

The Freethinker

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If I WERE asked what was the most distasteful reading I have ever encountered, I should unhesitatingly declare it was the appalling lies and libels circulated by pious Christians in books, tracts and articles dealing with Thomas Paine.

During the whole of the nineteenth century at least, the name of one of the greatest of Englishmen was enough to send very religious people almost into a fit of apoplexy, all the more so if, as was almost always the case, they had never read a line of his writings. They just copied one from the other, and in the name of Christ Jesus always hoped for the best—the best being that God Almighty would put it to their credit that they lied for his Glory, in attacking “the drunken and immoral infidel”.

Pious Hatred

As an example of the kind of thing with which the memory of Paine has had to endure, one should look at the magnificent stand Ingersoll made in his honour against the *New York Observer* in 1877. It must however be remembered that Paine became famous for three things—the way his books and articles helped the colonists in America to fight against England in their war of Independence—they included *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*; his famous reply to Burke on the French Revolution *The Rights of Man*, for which the British government was ready to hang him, and *The Age of Reason*, one of the clearest and most devastating attacks on the Bible as a “revelation” from God ever written. (It is interesting to note that Harmsworth’s Encyclopedia, 1910, in its article on Paine, and ignoring the lies and libels against him, said of *The Age of Reason* “that it expressed in singularly temperate language and in a style of great clearness and simplicity”, an attack on the beliefs of orthodox Christianity.) Needless to say, of all his books and articles, it was *The Age of Reason* which aroused in the pious their hatred and vituperation. They found it unanswerable. It is not surprising therefore that they began a *personal* attack on him, couched in the vilest language, and never producing a shred of evidence in support. This was the case with the *New York Observer*, and Colonel Ingersoll called their bluff. He challenged them to produce the evidence that Paine “died a drunken, cowardly and beastly death”, and offered to give the journal 1,000 dollars in gold if they did so. It accepted the challenge, and in *A Vindication of Thomas Paine* which Ingersoll published will be found the whole sorry story.

Ingersoll’s Defence

Ingersoll was a great lawyer, and he demolished every charge against Paine by sheer weight of evidence. The *New York Observer* backed down as soon as it was pressed by declaring “we have no intention to substantiate” the lies it had circulated. It did not believe that Ingersoll seriously intended to put down a sum of 1,000 dollars and called the money and the challenge “buncombe”. And Ingersoll made the journal (as he said) “eat

their own words”. He added that he “would rather dine with Ezekiel” than with the *NY Observer*. He proved as far as it was possible to prove anything that its charges against Paine were “cowardly and beastly falsehoods”. And the journal did not get the 1,000 dollars.

Some of us thought that these lies would eventually die out, and in this age of much more tolerance and less religion Christians would at least remain silent whatever they thought, but not a bit of it.

Some years ago that valiant fighter for Free-thought, Joseph Lewis of New York, managed to erect a statue to Thomas Paine in Paris. After all, Paine was one of the great

“foreigners” of the French Revolution. He had the highest hopes for its success, and was elected a Member of the Senate. All would have gone well with him—perhaps—but he strongly opposed the execution of Louis XVI and thus incurred the hatred of Robespierre; and only escaped the guillotine by a “miracle”—not of course a theological one. The French Government gladly allowed the statue to be put up, and thus honoured itself as well as Thomas Paine.

“An Insult”

But Joseph Lewis was not content with this success. Thomas Paine has always been one of his heroes, and now he wants to put up a statue to him in the town of his birth—Thetford in Norfolk. To make sure that it will be worthy of Paine he has commissioned Sir Charles Wheeler, the President of the Royal Academy, to sculpt it, and it will be finished in bronze and covered with 14-carat gold leaf. And what has now followed? According to the *Sunday Express* (May 26th), Thetford is “split over the memorial to a ‘scamp’”. A gentleman called Mayes, who is a Tory councillor in Thetford, calls putting up the statue “an insult”, and says that “Tom Paine, the renegade, fought against everything that is England”; and a lady called Oliver said, “This is a shocking thing to happen”. She added, in the best tradition of Christianity “Tom Paine, a philanderer and an unmitigated scamp, is the last man we should honour in this way”. Note how both these godly people of whose piety there can be no doubt, say “Tom” Paine—“Tom” being their mark of contempt. It always has been with the Christian liars and libellers in the past, though it is true that their names are now completely forgotten for the most part.

Strong Objections

On the other hand, Lord Fisher who is the chairman of the council said, “I know there are many strong objections, but Paine was a famous man, and we should be grateful for the American offer to honour him. I know Paine was said to be an immoral man, but he died many years ago, and his good work still lives on . . .”. If Lord Fisher had read the monumental *Life of Paine* by Dr. Moncure Conway, he might have been just a little more severe to liars and libellers. It is obvious that Mr. Mayes and Mrs. Oliver have never read a line of the great man’s work.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Paine Still Libelled

By H. CUTNER

(Incidentally, we offer either or both the hospitality of these columns if they could substantiate their libels with evidence.)

In the meantime, it would be as well to remember that most of the calumnies written against Paine were the work of ignorant nobodies—though there always was a sprinkling of better-educated evangelists and parsons of all kinds who helped in the great cause and who were perhaps a little better known, though even their names are nowadays forgotten. Dr. Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, who did not join in the Christian chorus of defamation, and who did his best to reply to Paine in his *Apology for the Bible* (which made George III ask why should the Bible be apologised for?) is about the only one of his opponents who survives by name. His book has been out of print for decades—it was such a ghastly failure.

On the other hand, literally hundreds of famous people have admired the work of Thomas Paine, not only on the sociological side, but also on the anti-religious side. Many of these tributes were culled from historical works and encyclopedias as well as from famous authors and publicists by John E. Remsburg (1917). Let me quote a few examples.

Tributes

The American president, Andrew Jackson, said of the *Rights of Man* that it "will be more enduring than all the piles of marble and granite man can erect". In an early edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* will be found, "Those who know the *Rights of Man* only by hearsay . . . would be surprised at the dignity, force and temperance of the style". President Woodrow Wilson said of its sentences that they are "as direct and vivid in their appeal as any sentences of Swift". The English poet, Ebenezer Elliott, declared "Paine is the greatest master of metaphor I have ever read"; while Walter Savage Landor gave us the couplet:

Few dared such homely truths to tell,
Or wrote our English half so well.

With very few exceptions, Paine's vivid and easy writing has won the admiration of famous writers for over a century and a half. It was this quality which was most conspicuous in his analysis of the Bible. He exposed its fallacies and absurdities, and made *The Age of Reason*, not only a "best seller" for over 150 years—it still is—but did so in a style which could be and was easily understood. Paine's "crime" was that he brought the truth about Christianity and the Bible direct to all who could read.

Paine called his own religion, "the religion of Humanity", and he wrote *The Age of Reason* as a Deist. So highly was he thought of in America, that in 1792 at the great celebration in New York of the Third Centenary of the discovery of America, the first man toasted after Columbus was Thomas Paine, and next to Paine was his *Rights of Man*. In fact, he enjoyed, as Dr. Conway pointed out, the personal acquaintance of "nearly every great or famous man of his time in England, America and France". As an example, we are told that the dearest friend of Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States, was Thomas Paine.

But he wrote *The Age of Reason* and made all the pious nobodies in the world, especially those who considered themselves super-Christians, his sworn enemies. They proceeded to blacken his personal character with a mass of foul and obscene libels and vituperation simply because he told the truth about the Bible. And here it should be added that most of Paine's positions are commonplaces of modern Christian theology. Even a Bishop can now displace God from his position on a cloud "up there", and

get away with it; while Paine's criticisms of the Bible are these days called "Higher Criticism" and as such accepted by the scholars in the Church though not of course by the "rank and file" who have barely advanced beyond the position held by primitive ignoramuses. No wonder Paine was, as Walt Whitman declared, "doubly lied about".

The famous Marquis de Lafayette said, "To me America without her Thomas Paine is unthinkable"; while Sir Hiram Maxim, a century or so afterwards, said, "I regard Thomas Paine as one of the greatest men the world has ever produced, and all ought to be proud that he belonged to our race". And it is almost needless to add that Abraham Lincoln admitted that he never tired of reading Paine. For Lord Brougham, "The most remarkable spirit in pamphlet literature was Thomas Paine . . . his style was a model of terseness and force".

Paine's "crime" I repeat, was writing *The Age of Reason*. The reader should study what Dr. Conway has to say about this remarkable work, and let the little ignoramuses expose their own stupidity. It represents he said,

as no elaborate treatise could, the agony and bloody sweat of a heart breaking in the presence of crucified Humanity . . . the unfettered mind may hear the wail of enthralled Europe, sinking back choked with its blood, under the chain it tried to break. So long as a link remains of the same chain, binding reason or heart, Paine's *Age of Reason* will live. It is not a mere book—it is a man's heart.

Thomas Paine is immortal in his books, but we who cherish his memory are more than grateful that an American, Joseph Lewis, can give us also a statue to remind the people of Thetford that Paine was born there, and that he was an Englishman but also a citizen of the world. It is a great tribute long overdue. We hope that, like the statue in Paris, it will be inscribed with the words "An Englishman by birth, a French citizen by decree, and an American by adoption". A hero of two worlds!

A Surly Gesture

"A SURLY GESTURE to the Americans coming so soon after they have honoured Sir Winston Churchill." That was how "Cassandra" described the objections to the Thomas Paine statue by "the good Burghers of Thetford" (*Daily Mirror*, May 27th, 1963). A local Tory member had "blasted off", saying Paine was a renegade, and that this private life was a disgrace. Another "vociferous objector" had denounced Paine as a philanderer and an unmitigated scamp.

"Yet a third lady," said "Cassandra", drawing the Union Jack around her, and announcing that she was born at the Britannia Barracks, Norwich, says that her father, who was a regimental sergeant-major at the barracks, would turn in his grave at the thought of a statue to Tom Paine".

Paine—as "Cassandra" pointed out—"began life as an Exciseman, but got dismissed for raising protests about grievances in the Service". He was "one of the great Radicals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" and the Americans are rightly proud of him. "If the worthy burghers of Thetford insist on complete moral purity, they had better disown William Shakespeare and Horatio Nelson at the same time they they reject Tom Paine".

Pope John XXIII

As we go to press news has reached us of the death of the Pope. A special article will appear next week.

Lea on the Inquisition

By S. D. KUEBART

TO REVIEW a book that was originally published in 1887, has since served generations of scholars as a standard work on the papal Inquisition and which at the time was praised by some of the most eminent historians, including Lord Acton, seems almost as pointless as reviewing the Bible. However, on the slim chance that some readers of this publication may not be acquainted with H. C. Lea's masterpiece I shall endeavour to give a brief resumé of its contents.

The present edition of *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 25s.) is a reprint of those chapters of the three volume original that deal with the establishment, organisation and methods of the medieval inquisition.

In the first chapter headed "The Inquisition founded", Lea at some length describes how the papal inquisition, in the beginning rather haphazardly implemented by individual zealots, often opposed by the bishops who "for the most part were indifferent as to the matter of heresy, while some even protected heretics for filthy gain", gradually grew into a powerful organisation after it was entrusted to the Mendicant orders, i.e. the Dominicans and Franciscans. Even then there was no uniform legislation against heresy which, ironically enough, was left to Frederick II, an arch-enemy and constant mocker of the Papacy, to provide. However, it must be remembered that by 1220 the Church had usurped almost absolute power, and the humiliation suffered by the unfortunate Henry IV served as a warning to ambitious successors. Knowing Frederick's caustic sense of humour, I do not think that Pope Gregory IX was altogether wrong when, criticising the inquisitorial methods employed by Frederick's officials in Sicily, he complained "that Frederick was using pretended zeal to punish his personal enemies, and was burning good Catholics rather than heretics".

The inquisitors, at first under episcopal jurisdiction, eventually gained such supremacy that John XXII was forced to curb their audacity in a decretal "forbidding all judges and inquisitors to attack in any way the officials and nuncios of the Holy See". The reason for this show of papal displeasure was the excommunication of one Guillaume de Balet, archdeacon of Frejus, papal chaplain and representative of the Avignonese papacy in the Campagna.

On the whole, papal interference with the work of the Inquisition was rare and arose mainly when questions of competence or jurisdiction had to be settled. Lea gives various instances of bishops and secular authorities clashing with the inquisitors over judicial or financial issues.

Towards the end of the chapter the author characterises the machinery of the Inquisition thus: "The Inquisition had a long arm, a sleepless memory and we can well understand the mysterious terror inspired by the secrecy of its operations and its almost supernatural vigilance"; and again "To human apprehension the papal inquisition was well nigh ubiquitous, omniscient and omnipotent".

The following chapters deal in great detail with the inquisitorial process and the fate of the victims enmeshed in its nets. Lea shows how the Inquisition, once established, soon discarded the principles of the Roman law (which far from being perfect was at least equitable) and, assuming the role of God's avengers, made a mockery of the most primitive concepts of justice.

Trained through long experience in an accurate knowledge of all that can move the human breast; skilled not only to detect the subtle evasions of the intellect, but to seek and find the tenderest point through which to assail the conscience and the heart; relentless in inflicting agony on body and brain, whether through the mouldering wretchedness of the hopeless dungeon protracted through uncounted years, the sharper pain of the torture-chamber, or by coldly playing on the affections; using without scruple the most violent alternatives of hope and fear; employing with cynical openness every resource of guile and fraud on wretches purposely starved to render them incapable of self-defence, the counsels which these men utter might well seem the promptings of fiends exulting in the unlimited power to wreak their evil passions on helpless mortals.

Evidence was accepted from all sources as long as it was adverse to the accused. Less evidence was required for conviction in heresy than in any other crime, and inquisitors were instructed that slender testimony was sufficient to prove it. Lea castigates another malpractice of the tribunals: "the crowning infamy of the inquisition in its treatment of testimony was withholding from the accused all knowledge of the witnesses against him". Ostensibly this was done to shield witnesses from the malevolence of those who had suffered by their evidence and the author rightly concludes: "Yet that so flimsy an excuse should have been systematically put forward shows merely that the Church recognised and was ashamed of its plain denial of justice, since no such precaution was deemed necessary in other criminal affairs".

The last chapter headed "The Stake", deals the death-blow to the time honoured Catholic hypocrisy that blames the secular authorities for the execution of the heretics, as throughout the whole book, Lea proves on the basis of contemporary documents, that the secular powers had no alternative but to obey the demands of an omnipotent Church, were they to escape excommunication and interdict. The book is extremely well written and gives numerous references to the documents on which the author based his statements. As befits a historical work it is free of bias. Indeed, Lea sometimes goes out of his way in order to be fair to the Church, although the reader is left with little doubt which side had Lea's sympathy.

Dr. Walter Ullman has written a historical introduction to the book, in which he starts off by giving a fair assessment of Lea as a historian, and it is only when, in subsequent paragraphs he comes very near to being an apologist for the Papacy that I think Dr. Ullman carries historical detachment too far. I do not hold that one should apply present-day ethics to judge medieval institutions, but one should not overlook that the barbarism of the Middle Ages was largely brought on by the Papacy itself.

From the days of Nicaea, Christians had resolutely turned their backs on Hellenistic thought and culture. The Roman bishops, having by treachery, forged decretals and sheer coercion usurped temporal power to the extent that emperors had to curry their favour, proclaimed theology the queen of "sciences" with the result that Europe was turned into a pious madhouse. Hence the unflattering epithet "the Dark Ages" for what to Christians are the ages of faith. Quite understandably the popes meant to perpetuate a status quo so beneficial to themselves, and I partly agree with Dr. Ullman when he writes:

By striking at the root of medieval Christendom the "heretic" was held to be assaulting Christendom itself. Seen thus, the efforts made by the papacy through the inquisitorial

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

It's a long time since our Divine Blasphemy Laws were invoked so heartily as when Tottenham Hotspurs came back with the European Cup, and marched in a victory parade through the streets of Tottenham with banners flying and enriched—horror of horrors!—with Biblical texts. Some of these read, "They shall reign for ever", "Hallowed be their names", "Adore them for they are glorious", and so on. One outraged parson, the Rev. C. Hill, wanted the Home Secretary to take action through the Blasphemy Laws immediately.

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But the real point in this hilarious if blasphemous incident, is that we still have Blasphemy Laws, and parsons—who have never had it so good either in money or publicity—want them applied whenever their tender Christian feelings are hurt. In this particular case however, the blasphemers were *believing* Christians, and not blatant or horrid infidels. We wonder what a Roman Catholic judge would give a Christian blasphemer? Would he let him off?

★

Our contemporary "Today" (May 4th) makes a big splash with an "amazing visionary", Madame Ludovici, who "can read the future" in a crystal ball. The lady herself proved this by telling Peter Finch—who gave us such a superb piece of acting as Oscar Wilde some years ago—when he consulted her, "Several years ago", that "I see you near to danger". She told him about some "catastrophe" supposed to come to him and when he asked in what form, she answered "I cannot say". Still, there cannot be any possible doubt whatever that she can read the future. (Italics are ours.)

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Why, asked the "Daily Mail" some weeks ago, "Should it always be black?" The question was raised by a Roman Catholic priest who claimed that "black clothes worn at funerals are melancholy and unnecessary". After all, the Chinese wear white for funerals so (we suspect) he would like to advise the same. But why was black chosen in the first place? There seems little doubt that it was to frighten away evil spirits which were so devoutly believed in by all Christians in the early Church. The ringing of church bells by making—on occasions—a hideous noise accomplished the same purpose. Even these days the row made sometimes by church bells and the garb sometimes worn at funerals are enough to frighten anybody away, let alone evil spirits.

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In the House of Lords where all should be sweet and sound with unity reigning supreme, a clash recently arose between the Labour Leader, Lord Alexander of Hillsborough, and the Bishop of Chester over a Bill to reform Church courts. The noble Lord thought that some of the proposals would be welcomed by members of the Church of England while others were much too controversial. He wanted the matter discussed much more, but was defeated by the voting. But, in these reforming days, why should it always be bishops of the Church of England? Why not a few heads of our dissenting sects, to give spice and variety to the well-worn subject.

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A Seventh Day Adventist, a Plymouth Brother, a healing Evangelist, a Mormon, a Witness from Jehovah, a Christian Scientist, and representatives from many other well known Christian sects, all shrieking in the House of Lords—what fun it would be! Even a humourless

Roman Catholic defending the latest pronouncement of the Pope would add that much-needed gaiety we all would welcome. Why can't reform of the House of Lords bring them all in?

LEA ON THE INQUISITION

(Concluded from page 179)

machinery were efforts dictated by the demand for self-preservation: if heresy were not halted, the result would be the collapse of the papacy and herewith Christendom. But one has to bear in mind that the vast majority of the heretics had anti-clerical rather than anti-Christian tendencies and, much later in history even Luther originally merely rebelled against clerical abuses, not the Church or Christianity. I think one is underestimating the intelligence of the medieval clergy in assuming that they were unaware of these sentiments.

Dr. Ullman constantly urges the reader not to judge or measure medieval inquisitorial proceedings "by the yardstick of modern ethical and wholly unecclesiastical norms" and referring to modern persecutions, he concludes his introduction with this observation:—

The results of both the medieval and the modern inquisitions are identical. But whilst the medieval inquisition was the unadulterated offspring of the prevailing ideas and views, no such explanation will suffice for its modern successor. This comparison strikes me as somewhat feeble. Surely, besides organising crusades, usurping power, amassing vast fortunes and murdering her opponents it was presumably the mission of the Roman Church to spread and follow the teachings of the nominal founder of the religion who implores his followers to extend love even to their enemies and who, when Pilate inquired into his political aspirations, almost contemptuously, replied: My kingdom is not of this world! The Catholic Church stands condemned by her own teachings; we do not have to resort to modern ethics to pass judgment.

IT'S THAT WOMAN AGAIN!

Every now and then, or so it seems, the Virgin Mary becomes bored with the ineffable joys of Paradise and decides to have a holiday on earth. Throughout the years this indefatigable space-woman has "hallowed" such places as Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, La Salette, etc. Not only does she apparently prefer to "appear" to credulous peasants, but she also has the amazing ability to speak their language (yes, local dialects too!). It is noticeable that she never presents herself to Atheists, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Mohammedans, etc., but only to pious Catholics. According to the *Scottish Daily Express* (May 25th), the Blessed Lady's latest descent to earth has resulted in her appearance in Alice, South Texas. Mrs. Tony Botello, a 35-year-old housewife, claims that "a vision of the Virgin Mary appeared on an old water tank and spoke "to her in Spanish". Mrs. Botello said "she was afraid of snakes on the farm and planned to move". The vision told her: "Do not leave. Happiness will be in this place".

How correct the heavenly prophetess has been, because 19,000 people have visited the "sacred" spot (no cures reported yet, but they will come!) since April 17th!

And, says the *Express*, "the Botellos have found financial happiness, at least. They charge one dollar (seven shillings) per car". What are the local Catholic priests doing about this? Will they open up a new "goldmine" by creating an American "Lourdes"? Time will tell.

HAVE YOU READ IT?

HONEST TO GOD

by the Bishop of Woolwich

Available from THE FREETHINKER Bookshop

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.
London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR.
(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
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Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.
North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Hornchurch Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, corner of Gubbin's Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, June 11th, 8 p.m.: DR. ARNOLD ELLIOTT, The Improvement of the Health Service".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, June 9th, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "The Disestablishment of the Christian Faith".

Notes and News

THE CHURCH of England, someone remarked to us the other day, seems to be going to the dogs! This was after Canon John Pearce-Higgins's protest against assenting to the 39 Articles as a condition of being installed as Canon and Vice-Provost of Southwark on May 25th. And it certainly does seem to be one shock after another: Dr. Robinson's *Honest to God*, Dr. Vidler and his Cambridge colleagues' *Objections to Christian Belief* and now the Canon. The 39 Articles, he said, "are not capable of acceptance and incompatible with modern knowledge". And, he added, "There is too much dishonesty and double-think in the Church today".

★
THINGS DON'T seem too good for the Church of Scotland either. In seven years it has lost 38,000 members; since 1960 Sunday School and Bible Class membership has "fallen sharply" (*Sunday Post*, 26/5/63) and there were only 54 new ministers last year, while "136 ministers were lost through retirement, resignation or death".

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ON MAY 24TH we cited a *Sunday Times* report of a Cambridge lecture on "The Church and Freedom" by Professor Hans Küng of the University of Tübingen. Dr. Küng has now said (in a letter to the *Sunday Times*, 25/5/63) that the report "gave a wrong impression". "I did not compare 'Rome' and the 'Kremlin'", he writes. "I only repeated the statement of Fr. Gustav A. Wetter (former Rektor of the Pontifical Russian College) who

described in his book *Dialectical Materialism*, some external similarities between the Catholic and the Communist systems". Having thus denied that he made the comparison, Dr. Küng goes on to say: "My answer, developed during a whole hour was: 'According to her external nature, the Church may in many ways resemble Communism in its enslavement of men. In her inner nature she is radically the opposite pole from that pseudo-Church with its pseudo-faith. In her inner nature she is, despite all external signs to the contrary, the dwelling place of freedom'". How these modern theologians try to convince us that things are contrary to what they seem! Well, we wish Dr. Küng luck in his efforts to convince slaves that they are free.

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THE ROMAN Catholic Church in Malta may be "in her inner nature . . . the dwelling place of freedom", but if so it is certainly "despite all external signs". Archbishop Gonzi of Valetta recently suspended Father E. T. Borg, OBE, from hearing confessions for "treating lightly" the Archbishop's instructions for dealing "firmly" with Maltese Labour Party supporters (*Daily Telegraph*, 27/5/63).

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AMERICAN BAPTISTS ARE SPENDING \$1.5 million on a "New-Life Movement" crusade to Japan, complete with cowboy band, Metropolitan Opera singer, the Vice-President of Liberia and 570 clergymen and lay leaders. But *Newsweek* (29/4/63) reported little response and said: "The Baptists have a long way to go in Japan, where there are but 800,000 Christians (less than 1 per cent of the population), and only 14,000 are Baptists." And the Rev. Shouchi Matsumora, the Japanese clergyman featured at the rallies held in the cities added: "In Japan, very few influential people are Christians. Usually Christians are poor people, lonely, suffering with problems, ashamed to admit they went to a mission school. They have an inferiority complex."

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WE HAVE just heard that the enterprising New York publisher Lyle Stuart is bringing out an English translation of Paul Jury's *Journal d'un Prêtre* at the suggestion of one of our contributors. Jury, an ex-Jesuit who died a decade ago, translated Freud into French, and was a trained psycho-analyst who treated many French priests who were in sexual difficulties that their confessors couldn't cope with. He was therefore in a unique position to report on the sex-life of celibate priests. When *The Humanist* reviewed *Journal d'un Prêtre* some years ago it expressed the hope that the book (actually a collection of long notes) would appear in English. Now, thanks to Mr. Stuart, it will. We shall inform readers when it is available.

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LORD MILFORD, the first Communist peer to take his seat in the House of Lords, affirmed, or—in the words of the *Daily Telegraph* wit (24/5/63)—"denied God but acknowledged Caesar". The affirmation read: "I . . . do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors, according to law".

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CONGRATULATIONS TO Barnsley (Yorks) Freethinker, Henry Irving, on attaining his ninetieth birthday. Mr. Irving, a prolific writer to the press, enjoys good health, due no doubt in part to his serious cultivation of physical fitness. He gave gymnastic exhibitions, gained a gold medal in a competition of strength and the diploma, bronze and silver medals of the National Physical Recreation Society.

Bayard Simmons as Historian

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE NUMEROUS ADMIRERS of the late Thomas Bayard Simmons knew and respected him as a Freethinker and Socialist of the finest vintage; as a scholar and as an English gentleman in the best sense of that often misapplied term. If, in addition, their tastes ran to literature, they also knew and admired Bayard Simmons as a poet of considerable stature, who expressed the point of view of an elevated Humanist ethic in fluent and dignified verse. It was with pleasure, if hardly with surprise in the case of this many-sided man that I recently met Bayard Simmons (though alas, posthumously), in yet another capacity; that of an historian, as a specialist in Russian ancient and medieval history.

I was already aware of his deep interest in and knowledge of Russian literature; indeed I believe that he has actually translated the great Russian poet, Pushkin into English verse. But I was both surprised and pleased when soon after Bayard Simmons's regretted death, which has left an irreplaceable gap in the ranks of contemporary Freethought, his life-long friend and *alter ego*, Madame Valentina Manouso, was kind enough to send me an unfinished paper of Bayard Simmons, some 10,000 words in length, which a detailed perusal soon revealed to be actually the unfinished opening chapters of a projected book on ancient and medieval Russian history, upon which its versatile author was evidently engaged during his last years. I am particularly grateful to Madame Manouso for this most instructive and interesting unfinished *opus*, in the effective composition of which, no doubt, her own expert knowledge of the Russian language and literature, combined with Bayard's own literary talent and keen interest in all that appertained to that great country, which during his own long life-time had opened a new era in the evolution of human civilisation.

When I was in Leipzig in 1957, I was shown amongst other items of historical interest in that famous city, the original printing works of Lenin's pioneer journal, *The Spark*, originally printed in that city, an event usually regarded by present-day Russian scholars as the starting point of Bolshevism. It so chanced that a few minutes before I arrived, the Leninist relic had been visited by a far more famous visitor, none other than Lenin's present successor, Mr. N. S. Khrushchev. I signed my name just opposite the great man; obviously a great honour for some one! When Mr. Khrushchev saw the modest printing works, the rivulet from which had initially emerged the tempestuous torrent of Bolshevism, he turned to his entourage with the significant comment, "From what small beginnings do we come!"

Upon reading this unfinished MS of Bayard Simmons, I also was impressed by the same thought. For if the origins of most mighty empires are shrouded in a primitive obscurity, if the Roman Empire began with the legendary Romulus and Remus and the English Empire with the perhaps hardly less legendary Hengist and Horsa, ancient Russian annals as here vividly portrayed, were born amongst blood-drinking, head-hunting savages, who worshipped primitive gods with ferocious rites on the vast Steppes of what is now Southern Russia and amidst the gloomy pine forests of the North.

In the case of Russia, as emerges early and clearly from Bayard Simmons's vivid narrative, its determining feature from the most remote times has always been the immensity of encircling nature. For everything in the

Russian landscape is on a gigantic scale, the adjective beloved by our German friends *kolossal*, appears to describe every natural feature: the interminable Southern plains, the vast forests of the gloomy North and the huge rivers, Volga-Dnieper, Dneister, et al, as compared with what our author aptly terms, "the tiny Thames" and the other rivers (or by Russian standards rivulets) of Western Europe. With the perceptive intuition that one naturally expects from Bayard Simmons, this all-pervasive domination exercised by the huge brooding landscape over the Russian soul, is forcefully propounded; one might even add by way of a further suggestion that the huge impersonal contours exemplified by the Russian landscape, by dwarfing the individual and depressing the ego into a relative insignificance, directly prepared the appropriate background for the eventual emergence of a collectivist civilisation upon Russian soil.

It would have been interesting to have had the view of a Socialist like Bayard Simmons upon this conjecture. But whilst he did not, alas, survive to treat of modern Russian problems, his opening section does bring out both clearly and forcibly that constant factor throughout Russian history, namely, that Russian history even more than most has been effectively dominated by its overwhelming sheer physical immensity. After all, was it not a modern Tsar (Nicholas I), who declared that his best generals were "General January and General February"?

Unfortunately, our author's original plan for a complete history of medieval Russia, never eventuated. For what has survived are merely his opening chapters ending in the Dark Ages, at the time of the Norse invasion of the Varangians, the Vikings who simultaneously harried the coasts of England and of Western Europe. Since it was from the "robber states" established by these Norse free-booters, that the earliest historic Russian feudal states eventually emerged, it is clear that Bayard Simmons's surviving narrative stops well before written Russian history began with the monastic chroniclers of the 13th century during the epoch of the Tartar invasions by the successors of Genghis Khan and by the later "Golden Horde" (13th century).

The narrative stops short of these memorable events as also before the conversion of the medieval Russians to Christianity by Byzantine missionaries. As Bayard Simmons remarks, written records in Russian originally arrived along with Christianity; it was indeed a determining factor in Russian cultural evolution, that the original Russian civilisation was derived from Constantinople and not from Western Europe, the medieval Russian chroniclers being usually monks as in contemporary Western Europe. The (as we may term it) prehistoric "history" of Russia to which this extant MS is confined, is that of successive pagan tribes from the ancient Scythians—nomadic savages to whom Herodotus (c. 450 BC) and other ancient Greek authors refer to the medieval Slavs, the ancestors of the modern Russians who seem to have arrived from the East perhaps about the beginning of the Christian era, speaking an Aryan language. Of these primitive Russian races, our knowledge is impersonal and mostly fragmentary, as is usually the case with pre-literary cultures. In the case of the ancient Scythians, we do, however, possess the still extant narrative of Herodotus—the "father of history"—who had some personal experience of them and of their way of life.

From Herodotus also, we derive an account that seems to be at least partly historical of the first of Russia's foreign invaders, King Darius Hystapes of Persia, who invaded Scythia around 500 BC, when this ancient precursor of Napoleon and Hitler similarly got lost in the Russian wilderness and eventually had to beat a hasty retreat; many subsequent invaders were to tread the same long road home. We also hear first from Herodotus of the pagan cult of the war god personified by a naked sword, a cult which was later to strike terror into the degenerate Romans of the 5th century during the invasion of the Hun, Attila, "the Scourge of God".

In the case of the post-Christian Slavs (the word "Slav" means "glorious"), who may perhaps be called semi-civilised, rather more is known. Their pagan rites are described in some detail by Bayard Simmons, who reminds us that the primitive Russians remained pagan until well on into the Middle Ages. At this era also, there emerge certain Russian folkways and social institutions that have survived down to modern times. Our author gives us a spirited translation of the old folk-songs sung at the nature-festivals of the pagan animistic cults: more topically he refers to the medieval Russian institution of the *nir*, or communal council of the village as the cradle of Russian democracy, pointing out very appositely that the medieval *nir* was the lineal ancestor of the modern "soviet".

This long and relatively little known era of Russian pre-history, ended with the advent of the Norse Vikings who (from about 900 AD on) began to found the earliest Russian principalities. One of these Vikings, Haardvada (1066 and all that!), went on to Constantinople and became captain of the Byzantine emperor's Varangian guards. Whilst it was from another Norse invader, that the tsars of modern Russia claimed descent down to the unfortunate Nicholas II. But at this initial historical era in Russian history, Bayard Simmons's interesting fragment abruptly stops. He has however, done quite enough to furnish fresh evidence for the remark of Maximilian Harden as recently quoted in the correspondence columns of THE FREETHINKER: "read Russian history for you will find it very edifying!"

It is much to be lamented that Bayard Simmons was unable to finish what promised to be a valuable contribution to medieval Russian historiography. It is perhaps even more regrettable that he was unable to continue his lucid interpretation of Russian history right up to our own day, when that great country has arrived at such a leading role in both the social, political and scientific spheres. For Simmons's obviously keen insight into Russian evolution, combined with his own wide experience of modern leftist movements, would surely have constituted him as a notable interpreter of the Russian Revolution and of the great experiment in the evolution of humanity that is now developing from that ever-memorable event. As it is, we must now recognise in Bayard Simmons, not only the scholar, humanist and poet whom we all knew and respected, but also an historical writer and interpreter of indubitably authentic talent.

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The "Holy" Nail of Milan

By JOHN W. TELFER

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH persists, in this age of science and technology, with such superstitious rituals as the procession which takes place every May 3rd in Milan.

On that date, feast of the "Finding of the Holy Cross", Cardinal Montini, Archbishop of Milan, is hoisted up more than 100 feet into the dark recesses of his cathedral roof, where he secures "the reliquary containing one of the nails used to fasten Christ to the Cross" (*The Universe*, 26/4/63).

The reliquary is then carried in procession and, after 40 hours of veneration, re-suspended in the cathedral heights for another year.

The report in *The Universe* informs us that the first mention of this "nail" was made in the eulogy which Saint Ambrose delivered upon the death of the Emperor Theodosius on February 25th, 395, in which St. Ambrose "recalls the donation of the nail by Theodosius to Milan", and "also harks back to Constantine and to his mother Helen famed for having found the true Cross in Palestine, and with it the nail" (my italics).

When the new cathedral was built in 1461, Archbishop Charles of Forli ordered that the nail be placed high in the vault for safekeeping, and sovereigns have contended for the honour of carrying it in the May procession. Maria Joseph even journeyed all the way from Vienna in order to carry the "holy" nail, and was specially spared the elevator trip on the "nivola". *Nivola* is the Latin for cloud, but the cloud on which Cardinal Montini floated on May 3rd was devised by Leonardo da Vinci, and is "moved by a complex system of pulleys and ropes; it sways even though there is not the slightest movement of air in the cathedral for everybody is holding their breath".

Considering that the Church of Rome already possesses such "authentic" relics as the Holy Shroud of Turin, the actual chains which bound St. Paul, a phial of the Virgin's milk (surely now dehydrated!) her chemise and chamberpot, and enough pieces of the "real" cross to renovate the Vatican's furnishings, does anyone have the audacity to doubt that Cardinal Montini's "nail" is anything but genuine? It only remains now for the Pope to announce that Vatican archaeologists have unearthed Jesus the carpenter's trade union card—and millions of credulous Catholics would surely flock to revere it!

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor welcomes letters from readers, but asks that they be kept as brief and pertinent as possible.

"THE BIBLE HANDBOOK"

A small point. You referred in "This Believing World" (24/5/63) to "Foote's Bible Handbook". I was a great admirer of Foote, but it is as well to know that his only connection with *The Bible Handbook* was that he wrote an excellent preface. The whole of the work of the book itself was conceived and carried out by W. P. Ball. G. J. FINCH.

ATHEISM AND MORALITY

I fully appreciate Mr. Broom's important dilemma. I offer an explanation that I find satisfactory. The following is an oversimplification, but I hope it conveys the meaning.

If my emotional reaction to a moral principle is of a certain kind I define the principle as "right". Other people, because of different feelings about the principle, will define it as "wrong". Such people are entitled (a moral judgment of mine) to have different feelings to mine. They are not entitled (another judgment) to translate these feelings into actions. Only I, and those who feel morally as I do, are so entitled. My feelings are the sole criterion of what I believe other people are entitled to do. Naturally some people argue in a similar way, but from

different feelings. But for me their feelings are not the correct ones on which to base a morality. Mine are the only correct ones. I am defining my position as right, so alternative positions are wrong by definition. It does not matter that other people use a different set of definitions. This does not effect my attitude to my set. Their set is mistaken, being motivated by the wrong feelings.

I hold that this view of morality is the only one which is consistent with scientific fact, and which gives me rational grounds for behaving in a certain way. It is not arrogant simply because there is no other possible view of morality that accords with fact. A man can only be said to be arrogant, when it is logically possible for him to be otherwise.

Nothing in the above interpretation is incompatible with my holding that tolerance is right, which I believe. Socially this entails allowing people to behave according to moral principles which I hold are wrong. One cannot generalise about the right degree of tolerance, which depends upon the case under consideration and the issues involved.

With regard to Mr. Broom's second point about whether it is obligatory for a Catholic to believe that the existence of God can be proved. I quote from a letter to me from the Rev. Gallon of the Catholic Enquiry Centre:—"A Catholic who knowingly and deliberately repudiated the teaching of the Council of Trent and said that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated by human reason, would be guilty of heresy and mortal sin". (I have also had a letter from Mr. Rittner of the Catholic Truth Society which said more or less the same as this.)

The following quotation is taken from the booklet, *God*, by the Rev. Ripley:—"As Catholics we are bound to believe that *God, our Creator and Lord, can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason from created things*". (Italics in the original.)

Father Ripley also writes:—"Canon Eaton wrote this: 'Let us be quite clear at once that we cannot prove the existence of God . . . That is heresy. It follows . . . Kant . . . who . . . influenced Protestant theology to reject the rational foundation of religion in favour of the idea that religious truths must be received not by reason but by feeling . . .'. (My italics.) Good luck Mr. Broom. G. L. SIMONS.

Mr. John L. Broom has spoken of the Atheist's dilemma, but there is none such. There is only Mr. Broom's dilemma, due to his hankering after the impossible—an absolute set of moral standards.

Mr. Broom "would like to believe that something more than my own personal opinion is involved when I judge that Danilo Dolci is a better man than was the Commandant of Belsen". Well, in a sense, more is involved than just Mr. Broom's personal opinion: a humanitarian tradition is involved.

Morality is not merely "a matter of individual opinion or taste". To talk thus is to talk as though human beings lived in isolation and traditionless. ROBERT DENT.

The foundation of Christian Morality is the "Will of God". This "Will" causes an immense amount of moral confusion here on earth, by "willing" things which are mutually incompatible, e.g. War and Peace, Grace and Sin, Heaven and Hell, etc.

The foundation of atheistic morality is human judgment which is much more simple and much less confusing than the "Will of God". We do not claim that human judgment is infallible, but it can be fairly reliable. There is no real reason to doubt the human judgment which condemns the gratification of sadistic and anti-social impulses and strives to promote the practice of those domestic and civic virtues which facilitate the peaceful enjoyment of life for the large majority of people.

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The fundamental objection to Christianity or any other orthodox religion is a purely moral objection to telling lies. There is however no reason to believe that our moral judgments derive from a different origin from other human judgments.

P. P. CROMMELIN.

A HUMANIST'S DECALOGUE

Dr. Ronald Fletcher's "Ten Non-Commandments" impressed me as the most significant attempt I have yet seen to present a genuine Humanist Decalogue; an alternative to the much-vaunted religious codes. It is not sufficient to indicate the deficiencies of the latter. "What are you going to put in their place?" is a legitimate question here, and now, thanks to Dr. Fletcher, we have a positive substitute to offer.

J. G. GOODWIN.

Congratulations on your issue of May 24th, containing two remarkable reprinted articles, "Ten Non-Commandments" and "Frank Sinatra on Religion". These seem just right for teenage consumption.

F. M. BLAKE.

With reference to Dr. Ronald Fletcher's repeated phrase "In which we agree with Moses", it seems to me that Moses was not only a sublime example of not practising what one preaches, but also of changing the teaching to suit the exigencies of the moment. To do Moses justice, it is related that he was not quite so sanguinary as Jehovah, and indeed, on several occasions dissuaded the Divine Ruler of the Universe from perpetrating massacre upon his Chosen People, using the expedient argument that the Egyptians wouldn't half have something to say about him if he was caught at that lark. However, Moses started his adult career by murdering an Egyptian, and in later life, stood on a hilltop blessing his army, which, forsooth, were murderously successful while the old man held his arms aloft. Maybe his greater crime in our eyes would be the massacre he instructed his loyal disciples to commit, after breaking the Ten Commandments in his anger at one fell swoop, because the Chosen People had chosen their own God. The massacre of St. Bartholomew had nothing on the massacre of the Golden Calf. It does not appear, either, that Moses did ought to prevent the Lord from the murder of all the Egyptian first-born.

Thou shalt not covet!—well, again Moses was a poor advocate for that philosophy; did he not instruct the Chosen People to steal the jewellery of the Egyptians? Did he not order the Exodus; to take over the land flowing with milk and honey, belonging to seven great nations; who presumably had tilled and planted and stocked their country until it became the object of covetousness of the Wandering Jews?

No, do not let us go to Moses for moral instruction.

EVA EBURY.

OBITUARY

Robert Green, who died in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on May 11th, at the age of 76, was born in Co. Down of Scottish and Irish parents and received a strict Presbyterian upbringing. He began to have real doubts, he said, when he was 25, and the turning point came in the first world war. He was shocked to see the number of soldiers who were killed in battle immediately after attending religious service. Though wounded himself, Robert Green survived—a Freethinker.

He was a kind man who never tried to force his views but relied on reasoned argument, and his four sons share his Freethought. He was also a keen Trade Unionist.

Aware that he was dying, Robert Green asked for a secular service and this was conducted by Mr. F. R. Griffin at Newcastle Crematorium on May 16th.

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