

The Freethinker

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FOR A LONG PERIOD in world chronology, for, in fact, almost 18 centuries—135-1948 AD—the Jews were a people without a country. For after the failure of the great Messianic insurrection of Simon Bar-Cochba (the "Son of the Star"), the Jews were forcibly excluded from Palestine, their Holy Land, to which they did not return as the legal masters until the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. For the past fourteen years, the State of Israel has enjoyed a juridical existence and along with it, Judaism, the religion ostensibly derived from Moses as expressed in the Old Testament and codified in the Talmud.

Without, so to speak, interfering in the affairs of a friendly nation, one can nevertheless, note that the creation of the State of Israel was ultimately due to rival and conflicting theories within the Zionist camp. On the one hand there was religious Zionism, the theory firmly implanted in the orthodox rabbinical theory of contemporary Judaism, that the Jews had a divinely ordained right to re-occupy modern Palestine as their authentic Holy Land, given "to Abraham and to his seed forever" by their tribal god, Jehovah. According to this theory (apparently still overwhelmingly predominant amongst orthodox rabbis in Israel) this State owes its existence to direct divine intervention in the historic process and to the immediate divine bequest of Palestine, of Canaan, "the land flowing with milk and honey" to his "chosen people" the Jews. Whereas, among that apparently large and continually growing section of the population of Israel who have in varying degrees tempered their religious orthodoxy with a modern outlook, Israel is explained and justified by arguments of political and economic expediency such as are currently invoked by modern nationalist secular states in order to justify their juridical existence—arguments which do not involve racist theories such as that of the Chosen Race, and which are entirely independent of belief in Jehovah or in his alleged gift of the Holy Land Canaan to the Jews.

"Israel's Dogmatic Quarrels"

Under the above title, the *Daily Telegraph* recently (June 5th) featured a most interesting article upon the religious and social crisis that is now agitating Israel. "The breach between ultra-orthodox Judaism and the modern State in Israel is steadily widening", said the *Telegraph*. "Persistent attempts by zealots to substitute the ancient religious precepts for modern laws and practices have split the country and created serious political divisions. The ruling Party, Mapai, has always had to rely on the political and financial support of the religious parties, who command the loyalty of about 25% of the country's voters. Mapai has been compelled to grant so many concessions that the leaders of the ultra-orthodox groups have arrogated to themselves a degree of independence amounting to non-recognition of the temporal laws and institutions of the State".

(n.b. The present Prime Minister, Mr. Ben Gurion, the

"George Washington" of Israel is, like his American prototype, far removed from religious orthodoxy).

The Messiah v. the State of Israel

The article goes on to describe some of these dubious concessions to rabbinical ultra-orthodoxy: e.g. that the rabbis have their own schools independent of the State school system, yet endowed by public funds, in which their orthodox pupils are enrolled as rabbinical students and as such are exempt from military service. The further facts added by our authority, indicate the virtual stranglehold that rabbinical Jewish orthodoxy has succeeded in imposing upon the cosmopolitan and apparently largely heterodox population of the present State of Israel. "In the 14 years of Israel's existence many issues have been resolved against the will of the majority of the country's non-orthodox population. Religious marriage is the only recognised form of matrimony. Public transport is banned on the Sabbath, and divorces are the concern of religious courts".

And behind this facade of legally-enforced religiosity, there lie some apparently strongly entrenched superstitions that are so primitive as to be almost incredible in a modern State, superstitions of tribal barbarism most incongruously transposed to the age of atomic power and of space travel. For, *inter alia* we learn: "The ultra-orthodox have completely dissociated themselves from the State of Israel and maintain that the real Jewish State will come into being only with the advent of the Messiah." For it must of course be remembered that Judaism still regards the coming of the Messiah as a future event, for Jesus, Bar-Cochba, and all other real or alleged claimants to the role of the Messiah, are regarded by modern rabbinical Judaism as merely so many frauds and imposters. Did not some rabbinical wit produce this apt definition of the New Testament: "What's true in it isn't new and what's new in it isn't true"? It is actually not uncommon for rival religions to criticise each other in such a rationalistic manner.

However, that Christianity has no monopoly of obscurantist opposition to modern science is indicated by this almost incredible belief in contemporary Jewish orthodoxy. "Orthodox [i.e. rabbinical] dogma maintains that when the Messiah comes, the dead will rise in the form in which they were buried and their bodies must not therefore be dissected. This problem of post-mortem examination as a medical necessity has caused clashes in the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, and has at times threatened to bring down the Government coalition". Nor is it only by legal means that the rabbis bring pressure upon their Government. Recently, near Tel Aviv, a rabble of religious fanatics assaulted the police and prevented by force a post-mortem examination by the Institute of Forensic Medicine. Evidently the spirit of rabbinical intolerance that excommunicated Spinoza and maltreated Uriel Acosta, is far from extinct in present-day Israel.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS — The Religious Struggle in Israel

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

Israel v. Judaism

Fortunately, the non-orthodox majority in Israel appear to be now commencing their revolt against the yoke of rabbinical Judaism. "A 'League against religious compulsion' has recently been formed and is actively campaigning", says the *Telegraph*. And, rather significantly, "Its cause has been helped by two recent cases of the abduction of children by zealots to ensure their orthodox upbringing". A secular revolt against medieval—perhaps one should say prehistoric—superstitions. Jews against Jehovah! It is certainly high time. For if modern Zionism can produce no better credentials than the legen-

dary assignment of Palestine to the Jews by a mythical tribal deity, it will soon perish, and will deserve to. Freethinkers all over the world will watch with a quite peculiar interest, this dawning struggle by a modern Israel to free itself from the clutches of a primitive theology which has already spawned a whole family of religions (Christianity and Islam in particular) during the course of its long evolution. May we not hope that Freethought, which has for so long battled resolutely against his religious offspring, may now at long last succeed in giving the final *coup de grâce* to Jehovah himself upon, so to speak, his own native heath: Judaism and its Holy Land?

Freethought in Austria: The Present Situation

By FRITZ KERNMEIER

[Editor's Note.—The Austrian Federation of Freethinkers are this year's hosts to the Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers in Vienna on July 27th, 28th and 29th.]

IT IS NEARLY six years now since, on August 17th, 1956, school director Franz Ronzal, Honorary Chairman of the Austrian Federation of Freethinkers, who died in 1961, published a report in *THE FREETHINKER*. We have lived through many disappointments since that time, but have finally succeeded in getting ready for new action.

Our statutes were accepted by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior already in 1947, but with a difficulty. Our new Federation was not recognised as the legal successor to the similarly named Austrian Federation of Freethinkers that had been dissolved by the Dollfuss regime in 1933. This way the present coalition government (People's Party and Socialist Party) deprived us of all claims for financial compensation, which would have amounted to a considerable sum of money, that would certainly have been of great help to us, especially in the beginning.

But the two Government parties are more interested in getting on good terms with the Church. Even now they are trying to sell the people a new kind of concordat—gradually and, as it were, by instalments, as there would be too great a resistance if the whole lot were offered to the people at a time.

1. More than a hundred million Austrian shillings (£1,500,000) are now given to the Catholic Church per annum by the state, while the legitimate claims of the poorest—the old age pensioners in particular—have not yet been satisfied. A new diocese will soon be created in the province of the Burgenland—equally at the expense of the state. The Archbishop of Salzburg will soon receive back all the landed estates that had been confiscated in the 18th century by the Emperor Joseph II, estates which represent a value of almost another hundred million shillings. The last day up to which compensation claims could be put forward was February 1st, 1934, so that more than twenty years have elapsed since.

2. As a second part of this would-be concordat, so-called school reform occupies a prominent place. The respective bills are now in the process of being passed by the Austrian parliament. They may be one of its last decisions, since we are going to have elections soon.

On the basis of this "reform", religion is going to become an obligatory subject in all Austrian schools. More than that. In future the Roman Catholic Church will be entitled to set up training colleges wherever it pleases, while the Austrian state will have the right to establish only one such college in each province. University degrees will further be denied to teachers who will receive Training

College diplomas instead. Religious and class distinctions will continue to dominate secondary education in Austria, as the Socialist Party abandons its great plan of a general educational system for all children until the age of fourteen. Neither do the new school laws contain any provisions as to a final closing of the many inadequate elementary schools still in existence in our country. Teachers working in Catholic private schools will be paid by the government.

As a third element of the projected new concordat I would like to point to the project of re-Catholicising of our marriage law. Moreover too many papal medals have been awarded to leading politicians in Austria lately.

The people are not willing to accept all that. The number of those who have left the Church is approaching 400,000. In February, 1962, an important conference took place to which both the working-class atheists, represented by our organisation, and the middle-class "associations of persons without religious affiliations" sent delegates. As a result of this conference, a working committee of all associations of Austrian citizens without religious affiliations was set up to co-ordinate activities. This was accomplished in a spirit both of mutual tolerance and readiness to continue the struggle.

The Austrian Federation of Freethinkers is a non-party organisation of people without religious affiliations, and will follow the policy laid down in a declaration of basic principles by our general assembly in 1962. We emphasise the economic aspect of Roman Catholicism and appeal particularly to class-conscious workers, but there will be no party-politics within the ranks of the Freethinkers.

Five years ago there were only 300 members of our organisation. This was due to a lack of activities, which in its turn was affected by a number of considerations of the Socialist Party leadership which did not wish to alienate Christian voters. As soon as our activities increased—and this took place while Franz Ronzal was still alive—more joined our organisation so that we have now about a thousand members. We are far from being satisfied yet, and we are glad to report that a number of local organisations have been set up recently. Our appeals are meeting with good response.

May the Committee of the World Federation of Freethinkers on the eve of its Vienna meeting on July 27th-29th, be assured that Vienna, apart from being the capital of an officially clerical country, is still the heart of Austrian Freethought. Austrian Freethinkers are trying to live up to the noble traditions of militant Austrian Freethinking, and feel united with Freethinkers all over the world—in spite of all obstacles and difficulties.

Economic Determinism and Religion

By JOHN BOWDEN

IN 1848, by some historians called the year of revolutions, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels jointly issued the Communist Manifesto which had been compiled at the end of 1847. That Manifesto proclaimed that "in every historical epoch the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organisation necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch . . .".

There, in a sentence, was promulgated the Materialist Conception of History, more briefly called Historical Materialism and sometimes referred to as the doctrine of Economic Determinism. It affirms that not only every form of social organisation but all political and intellectual activity is the result of the operation of purely economic forces.

Pressure of criticism caused both Marx and Engels later to modify this materialistic formula. Engels was in fact kept busy for years explaining away the crudely mechanical concept of social evolution expressed in the Manifesto. A letter to Mehring dated July 14th, 1893, has quite an apologetic tone; it implies that the mechanistic formula was hastily devised to meet the exigencies of the situation as it obtained in 1848, when the Manifesto was issued. Engels alleges that others besides Marx and himself were to blame for this. "We all laid . . . and were bound to lay, the main emphasis at first on the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of the actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But in doing so we neglected the formal side—the way in which these notions come about—for the sake of the content. This has given our adversaries a welcome opportunity for misunderstandings . . . This side of the matter, which I can only indicate here, we have all, I think, neglected more than it deserves. It is the old story: form is always neglected at first for content. As I say, I have done that too, and the mistake has always struck me later . . . Hanging together with this is the fatuous notion of the ideologists that because we deny an independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a part in history we also deny them any effect on history. The basis of this is the common undialectical conception of cause and effect as rigidly opposite poles, the total disregarding of interaction. These gentlemen often most deliberately forget that once an historical element has been brought into the world by other elements, ultimately by economic facts, it also acts in its turn and may react on its environment and even on its own causes".

In a letter to Starckenburg, Engels reaffirmed that "Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development". "But", he added, "all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic condition is the *cause* and *alone active* while everything else has only a passive effect; there is, rather, interaction on the basis of economic necessity which *ultimately* always asserts itself".

A letter to J. Bloch introduces a significant variation. Says Engels, "According to the materialist conception of history the *ultimately* determining element in history is the *production and reproduction of real life*. [The last words italicised by me, J.B.] More than this neither Marx nor I has ever asserted. Hence, if somebody twists

this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure . . . also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. There is an interaction of all these elements, in which, amid all the endless host of accidents, the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary".

Here is a complete repudiation of the formula expressed in the Communist Manifesto, which affirms that all social forms, and all political and intellectual history, can be explained only on the basis of economic determinism. Note that in the quoted letter Engels states that the *ultimately* determining element is the production and reproduction of real life; that is to say, the basic determinant is biological, not economic.

With a few exceptions—Plekhanov and Labriola for example—Marxists seem never to have heard of the doctrinal modifications introduced by Marx and Engels; or if they have heard of them they have elected to ignore them. For the Manifesto formula is accepted by them as an article of faith, as an inviolable dogma, departure from which will incur excommunication, if not eternal damnation. The Plekhanovs and Labriolas are denounced as "revisionists", "deviationists" and the like. Doctrinaire Marxists would be scandalised to be reminded that if Plekhanov, Labriola and their like are deviationists and revisionists then so also were Marx and Engels!

No observant person will deny the tremendous importance of economic factors; they influence our lives from cradle to grave. What is challenged is the contention that these factors are basic in the sense of primary and invariable. My point is that social phenomena are far too complex to be explained in terms of a single aspect of reality. What we have to consider is, on the one hand, man (who is the active factor) and on the other hand the totality of his environment. And a major factor in that environment is the psychological element.

It is also asserted by doctrinaire Marxists that, as the propagation of ideas can never influence events, anti-religious propaganda is futile and a waste of time and effort that could be diverted into more useful channels. This was not the opinion of Lenin or of Engels. In his *Works* (Vol. XXVII) Lenin stated: "Engels long ago advised the leaders of the modern proletariat to translate the militant atheistic literature of the end of the eighteenth century for mass distribution among the people. To our shame we have not yet done this . . . Sometimes our sluggishness, indolence and inability in this sphere is excused by all kinds of bombastic arguments, as for example, that the old atheist literature of the eighteenth century is obsolete, unscientific, naive, etc. There is nothing worse in the world than these pseudo-scientific sophisms . . . Certainly there is much that is unscientific in the works of revolutionary atheists of the eighteenth century . . . [but] a Marxist could not make a worse mistake than to think that the many millions of people who are condemned by modern society to ignorance, illiteracy and prejudices can extricate themselves from this ignorance only by following the straight line of purely Marxist education . . . The lively, talented writings of the old atheists of the eighteenth century, which attacked skilfully and openly

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Following the military pattern, the Church of England is to appoint a full-time "recruiting officer" to "help in the drive for more men in the ministry", according to the *Daily Mail* (June 9th). He will have to be a parson, and get in touch with all types of schools; and sermons are to be preached on the need for more clergy all over the country. In the dear old days, long past, many parsons were recruited from large families, especially from sons who showed a marked inability to earn a living. In these days of much smaller families, it is most unlikely that anybody able to earn a good salary in other fields, would find his "vocation" on the average curate's stipend, especially if he has had a course of training in science. Still, it may be worth trying if only to see what we get.

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In the meantime, however, the Rev. A. Lee, the rector of Willoughby, Lincoln, has attacked this drive for more curates on the grounds that unless they are paid good wages "no more young men should be ordained". He insists that they should be kept out "until they can be assured of a decent livelihood". Alas — gone are those happy and pious days when a young man who obtained a "living" in any parish was considered as doing it for Christ's sake, no matter how poor the salary. In these much more "industrialised" times being a parson is simply a job, and should be paid for at union rates. Well, the Church can afford it.

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In spite of the heart-to-heart chats by "heretics" with the Pope which gladdened every Anglo-Catholic in the country and maddened almost every Protestant, we note that Dr. Ramsey has had sadly to admit "that unless Rome modified its claims to be the only Christian Church there could not be unity". This attitude on the part of the Vatican has of course been loudly trumpeted by Dr. Heenan these days, but in fairness to Rome it has always been its attitude, and it knows it.

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But if the "Protestantism" of all the various brands we have can make no headway, and it certainly is not feared by Rome, there is one enemy it does fear, and that is Atheism; and by Atheism we mean exactly what it means and not the "smear" of Communism. Roman Catholics have no fear of Protestants — but how they run from an Atheist who knows his case! But for that matter so do our Protestants.

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During a confirmation service recently, the Bishop of Lichfield ordered a chattering child out of church amid protests from angry parents. But we have often wondered what "our Lord" would have said had chattering children interrupted his "Sermon on the Mount"? Would he have gallantly said again, "Suffer little children to come unto me", or ordered the little brats to go play and chatter elsewhere? It's a moot point which has not so far been minutely discussed by Roman Catholic theologians.

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A slashing attack on TV "religion" always thrills us. For example, the Rev. P. Powlesland of Mansfield waded in the other week with, "Religion on TV is a snare and delusion, tempting you away from your responsibilities by offering you religion on the cheap . . ." But is religion on TV cheap? After all, we have to pay a fee of £4 as a start, we have to pay something like £60 for a set, and sundry other sums for repairs every now and then.

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Mr. Powlesland claims that as "you can get religion twice a Sunday on TV, why bother about going to church?"

Which only goes to show how far removed he is from reality. Most people used to go to church not merely to hear a sermon or join in singing hymns, but as a kind of social event — having a chat with friends, showing off a new hat, or keeping up with the Joneses. Certainly, not because it would give them a chance of hearing a laboured exposition of one of Paul's Epistles. Nowadays, a half-hour of TV's religion is sufficient to put every believer in touch with God — and then, heigh ho! "Is the car ready for a spin?" and if it is, good-bye for the nonce to religion, TV's or the Church's!

ECONOMIC DETERMINISM AND RELIGION

(Concluded from page 203)

the clericalism prevailing in their day, will prove very often to be a thousand times more suitable for rousing people from their slumber than the dull, dry paraphrasing of Marxism . . . The most important thing . . . is to be able to rouse the as yet undeveloped masses into taking an intelligent interest in the religious question and in the criticism of religion".

In his preface to *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels, when commenting on the conditions of the exploited masses of his day (in Britain) remarked that as a means of keeping the workers submissive and contented the ruling caste saw to it that they were well indoctrinated with religion. With that end in view "John Bull" imported Yankee revivalists like Sankey and Moody, and also enlisted what Engels regarded as the "doubtful aid" of the Salvation Army. Here is an admission that the working class was influenced by religious ideas and were rendered more submissive as a consequence. Well, if doping the people makes exploitation easy, undoping them will render it less easy.

The emergence of Christianity as the state religion of Rome was due to the emperor Constantine. This opportunistic ruler decided that the slave virtues inculcated by the Christianity of his day better served his interests than the manly virtues of the then state religion of Mithraism. He thereupon, by decree, made Christianity the official cult. The fact that he met little resistance was largely due to the fact that most of the slave class, after the crushing of their revolt, had already adopted Christianity. What has to be explained by the rigid economic determinists is why a slave class should voluntarily accept a religion which intensified their economic subjection.

We can, of course, understand Constantine's attitude. The great "merit" of Christianity, from his point of view, was that it preached the virtues of humility, resignation and submission to the powers that be. The slaves accepted it because it promised heavenly compensation for privation and suffering here below. In that other world wrongs would be righted and injustices rectified; those translated to this glorious region would be eternally blessed.

Once an oppressed class can be persuaded that humility and submission are virtues for which they will receive a reward they come to look upon themselves as a privileged class. Revolt is looked upon as irreligious. (Cp. Paul, "slaves obey your masters", *vide* Lecky on martyrdom.) It is only when an oppressed class becomes convinced that there is no hope of emancipation that it turns to the "consolations" and promises of religion.

WITHOUT COMMENT

"I like to think sometimes that some of the services I render to the country are entertainment in one way or another".—The Archbishop of Canterbury speaking at the Ladies' Luncheon of the Variety Club of Great Britain. (*Daily Herald*, 13/6/62).

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoons. (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

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: L. EBURY.

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. (Stork Hotel, Corporation Street). Saturday, June 30th, 6.30 p.m.: ANNUAL DINNER.

(Midland Institute, Paradist Street), Sunday, July 1st, 6.45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Cardinal Newman and His Brothers".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, June 29th, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, July 1st, 11 a.m.: R. STEPHEN

SCHENK, B.Sc., "Character and Conformity".

Tyneside Humanist Society (100 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, 1), Wednesday, July 4th, 7.30 p.m.: F. R. GRIFFIN and Others,

"The Psychosocial Function of Humour and Satire".

Notes and News

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY "is making progress in his bid to free the Anglican Church from State control", according to the *Evening Standard* (12/6/62). Unofficial discussions have been going on for some time, and it is believed that "more formal exchanges with the Government's advisers may open soon". Note though, that while the Archbishop wants "greater freedom for the Church" — the right to choose bishops etc. — he wants "some link with the State to remain". To put it bluntly, the Church of England merely wants the best of both worlds.

"VERY VULGAR" but not "obscene". That was the decision of Eastbourne Watch Committee on five postcards sent to them by the National British Women's Total Abstinence Union, whose motto should be, "we don't get any fun out of life and we aim to stop others from having any". Miss Hilda Hume, the local secretary called the cards "terrible" and "most objectionable", while another member, Miss Caroline Randell, referred to "galleries of vulgarity" looking at them! Might we not tell these Misses Grundy and their supporters of the Eastbourne Free Church Council

to abstain from looking at the cards, leaving them to those people who enjoy a good belly-laugh now and again?

AS REPORTED elsewhere in this issue, the National Secular Society passed a resolution at its Whitsuntide Conference, deploring the cancellation of controversial programmes on television, and noting especially the ITV interview with Dom Mintoff, which was cancelled because of the proximity of the Maltese elections and because, of course, it exposed the Roman Catholic Church's deliberate interference with the democratic nature of those elections. The Socialist International Council, meeting in Oslo, has now called for new elections to be held under independent observation, and Tom Driberg (*Reynolds News*, 17/6/62) has given some details of the Archbishop of Malta's instructions to confessors, distributed to parish priests after the election. The documentary evidence supplied by Mr. Mintoff makes it quite clear, "that the Maltese hierarchy did regard it as a mortal sin to vote Labour".

THE CONFESSOR is to ask the penitent how he voted, and: "If the penitent voted for the party hostile to the Church, the confessor should ask whether . . . the penitent sinned in private or in public. (The latter implies either making one's intentions manifest or canvassing for that party) . . . If he sinned in public, he should not be absolved unless and until he makes public atonement and honestly promises that . . . he will make reparation to the same extent to which he has caused damage to the Church . . .".

HOW MUCH longer will the British theatre have to put up with the imbecilic restrictions of the Lord Chamberlain's office? Writing to the *Sunday Times* (17/6/62), Michael Meyer reported that, in reply to a request from the Dundee Repertory Theatre to perform his translation of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, "an illegible signatory has refused to allow the pious old servant Bertha, to utter the exclamation: 'Jesus!'" Well might Mr. Meyer ask: "Is one seriously to understand that what was permissible in the Christiania of 1890 is forbidden in the United Kingdom in 1962?"

"IF THE essence of gambling is to receive money for which no equivalent service is given", wrote the Rev. H. Glyn Lewis in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* (15/6/62), then "it concerns equally speculation on the Stock Exchange". And he asked how the Bishop of Chester, who recently condemned the nation's "gambling mania", could "reconcile the acceptance of money from the Church Commissioners whose income is derived mainly from investments and dealings on the Stock exchange". Perhaps the Bishop will point a fine ethical distinction between the Stock exchange and bingo, which he had called "the very negation" of Christian Stewardship. More likely he will ignore Mr. Lewis's letter.

WE WONDER if Miss Marilyn Monroe will take the advice of *Osservatore Romano* and wear a woollen dress instead of bathing in the nude? It would be better for her physical and moral health, said the Vatican newspaper.

PERHAPS MISS MONROE ought to go further. Perhaps she should follow the example of Sister Nazarena of the Camaldolese convent in Rome who, according to the *Daily Express* (17/6/62), lives like a hermit, "wears a hair shirt and a coarse sackcloth habit", "prays for hours, day and night", and "mortifies her flesh with a 'discipline'—a thin, knotted cord used as a whip". We trust not. Whatever her failings, Miss Monroe has at least brought a little fun to life.

The National Secular Society's Annual Conference 1962

THE 1962 Annual Conference of the National Secular Society was held in the Leicester Secular Hall on Whit Sunday, June 10th, and was very well attended by delegates and individual members. The President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, was in the Chair, and goodwill messages were read from the World Union of Freethinkers and from San Juan (Trinidad) Branch of the Society.

The Executive Committee's Annual Report was read and approved for printing and circulating to members. Then the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. W. Griffiths, introduced the Financial Statement, referring to the ever-rising costs and the value of legacies. Subscriptions, he pointed out, only met a part of our expenses, and we were dependent for the rest on our investments.

Mr. Ridley was re-elected President, Mr. L. Ebury and Mrs. E. Venton, Vice-Presidents, and Mr. Griffiths, Hon. Treasurer. The Executive Committee, elected on area basis, was as follows: Scotland, Mr. R. Borsman; Wales: Mr. W. Shannon; N.E. Group, Mr. F. J. Corina; N.W. Group, Mrs. E. Ebury; Midlands, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook; S.W. Group, Mr. D. H. Tribe; S.E. Group, Mr. J. W. Barker; and London, Messrs. W. J. McIlroy and J. B. Miller. A motion to add the West Indies as an area so that it might have Executive representation was approved.

Other motions passed protested (1) against the practice of local authorities of selling land at uneconomic prices for the building of religious establishments and (2) against the cancellation of controversial programmes on TV; (3) urged the rescinding by the Government of the exemption of ecclesiastical properties from rates; and (4) reaffirmed the Society's support for CND. Mrs. Ebury's valuable statement on number 1 is printed in full on page 208, while the second motion referred specifically to the cancellation of the ITV "Freedom to Worship" interview with Mr. Dom Mintoff (Leader of the Maltese Labour Party and former Prime Minister of Malta) because of the nearness of the Maltese election. Mr. Mintoff (as reported by Peter Black in the *Daily Mail*, 17/2/62) had said: "The Catholic Church has been interfering in politics in Malta since time immemorial. We have had cases where people have been denied religious burial simply because they belonged to the Labour Party or even because they attended a public meeting. All children, when they go to confession, are categorically asked whether they support the Labour Party. If they do, they are denied absolution".

When any building is excluded from rating, costs are spread over the rest of the community. That is what should be brought home to people, said Mrs. Venton in seconding the motion urging the Government to rescind the exemption of ecclesiastical properties from rates, and members were urged to write to their local MPs on the matter.

Nuclear disarmament is the most important issue before us today, said Mr. J. A. Miller, in moving reaffirmation of the Society's support for CND.

There was, in addition, a long discussion on policy, in the form of a motion introduced by Mr. Tribe. "Religion is not kept going by evangelical fervour", he said, "but by two things: apathy of the masses and nonchalance of the anti-Establishmentarians". He referred to the Modernist trends in Christian apologetics, the emphasis on symbolism

rather than literalism, and the pseudo-science of Pèrre Teilhard de Chardin, which Secularists must be aware of and refute. Mr. Ebury suggested that fundamentalism was still far from dead (witness the Roman Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) and there was a number of other speakers before Mr. Tribe withdrew the motion as having served its purpose of promoting a valuable discussion on policy.

London was agreed on as the venue of the 1963 Conference.

Prior to the Conference, there had been a most enjoyable reception in the Secular Hall on Saturday evening, June 9th, when Mr. Ridley had greeted members and friends, Mrs. Winifred Hill had provided delightful home-made fare, and Mr. Len Hall had cleverly exposed some of the the fallacies of ESP. On Sunday evening, an open-air meeting was held in Leicester Market, chaired by Mr. Barker and addressed by an excellent array of speakers. It was generally agreed that, as the President said, the Conference had been most useful, the number of young members present being particularly encouraging. There is, in fact, every reason to think that, as Mr. Ridley put it, the year's activities of the Society will be worthy of its past.

C.McC.

The Missing "Army"

"FOR YEARS the Salvation Army have met on the corner of Leicester's Market Place near Woolworth's on Sunday evenings; but where were they this week"? asked C. H. Hammersley in the *Leicester Evening Mail* (16/6/62) "Instead, the National Secular Society was preaching atheism upon this hallowed spot without any Christian opposition whatever". Should the "Army" be accused of cowardice or "are they like most other Christians who only like to preach to the already converted?" continued Mr. Hammersley. The official Salvation Army reply was that because several bands people were on holiday the usual Market Place meeting was transferred to Kildare Street. And an officer said he didn't know the NSS had held a Conference in Leicester on Whit Sunday. Do none of the Salvationists ever read the papers? asked a surprised Mr. Hammersley, "a news item stating that the Secularists intended to take over from the Salvation Army on Sunday appeared in Saturday's *Evening Mail* (9/6/62)". However, he pointed out that the "Army" would be quite safe on subsequent Sundays as the NSS delegates "have dispersed to 'evangelise' in other fields".

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Undoubtedly one of the most important events during the course of the present century has been the emergence of Africa into the full light of world history.—F. A. RIDLEY.

The Kingdom of Northumbria & Christianity

By I. S. LOW

THE KINGDOM OF NORTHUMBRIA was once the greatest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. It stretched from the Forth to the Trent, from the North Sea to the Atlantic, and its kings were looked on by the other English kings as their overlords. Under the influence of Bede it has been assumed that this greatness was the result of the kingdom's early adoption of Christianity. But was it?

The real founder of Northumbrian greatness was King Ethelfrith of Bamburgh. Bede himself makes this perfectly clear. It was Ethelfrith who united Bernicia and Deira (the first comprising Northumberland and Durham, the second most of modern Yorkshire), beat back the Scots and extended his power to the Western coast. Moreover there is reason to believe that he was a statesman who persuaded the people he conquered to look on themselves as members of one nation, so that the kingdom did not break up on his death as it did on the death of other kings. Yet King Ethelfrith was definitely a pagan!

Christianity was adopted by Northumbria at a meeting of the Witenagemot in 627 AD. But soon disputes sprung up between the Celtic Church (which had taken a leading part in the conversion) and the Roman Church. Eventually this led to the Synod of Whitby in 664 AD when King Oswy decided in favour of Rome. But some historians think this led to the downfall of Northumbria: for it meant that "that kingdom had a Church whose headquarters were out of the physical control of the Northumbrians—which led to the eventual triumph of Wessex".

It should not be thought, however, that the Northumbrians were too submissive to Rome. The famous bishop Wilfred seemed to the people to be growing too rich and powerful; and King Egfrith deprived him of his bishopric. He took his case to Rome and the Pope decided in his favour; but the Northumbrians ignored this decision.

Furthermore Christianity does not seem to have been quite the moral force it has been represented.

When Penda the Pagan of Mercia and Cadwalla the Christian of Gwynnedd ravaged Northumbria after their victory at Hatfield in 633 AD, the Christian was far crueller than the Pagan. Bede rages against Cadwalla: he hardly says a word against Penda.

Bede tells us much about the prayers King Oswald of Northumbria uttered before his victory at Heavenfield and nothing at all about those (which so pious a monarch must have made) before his defeat at Maserfield.

There is no doubt that culture flourished in Christian Northumbria; examples are the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Bewcastle Cross. But we know that the Angles and Saxons produced beautiful works of art before they were converted to Christianity.

It is usual for modern Christians, faced with the discoveries of modern astronomy, to assert that Heaven and Hell are spiritual places, and to imply that this has always been the belief of Christians. But Bede tells us how St. Cuthbert lived in a hut surrounded by an embankment "so that he could only see the heaven for which he longed".

By the way, Bede was no perfect character. When writing about religious opponents—for instance the Palagians—he often displayed a venom that is startling and shocking.

But let him have the last word. At the end of his *Ecclesiastical History* he tells us how too many people were entering the monasteries for the sake of an easy life and to avoid having to learn to defend the country. The

results of this, he forecasts sombrely, would "Be seen in the next generation". They were. The Danes came and Northumbria no longer had enough men able to defend her.

No doubt Christianity brought benefits to Northumbria. But without it many good things would still have happened—and with out it many bad things would not.

The Massacre of St. Bartholomew

By R. E. STRICKLAND

[The *Massacre of Saint Bartholomew* by Henri Nogueres, translated by Claire Elaine Engel. George Allen and Unwin, 25s.] WHEN THE NEWS from Rome that several thousand Protestants in Paris alone had on St. Bartholomew's day, 1572, been murdered on the orders of Charles IX and his mother Catherine de Medici, Gregory XIII granted one hundred crowns to the bearer of the glad tidings, and on the official confirmation ordered rejoicings on a much larger scale. Salvos were fired from the Castel St. Angelo and a special medal was struck commemorating the massacre. Appropriately, the Holy Father's own profile was on one side and on the other the Angel of God cleaving the Protestants. It was ordained that the anniversary of the massacre should in future be commemorated on the same day as another notable killing of heretics, the battle of Lepanto, and Vasari was commissioned to depict scenes of the slaughter on the walls of the Sala Regia in the Vatican.

It was doubtful, however, whether succeeding Popes gained much satisfaction from these paintings. To use Talleyrand's phrase, the massacre was worse than a crime: it was a folly. Although His Most Catholic Majesty in Madrid ordered a solemn Te Deum, other monarchs showed horror and revulsion. The most important of these was Elizabeth of England, and the national unity she created against Catholicism was in no small measure due to the way the events of St. Bartholomew had confirmed her people's suspicion that Papacy was an evil to be resisted at all costs.

M. Nogueres's day-to-day account of that 1572 summer shows how Catherine de Medici felt her power to control affairs ebbing to the point where only some desperate stroke against the Huguenots could regain her freedom of manoeuvre. It was popularly supposed that for the wedding of her daughter Margaret to the Protestant Henry of Navarre, she had deliberately gathered at Court all the Huguenot nobility. In fact, however, the massacre was not part of a planned policy. Her original objective was confined to the assassination of their leader, Admiral Coligny, whose anti-Spanish policy was gaining adherents at Court and was even proving attractive to the vacillating Charles IX. But the murder was botched, and in desperation Catherine managed to persuade the King of an imaginary Huguenot plot. The tocsin was rung, and this time the Admiral and his retinue were well and truly dispatched. But the mob got out of hand and what had been planned as a single act of terrorism resulted in prolonged and uncontrollable mass killings. The Spanish Ambassador noted that the Protestants' "houses were being looted and no children spared. Praise be to God".

M. Nogueres's book, containing some well-chosen contemporary prints, lacks the apparatus needed to establish it as a work of historical scholarship, but English readers will find it an interesting, if somewhat too personalised, introduction to what was the most notorious of the many blood-lettings which characterised the wars of religion. These wars ended, paradoxically, with the triumph of the Huguenot leader Henry of Navarre, who had thought it

politic at St. Bartholomew to be converted, who had later relapsed, but had finally rejoined the Church on the sensible if unapostolic grounds that "Paris is worth a Mass". That Paris remained so unequivocally Catholic was one of the results of St. Bartholomew, which on the purely national stage was as successful an act of mass murder as any throughout history up to our own time. It is clear from M. Noguères's book that modern dictators still have lessons to learn from this Catholic achievement.

Cheap Land for Churches

By EVA EBURY

The following statement was made by Mrs. Ebury when introducing a motion by North London Branch to the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society at Leicester on June 10th, "That this Conference protests against the practice by local authorities of selling land at uneconomic prices for the building of religious establishments, which is, in effect, using the ratepayers' money for superstitious uses."

UNDER THE Town and Country Planning Act, Councils are permitted to sell land at less than market value for the purpose of building churches in new towns, housing estates, or in any area where a church does not exist, or if it can be claimed that there is a need for a further church. The Minister of Health issued a circular (number 20/50) in 1950, giving such powers to local authorities, the contention being that churches supply a social and spiritual need. There is one saving clause in this, that might be of assistance in combating this menace in a particular area: application for the right to sell land at an uneconomic price for a church has first to be submitted to the Minister of Health. Of course few if any applications are likely to be refused, but there still remains the possibility that a local agitation against this extortion from the rates, might be successful.

It seems to me that the only other manner in which we can tackle this problem, is to apply direct pressure on the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and upon MPs, urging an amendment to the Act deleting this clause favouring religion at the expense of the people.

Although there are historical incidents of churches being built with ratepayers money, I take it that, prior to this act, councils were not allowed to sell land to ecclesiastical bodies to the detriment of ratepayers. In fact, the whole history of English land laws, from Henry III to Victoria gives evidence of the struggle between the Crown and the Church, to prevent land accumulation in the hands of the latter, and Mortmain Acts were continually being passed because the secular powers knew the dangers of death-bed fears, provoked by priestcraft. They thus sought to prevent the "willing of land" to the Church on death.

So, it would appear that this clause of the Town and Country Planning Act is in direct opposition to the long established policy of the Crown in the matter of allowing land to become the property of ecclesiastic bodies. A full inquiry should be made, into all matters relating to this present abuse, and efforts should be made to bring the matter to the notice, not only of ratepayers, who are directly involved, but to the thinking public.

In conclusion, I cannot help wondering if this uneconomic value of land is reciprocal? Whether there is legislation to provide that a local council can acquire the land where a church has fallen into disuse at less than market value? I should not think so.

AN ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

By GEORGES ORY

(President of the Cercle Ernest Renan, Paris)

Translated by C. Bradlaugh Bonner

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OBITUARY

William Henry Powell of Cardiff, who died unexpectedly on Saturday June 9th, at the age of 80, was a unique personality of Welsh descent. He was a quiet, kindly man, but persistently tenacious in defence of his Secular principles. He was always concerned about the well being of his fellow men, and active in his advocacy of Freethought and Socialism. Under the nom-de-plume of Paul Varney and Malfew Seklew (Malthusian Secularist) he wrote numerous letters to the local and other papers in support of those causes he held in high esteem. His body was bequeathed to medical research, but because of the nature of his death, a post-mortem examination was necessary, and this ruled out his wish.

His funeral at the Cardiff Crematorium on Thursday, June 14th, was attended by relations and friends with a secular service conducted by Mr. H. W. Day of the Cardiff Humanist Group, assisted by Mr. A. Miles.

The Wales and Western Branch of the National Secular Society expresses its deepest sympathy to Mrs. Powell and her family.
A.E.C.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

To fundamentalists the origin of Christianity is a cut and dried matter, it is a "revealed" religion. But to thinking people the matter is much more complex as recent issues of THE FREETHINKER testify.

Until recently I accepted as historical the central figure in Christianity, Jesus. Now I am not sure. The more one probes the material available relative to Christian origins the less historical Jesus becomes, and the key figure to emerge is Paul.

I note that F. A. Ridley takes a tilt at the myth theory in THE FREETHINKER for June 8th. I should like to see a reply to this from Mr. Cutner, in fact a debate through the pages of the paper between Mr. Cutner and Mr. Ridley would, I am sure, interest many readers.

[No doubt Mr. Cutner and Mr. Ridley will make further contributions on this subject.—ED.]

THE HOLY GHOST

My friend Cutner's admirable article on this subject reminds me that when the *Methodist Recorder* reviewed my autobiography *The Testament of a Victorian Youth*, it was indignant because I referred to the Holy Ghost as the junior partner in the Trinity.

Surely I was justified. The Holy Ghost (unlike the ghost of Hamlet's father) makes a very belated appearance on the scene. Perhaps it was being celestially coached for its debut in the Acts of the Apostles!

In "The Descent of the Holy Ghost" (THE FREETHINKER, 8/6/62), Mr. Cutner states that the book of Acts is the first book to mention the Holy Ghost in the Bible, and from lack of correction in the following issue, seems to have got away with it. I would like to refer him to John 14, 26:—"But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost whom my father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you"

[Mr. Cutner did not say that Acts was the first book to mention the Holy Ghost—which appears many times in the Gospels—but that it was the first to mention Pentecost, which is correct.—ED.]

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH ANNUAL DINNER

The Birmingham Branch National Secular Society Annual Dinner at the Stork Hotel, Corporation Street, Birmingham, on Saturday, June 30th, at 6.30 p.m. Tickets 12s. 6d. each from W. Miller, 62 Warwards Lane, Selly Oak, Birmingham, 29.

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