am asked to believe is, the more I shall believe it". Irons in fact insists that "the idea of Christianity needs neither an entirely true Bible, nor a Divinely-gifted Church". Yet he constantly uses the term "the Sacred Scriptures".

What Irons notes almost at the outset of his book is that at least from the Reformation, "the range of criticism of the Bible was seen to be indefinitely widening", that a number of eminent Christians "believed that everything dear to Christians was openly threatened", and that some of the criticisms of the Bible (and this was said in 1865 when the "sacred Book" was the great fetish of all good Victorians!) "would have driven to madness the earnest Hutchinsonians of the eighteenth century", and would "now shock the milder faith of the Anglo-Saxons in our own day which, unconsciously, is Hutchinsonian still". It is difficult to imagine any earnest Christian talking like that on TV in 1961. I have listened to scores of religious programmes on the radio and on TV, and cannot remember any of the religious gentlemen concerned with showing us the Way to Heaven even referring in passing to Biblical criticism. The Bible is the Word of God, and the Gates of Hell cannot prevail against it.

Irons is however in a different category altogether. He would never have been asked to speak as a broadcaster, he was far too dangerous. In his day the old Chillingworth formula prevailed. "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants", though it was being changed to "the Bible as criticism may ultimately settle it".

Irons admits that "the free enquirer" (in his own day) is "troubled at the first step with the question. How was the Bible given?"—which has been of course the theme of most Freethinkers dealing with the Bible. "Does he know, has he even thought, as yet, of asking, from what 'originals' this translation [the AV] was made?" But, however the translation was made, our enquirer soon finds that there are "various readings" enumerated by such eminent scholars as Dr. Wordsworth, Bishop Lloyd, Dr. Fell, Dr. Mill (who gave, by the way, 20,000 of them as far back as 1753), Bishop Walton, the Elzevirs, the Stephenses, and Erasmus. Dr. Irons then turns on the screw as thus:—

What are the *oldest existing* authorities to which anyone can now trace the Greek Testament? No actual manuscripts, no original versions, no autographs, of course, of the saints or fathers of the earliest generations of Christians, now exist. We may get *printed* copies, of such eminent works, as have

survived the ravages of time, in various transcripts which rarely reach within hundreds of years of the originals. In monasteries and libraries, some treasures of the seventh or even of the sixth, century of our era may be met with . . . but little critical use has hitherto been made of them . . .

We are naturally told of the work of Jerome in the fourth century doing his best "to revise" (be it noted) not the *Greek* texts then current, but the *Latin* texts; and in his Vulgate, "he departed considerably from the previously existing Latin versions of which he declares quite plainly, *that no two agreed*". And Irons lets out another secret known of course to all serious Bible critics, that Jerome "had heard that the original of the first of the Evangelists, St. Matthew, *was not Greek at all, but Hebrew*". Even Eusebius "is quite confident that Matthew wrote his Gospel in *Hebrew*". And what must be the upshot of all such heretical doubts? Why,

to admit this is, would seem to place at a hopeless distance the chance of recovering, in a literary sense, the *very words* of the first Gospel teaching. Yet it were hard to dispute the authority of Eusebius; for it is startling to perceive, as every one must, how much of all the testimony of other Christian writers of the first 300 years depends on the veracity and care of that one man, living in the fourth age.

When Robert Taylor said this 35 years previously—and much more—he was ostracised and vilified by all good Christians who had never taken the trouble to read him.

And what about those two stalwarts of the early Christian Church, Justin Martyr and Origen? Irons admits that "there is a difference, almost unaccountable on merely literary grounds, between what survives of Origen, and what remains of such a writer as Justin Martyr, only fifty years before. Justin does not once quote any Epistle of St. Paul, either in his Apologies, or his Dialogues. (Bishop Marsh [a very famous early nineteenth century theologian] thought that he was unacquainted with the Gospel as Scripture.) Origen is intimate with the Epistles; yet at the beginning of the second century, there is almost total silence in the Church as to the formal existence of the Gospels". Here indeed are admissions—but what about this? "The very language in which our blessed Lord" says Irons, "uttered His Divine discourses, no criticism has found out". If, he adds, "He spoke them in Greek, are we to suppose that the Galilean multitudes who heard Him, understood Greek? If he spoke them in Hebrew, are the 'original' words entirely lost? Or, was that which he spoke to them in Hebrew 'brought to remembrance' 30 years afterwards, in Greek, and written down in Greek by the Evangelists?" Freethinkers, who perhaps had never read Dr. Irons, or lived before he was born, have always asked these and similar questions and never received an answer. There is no answer.

I have very little space to repeat here the hundred and one difficulties which Irons recognised as having no solutions—but it is very interesting to read what he says about the Hebrew text of the Old Testament which he almost pulverises, as he does the "corrupt" Greek texts of the New Testament. But what he does notice in detail is that it actually was the Greek text of the Old Testament which was in use by the Jews as well as by the Christians for something like three or four centuries. The Jews used it for two centuries at least after the translation was made and the early Christians used it to such an extent that almost all—if not all—the quotations in the Gospels are

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Our great national newspaper, "The Times", used to be called (we think) the "Thunderer", but in this nuclear, space age, its thundering now seems to be little above a hopeless squeak. It has in addition, got religion pretty badly. The other Saturday it filled a half column with nonsense about "the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ", the Great Day when "our Lord" will come again. Whatever else our Bishops may believe (or say they believe) the Second Advent of Christ Jesus is referred to in these days as *little* as possible. The beautiful picture of the Son of God dressed in a white nightie arriving on earth on a cloud which used to adorn illustrated Bibles in the pious Victorian past has, except for certain cranks, gone for ever.

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For "The Times", it is "both natural and inevitable" waiting for the coming which "Christians will personify as a coming of Christ". For "the day of the Lord" is God's judgment day, we are assured. And what can cause fear in human beings as much as God's judgment day? Or rather, it is supposed to frighten us. But alas it only causes contemptuous laughter these days. Even the "Thunderer" no longer frightens us.

★

However, there is always the consolation that if "our Lord" won't come (or can't come) we can depend on the Bible as a great money-maker. No fewer than 3,250,000 copies of the New English Bible have been sold giving us — so we are assured anyway — "the Christian message in the living language of today" — as if pious nonsense is not pious nonsense when put into modern terms. You can even buy LP records made from the NEB — at 41s. per record — if you prefer God's Precious Word to be spoken for you, or if you can't read.

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And side by side with the NEB there are the colossal sales of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which have topped over 3,500,000, and made £800,000 for the publishers. Actually 250,000 more copies sold than the Bible! Which means, if it means anything at all, that a few plain Saxon English words can rake in money at least as much as the Matchless Word of God. Perhaps the translators who are hard at work on the Old Testament will now give us an *unexpurgated* version of the "Song of Solomon", and thus beat all Bible-selling records.

★

We do not know the cause exactly but it appears from the *Daily Mail* (November 17th) that the BBC's "Epilogians" (as they are called) are being sacked. These gentlemen were responsible for the lugubrious but highly religious nightly messages from the Lord — a sort of "night-cap" to give us heavenly sleep. The Epilogians had to have proper training — in particular, said one "trainer" — "We try to eliminate all the ecclesiastical voices", though, thank God, he or they never succeeded. Fancy an "Epilogue" or that cheery "Lift up your Hearts" without a parsonic voice! We do not know who will replace the Epilogians though we suspect that other Epilogians will take their place to give us the same old "Epilogues".

★

Whatever a Bishop or an Archbishop may make in cash out of the Simple Message of Jesus, he or they have always something to say against anybody else making money. Here is Lord Fisher of Lambeth telling us — it is given as one of the week's "quotes" in the *Daily Mail* (November 18th) — "I think it is unrighteous ever to strike for money except possibly when you really are starving". (The key

word here is "possibly"). We are reminded of something of the same in Luke where (3, 14) soldiers are urged by Jesus "to be content with your wages". Most of those who died for England in World War 1 got less than a shilling a day!

A CHRISTIAN ON CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

(Concluded from page 379)

taken from the Septuagint and not from the Hebrew. And Irons asks,

What is this Greek Version, or "Septuagint", as it is called? Who made it? From what originals was it made? And when? And why? And what is its present state? And no one yet knows anything whatever about the "literary condition" of the Hebrew Scriptures when the Septuagint was made.

He contemptuously dismisses the "miraculous agreement" of its seventy translators working in seventy cells, the details of which are found in the famous (or lying) account in what is called the Letter of Aristaeus to Philocrates. He adds,

Strictly speaking, no one knows who made the Septuagint. No one knows from what copies of the originals any parts of the Version were made. It appears to be the growth of at least two generations . . . Has it then no authority at all? Was it not used by the Jews themselves, and bequeathed in fact by the Jewish Church to the Christians? Yes. That, such as it is, is the ground of its authority . . . but this does not assist our investigation as to the literary condition of the Hebrew Scriptures at that time . . .

Another question asked by Irons, intensely disliked by Jews and Christians alike, was about Ezra who is supposed to have been responsible for the Old Testament as we have it now. He "re-wrote" it after the return of the Jews from their Captivity; but, asks Irons—"Where at *this time*, was their Sacred Book?—and of what did it consist?" He never answers his own questions, and no one can answer them now.

Of course, Dr. Irons in the later part of his book, treats of "infallibility" and "Faith" and so on. He adroitly shelves all the difficulties, claiming that as the Bible is literally "unique", however destructive his criticism may look, it really is a matter of no moment. It does not matter how we got the "revelation", the only revelation from God almighty himself. The Bible and the Church are both "supernatural", above all criticism, and must be accepted as such. "To know the Incarnation" he cries, "the presence of Emanuel, is to know that 'all things are possible' . . . the Child of God will hear heaven's most solemn message . . . as knowing Him who sitteth on the water-flood and abideth a King for ever". In truth, "Yet a little while, and we must all give our account to Him Who is the Truth".

Poor Dr. Irons—he was indeed a pathetic result of a belief in the Supernatural as taught by Christianity. Like so many eminent Christians, Newman, Augustine, and others, he was clear-headed enough to see that there was no real evidence for any of the claims made by Church historians on the origin of their beliefs. But the blessed word "Faith" overwhelmed him, and his fall between two stools sent him heading into the depths of forgotten obscurity.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, December 3rd, 6.45 p.m.: BASIL BRADLAUGH BONNER, B.Sc (Vice-Chairman, Abortion Law Reform Society), "Abortion: Legal or Illegal?"

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, December 5th, 7.30 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "Epicurus (born 341 BC)—His Philosophy in 1961 AD.

Co-operative College (Stanford Hall, Loughborough, Leicestershire), Sunday, December 3rd, 3.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "The Challenge of Secularism".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 3rd, 6.30 p.m.: FRANK MAITLAND, "The Mind of Primitive Man".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, December 3rd, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Pope John and the Cold War".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, December 3rd, 2.30 p.m.: TERENCE WRAY (President, Young Conservatives), "Tory Principles in the 60s".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, December 3rd, 11 a.m.: RICHARD CLEMENTS, O.B.E., "The Humanist Frame and its Critics".

Notes and News

AT A MEETING of the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society held on November 22nd, 1961, it was resolved that: "The Executive Committee of the National Secular Society urges the Government to withdraw the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill which, rightly or wrongly, is likely to be interpreted as a racist measure, and hopes that instead, urgent attention will be given to correcting major causes of the present situation, viz.: by expediting the housing programme in Britain and encouraging economic viability in all parts of the Commonwealth." The resolution has been sent to the Home Secretary.

AFTER A PRIVATE VISIT to Madrid, during which he tried, without success, to contact Spanish Methodists, Dr. Donald Soper said (*Evening Standard*, 14/11/61): "My main impression is that Spain is a fascist community, that the Roman Catholic Church is dominant. There are vast

extremes of poverty and wealth. I am inclined to agree with Captain Galvao that the whole Iberian peninsula is heading for revolution".

THE REV. GILBERT J. TATE explained — in the *Leicester Evening Mail* (15/11/61) — "Where we disagree with Secularists". His article might well have been called "Jesus and Joad", because these were the two main sources of his argument. In the life and teaching of the former "we discover a sufficient picture of God to satisfy our intellectual and spiritual needs", wrote Mr. Tate, while Joad's book *Recovery of Belief*, showed that "we need the help of God to live the good moral life". "All honour to the sincere Secularist who teaches and tries to live the good moral life", said Mr. Tate, "but with Joad and countless thousands of other people I find that I need the power of God to help me in my struggle to live the good life".

REPLYING, C. H. Hammersley, Secretary of Leicester Secular Society, first disposed of Mr. Tate's claim to find "spiritual and moral truths" in the stories of Creation "even though they were not scientifically accurate". Then Mr. Hammersley pointed out that Jesus could not be regarded as one who had "perfect love". He did not love the Pharisees, the money-changers or unbelievers, for example, "although he recommended that we shall love our enemies (and hate our families)". Professor Joad, said Mr. Hammersley, "had a fine mind but was unable to overcome the effect of his Christian upbringing" and his point that somehow or other the Church has survived "is pathetic". He knew as well as anyone that it survived because it was protected by the secular arm. Finally, Mr. Hammersley referred to the many who live good lives without God and the many "who profess to rely upon him" yet live anything but good lives".

WE ARE PLEASED to note, by the by, that Mr. Hammersley's talk on "Why I am not a Christian" to the Leicester Coffee Pot Club on November 14th was well attended. The hall in the YWCA building was "packed", reported the *Evening Mail*.

A (SECOND) PROTESTANT conference on Roman Catholic Action in the American continent was held at Christ's Mission, Sea Cliff, New York, on September 29th, and is reported in the November issue of the Mission's periodical, *Christian Heritage*. The Rev. Stuart Garver quoted Roman Catholic Bishop Roger E. Vekeman, writing in *Ave Maria* (January 1960) that: "What we have to face realistically is that the Church is losing Latin America. That means practically one-half of the Catholics in the world. And that could be a crisis within the Church ever more serious than the Oriental Schism or the Protestant Reformation. The problem is that serious". The Roman Catholic Church is now taking full advantage of the new US foreign aid bill to build schools, clinics and food distribution centres, but Dr. Clyde Taylor (a trustee of Christ's Mission) who had just returned from an extensive fact-finding tour of Latin America reported that the strategy was "not helping the Roman Catholic Church too much in Latin America".

CHRIST'S MISSION specialises in helping priests who leave the Roman Catholic Church (it has five on its staff) and the Bolivian Indian Mission representative, the Rev. Joseph McCullough spoke of unusual success in Latin America where priests "are leaving the Church of Rome daily".

A New Case of Arson

By EVA EBURY

OUR INDEFATIGABLE PROPAGANDIST, Mr. J. W. Barker, often declares that the Freethought movement is an international fire brigade, because it extinguishes the fires of Hell. Here is a new outbreak of arson to bring to his attention. The Very Reverend Francis Ripley, Superior of the Catholic Missionary Society, by permission of Cardinal Godfrey, has been fanning the mouldering embers in the Catholic Truth Society's publication department, and the flames are leaping once again with true medieval fervour. Many spiritual privileges are accorded to all helpers in this new conflagration. Father Ripley has had a new pamphlet, *Hell*, published by the Catholic Truth Society, price 6d., to assist Catholics "to a better knowledge of their religion and to spread among non-Catholics information about the Faith", for, he says with alarm, "sentimentality has pushed modern discussion of Hell Fire to such lengths of aversion as to make it almost non-existent".

In *Hell*, he explains Hell, its purpose, justification; by whom and for whom it was created. "For God is not beaten by the man who rejects him"; the sinner "thwarts God's will, so the sinner's will must be thwarted in the same measure"; God cannot be hurt, but he can be offended. "Hell is a mystery", but it is the "logical outcome of God's plan". And it is most merciful, just and reasonable. If God prevented the birth of a sinner, he might be preventing the birth of a saint among the sinner's descendants! And lest you should think that only your soul will suffer torment in Hell, Father Ripley explains how the body will later rise to join the soul and suffer "real, created, physical fire". For, he says, "any Catholic who denies that the fire of Hell is real would be sinning seriously against faith".

Yet he is puzzled, for the effects of Hell Fire are entirely beyond the natural powers of fire. Otherwise how could Jesus have spoken of the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not extinguished, and God have spoken to Moses from a burning bush that was never consumed? With the brilliance of a trained Catholic mind he solves the problem. Eternal fire, he says, "works supernaturally". Though we cannot say where Hell is, we are bound to believe in it, and in the devils who most probably do not have pitchforks, but are always on duty to see that the souls shall suffer the supernatural fire. Such fire does not give light, for Hell is a place of darkness and is capable of burning the damned unequally according to the amount of sin committed. And sin should be "punished timelessly", for there is not time in Hell and all good that the damned might have done is justly "cancelled out". God is "present in Hell", and no doubt enjoys a ringside seat there more than the gallery of Heaven, for is He not reported as delighting in the sweet savour of burning flesh? But the "pain is inflicted by an external agent by God's will", for, "you cannot commit mortal sin by accident and you cannot go to Hell by accident". One cannot pray for those in Hell, for St. Thomas Aquinas said "the damned in Hell are receiving the ultimate requital for what they deserve".

Father Ripley leaves no loophole for misunderstanding. He asks the pertinent questions and gives the answers. He answers the parents who wonder how they could be happy knowing their child to be in Hell, and answers them simply: "Love that is natural during life becomes supernatural after death. The child has freely chosen evil. The

parent sees him now in the light of the justice of God". And, "reasonable men accept what God tells them". Such in his reasoning, and surely none but a celibate Father could conceive it thus. As the angelic Aquinas affirmed, the joys of the blessed will be increased by the sight of the torments of the damned!

In some churches, old murals and windows are still preserved depicting Hell and the Judgment, placed there specifically—as the ecclesiastics were wont to say—that the faithful who knew not how to read, should be stimulated to meditate upon the Last Judgment, and that assisted by such material objects, the most feeble intelligence might rise to the conception of truth, and a soul plunged in the lowest abyss of darkness might soar upwards. Thus our forefathers were edified with pictures: the damned loaded on wheelbarrows, impaled on stakes, ground between millstones, boiled in crucibles, fed into ovens by devils, ruby, blue, purple, green; tailed, horned, scaly; pitchforked and fish-headed, all blasting the fires with their bellows. This also is the stock-in-trade of Father Ripley in 1961. Not for him the "sentimentality" that has an aversion to preaching Hell Fire. He "would not blame unduly those who only go to church because of a wholesome fear of Hell". Indeed, sermons on Hell are "perhaps too infrequent in the churches".

In fact the Roman Catholic Church dare not let the flames die out. Hell is necessary to preserve an obedient flock in superstitious fear. These are calamitous times for the Church: knowledge is spreading. The Virgin and St. Joseph have been appealed to in vain; perhaps overwhelmed by prayers for intercession, they have decided on a sit-down strike. Fear is the only hope if the Church is to regain its old power, and Satan its last recourse, for he is the Untiring one and has withal a hell of a lot of imps to assist him! The murals in the churches are deteriorating, the glasses are falling from the windows; the people are becoming literate, the past is giving way to the present. The "One True Church" boasts that she never changes, but kindle the flames how she will, there is a fire engine ready to extinguish them; the most effective engine of all, the spread of knowledge among the common people. Not all the buckets of blessed and salted water can save one soul from damnation, but the advancing stream of human culture can prevent the monstrous fears induced by psychopaths who warm their ghoulish minds with visions of perpetual agony. John, the apostle whom Jesus loved, said of the damned that "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever". The Very Rev. Francis Ripley is assuredly also a true and beloved disciple.

IRRELIGION IN LONDON

SPEAKING AT THE London Diocesan Conference at Church House, Westminster on November 20th, the Bishop of London, the Rt. Rev. R. W. Stopford said that in London the 1958 statistics showed that there were only 35 Easter communicants for every 1,000 of the total population over the age of 15 (*The Guardian* 21/11/61). "We can assume", said Dr. Stopford, "that we have in the diocese about 2,000,000 who were baptised in the Church of England — of whom only about 100,000 are regular active members of the Church of England. One in 20, which is below the national average".

Points from New Books

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

IT IS HARD to think of any other contemporary author who could have concocted the fascinating intellectual brew in Stefan Themerson's *Cardinal Pölätio* (Gaberbochus Press, 15s.). The author begins with the legend that Guillaume Apollinaire's father was a cardinal, and he tells us that the prelate's mistress carried her baby for the time taken to produce nine elephants in order to give birth to a poet in 1880. The cardinal is vastly distressed as he believes that poets have no respect for the Church. He begs the King of Italy to undertake a Massacre of the Infants to ensure his son's death; but the King feels this is a bit tricky; and he persuades the cardinal to wait until the poet is twenty, when he promises a war which will eliminate all the tiresome young men.

The Cardinal fills in time by keeping up with the scientific discoveries and philosophical theories. He wants to prove that Science and Philosophy are part of Religion, and he is ready to split any hair into a suitable number of parts. He even plots, with the help of mathematical symbols, how a missionary should approach a logical positivist.

Some wonderful things get said in the course of His Eminence's scholarly days. For instance the St. Marguerite Research Committee of the Pontifical Academy of Science produces statistics to show that a greater number of Roman Catholics than of Unbelievers are convicted in the criminal courts. "The report was a nuisance. Mngr. Gavarni said: All statistics lie. Mngr. Zorge said: Frogs commit still less crimes than Unbelievers, so what? Mngr. Liutprand said: To commit a crime you must have guts, and Roman Catholics have guts. And a little Franciscan brother hanged himself in his cell".

The cardinal survives until 2022 when the Post Office is sending express delivery letters by disintegrating the raw protons, neutrons and electrons of the communication and then re-integrating them at the receiving station. His Eminence decides to send himself to America by mail, but through error twelve telephonists in America stand by to receive the call and twelve identical cardinals appear in the States. Here is a new problem for The Vatican: how many souls have the twelve? Speculation, anyway, can go no further.

What, then, can one call this book—a novel of ideas, a biography with fantastic variations on the facts known about Apollinaire, a defence of poetry, a brilliant satire on theology? Certainly it is a new kind of entertainment for freely operating thinkers, complete with a dictionary of Freudian images which the cardinal had prepared for him when he contemplated writing an interpretation of *The Song of Solomon*.

That extraordinary man, Ignatius Trebitsch-Lincoln, was a Hungarian Jew who left Hungary at the age of twenty in 1898 and became a Presbyterian missionary in Canada. When the Anglicans offered him more money for his services, he willingly agreed to turn the Jews of Montreal into Anglicans, promising to deliver a fixed number of converts a month in exchange for a fat stipend. Later, this obliging gentleman became an English MP with a broken accent, a forger, an advisor to a Chinese war-lord, a Buddhist monk. David Lampe and Lasslo Szenasi have collected all the available details about this Vicar of Anywhere in a definitive biography, *The Self-Made Villain* (Cassell, 21s.); and it all shows that priests and monks are not always so limited in their sculduggery

as one might imagine!

The Church and The State are hand in glove in Portugal, and both are responsible for the repression and persecution under the regime. The facts are now becoming more widely known. The conspiracy of silence about the "dictator in a business suit", the "great Christian gentleman", has been broken thanks largely to the integrity and courage of Henrique Galvao, the official who was imprisoned for reporting the slave-labour conditions in Angola, the man who escaped from Salazar's prison to focus world attention on Portuguese corruption by hijacking a luxury liner. He has now written the story of this sensational episode, *The Santa Maria* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 21s.); and his revelations about the appalling social scene in Portugal and Angola should stir all free-thinkers. It is significant to note, at a time when the Free Portuguese can exist only outside Portugal, that Salazar's pictures are sold at the doors of churches with printed promises of indulgences to the purchasers. Well . . . read Captain Galvao on torture in the "great Christian gentleman's" country!

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, November 22nd, 1961. Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Barker, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornibrook, Johnson, McIlroy, Mills, Mrs. Ebury, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apology from Mr. Tribe. The Treasurer reported on the recent burglary in which cash had been stolen from both the National Secular Society and the Pioneer Press. Mr. Ebury handed over the usual North London Branch £5 monthly contribution to the Building Fund. New members were admitted to Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester, Marble Arch, Merseyside and North London Branches which, with 7 Individual Members, made 14 in all. Literature had been sent to the Co-operative College, Loughborough, where an Atheist Group had been formed, and Mr. T. M. Mesley would address the group on December 3rd. The Annual Dinner would take place in the Mecca Restaurant, 11/12 Blomfield Street, London, E.C.2, on Saturday, March 3rd, 1962. Further suggestions for leaflets were considered and British Transport Commission correspondence noted. The National Council for Civil Liberties conference on Immigration had been postponed pending government decision on the subject. In view of this, the following motion was passed unanimously: "The Executive Committee of the National Secular Society urges the Government to withdraw the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill which, rightly or wrongly, is likely to be interpreted as a racialist measure, and hopes that, instead, urgent attention will be given to correcting major causes of the present situation, viz.: by expediting the housing programme in Britain and encouraging economic viability in all parts of the Commonwealth". Discussion took place on the unsatisfactory treatment of the term "Secularism" in various encyclopedias, including the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It was agreed that this should be pointed out to the publishers and suitable literature sent to them. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, December 13th, 1961.

CONFESSION OF IGNORANCE

Our Lord was reticent about life beyond the grave, and if it is asked how much he knew of the future, we find ourselves in a mystery. He himself said that his knowledge was limited, but not what the limits were, nor can we ever discover them. About "dates and times" he said definitely that the Father had set these things in his own control. To one who asked whether it was only a few that would be saved he gave no direct reply. Nor did he ever describe the future life; but a reason for this may have been that it will be so utterly different from anything of which we have experience here that a true description of it would be beyond human capacity to comprehend. So it is that after nearly two thousand years of Christianity we know no more about life beyond the grave than the early Christians did.

—*The Times* (18/11/61).

CORRESPONDENCE

FROM THE NETHERLANDS

Nothing better illustrates the decline of Dutch Protestantism than the embarrassed way in which influential Protestants have recently referred to Reformation Day. A leading article in the Protestant daily, *Trouw* (Fidelity) on October 31st said very little about it, concentrating on the increasing number of Catholics and Protestants who "hanker for sitting down together round an open Bible". This year's Lenten pastoral of the Catholic bishops, and the publication of a new Roman Catholic Bible are instances in this connection.

"If special services are held on Reformation Day", said the weekly, *Vrij Nederland* (Free Netherlands), "they are not a success. The old feeling of triumph has been displaced by genuine grief at the schism, which some day will have to be healed, either by us or—if we can't—by God Himself. Considered thus, the devaluation of Reformation Day is a good sign".

A speaker at the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, the largest Protestant denomination in the Netherlands, Mr. L. de Geer (elder), "indicated that in his opinion it must be clearly stated that the Reformation did not call a new Church into existence, as is often asserted at Commemoration-Days of the Reformation".

I conclude by quoting this remarkable utterance made by another speaker at the same Synod: "Mr. Dronkers regretted that attempts to create better relations between Catholics and Protestants are often being doomed to failure by the activities of former Catholic priests".

A. M. VAN DER GIEZEN (Middelburg-Holland).

"OUR GREATEST EPIC"

As a great admirer of Milton since the age of 16—when I read all his poetical works—I was pleased with Colin McCall's article.

Surely there is some inconsistency in saying that *Paradise Lost* is "an attempted justification of Christianity" and adding later that *De Doctrina Christiana* "reveals Milton as an Arian and, as such, a disbeliever in the Trinity".

Professor Saintsbury, in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, refers to Milton's "semi-Arian views".

It is remarkable that neither Mr. McCall nor apparently Professor Empson takes into consideration the theology of *Paradise Regained*. Here there is no "plan of salvation", no doctrine of atonement. Apparently, to Milton, *Paradise* was regained by Christ withstanding the wiles of Satan! WM. KENT.

REPLY

My problem is to answer Mr. Kent reasonably, yet reasonably briefly. Perhaps I can best do so by reference to two modern Christian writers on *Paradise Lost*. "So far as I perceive anything," said T. S. Eliot, "it is a glimpse of a theology that I find in large part repellent, expressed through a mythology which would better have been left in the Book of Genesis, upon which Milton has not improved!" To which C. S. Lewis retorted that this was the traditional Christian God. It is well known that Milton's religious views evolved, and Professor Empson follows Professor A. Sewall (*A Study in Milton's Christian Doctrine*) in suggesting that Milton was considering revising his theology while he was writing *Paradise Lost*. "He probably became an Arian in the course of composition", says Professor Empson. Yet Milton's theology was Bible-based. Knowledge of God, he believed, was derived from the Bible, and *De Doctrina Christiana* is supported by Biblical texts. I think it in order to say that "*Paradise Lost* is an attempted justification of Christianity", and I agree with Professor Empson that the "fascination and poignancy" of the poem derive from Milton's struggle to present the Christian God as favourably as possible. That He is still wicked is Christianity's fault, not Milton's. COLIN MCCALL.

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.

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 on religious instruction in US public schools (the "McCollum Case"), 13s. 6d.

Available from the PIONEER PRESS, Postage 8d.

We regret that *Six Days or Forever?* is no longer available.

WHERE?

WHERE WOULD YOU expect a crowd of over 25,000 to watch statuettes of the Madonna of Capo d'Orlando and Our Lady of Martyrs carried in procession through the streets and then the fishing fleet to be blessed? It is, in fact, Fremantle, Western Australia, and the Governor, Sir Charles Gairdner said: "The occasion is twice blessed because it brings to Australia some of the colour and tradition from the Italian homeland and gives Australians colour and gaiety to their individual way of life". Then (according to the *West Australian*, 23/10/61), "the decorated crayboat Bongiorno, skippered by Mr. Luigi Santorimita, carried Monsignor J. E. Bourke, director of Catholic Education, and the Madonna . . . outside the fishing boat harbour". And back, of course, to be welcomed by fireworks.

WANTED

Books by and against Thomas Paine, including: *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance, Public Good, Letters to the Citizens of America, Agrarian Justice opposed to Agrarian Law and Agrarian Monopoly*, etc., *Dissertations on the First Principles of Government*. All published by the Freethought Publishing Company, London. Details and price required to: R. W. MORRELL, 443 Meadow Lane, Nottingham.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP. By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims. By Avro Manhattan. 3rd. Edition—Revised and Enlarged. Price 21/-; postage 1/3.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen. Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound. Price 7/6 each series; postage 7d. each.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (11th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 5/-, postage 8d.

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THE WORLD MENACE OF CATHOLIC ACTION. By Alexander Stewart. Price 1/-; postage 4d.

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MATERIALISM RESTATED (Third edition). By Chapman Cohen. Price 5/6; postage 7d.

MEN WITHOUT GODS. By Hector Hawton. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE. By Ernst Haeckel. Price 3/6; postage 8d.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF GOD. By Grant Allen. Price 3/6; postage 8d.

THE CULTURE OF THE ABDOMEN. By F. A. Hornibrook. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE LIFE OF JESUS. By Ernest Renan. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION. By Lord Raglan. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT. By Chapman Cohen. Paper cover 3/-; postage 4d.

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL. By Chapman Cohen. Price 7/6; postage 8d.