

The Freethinker

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Peace and Goodwill

By MARGARET McILROY

CHRISTMAS IS HERE AGAIN, to delight the children and swell the bank balances of shop-keepers. Clergy are complaining that Jesus is increasingly left out of the festivities, and stationers are grouching because some of the vast sums spent on Christmas cards are going not to them but to charities to benefit the hungry. Jehovah's Witnesses are adamantly refusing presents to their children, because—allies we would gladly do without—they deny that Jesus was born on December 25th. Christmas is here, the eagerly awaited, the happiest and the saddest time of the year, the busiest season for suicides, the time when memories of past happiness most torment the lonely and bereaved.

Christmas Contrasts

Christmas faces us with contrast after contrast. It is the time when Christianity appears most attractive. The lovely traditional carols, with their simple melodies, catch at one's heart:

He hath op'ed the heavenly door,
And Man is blessed evermore.

Mary and her baby represent all maternal tenderness and helpless babyhood. One could even wish to be a child again to believe in this remarkably pointless miracle and those "glad tidings of great joy", to believe that "the angels of God are crowding the air", and that Christ

Calls you one and calls you all
To gain his everlasting hall.

Most Beautiful—and Silliest

Yet this, Christianity's most beautiful festival is the one which most definitely lacks even the remotest connection with any actual historical event. One may accept the historicity of a Jesus, an itinerant preacher of remarkable, and even attractive, personality, crucified for leading a revolt against Rome—as was so ably argued in one of the most interesting books of the year, *The Death of Jesus*, by Joel Carmichael. However, if there was such a Jesus it is still quite certain that he was born not of a pure virgin, but to an artisan and his doubtless dutiful wife, in the normal course of nature, with the assistance of no angels, wise men or kneeling cattle, and not in any snow-covered Bethlehem stable. One cannot, of course, be certain that he was not born on December 25th—as likely a day as any other of the three hundred and sixty-five. Thus at the very moment when Christianity appears at

its most attractive it is also at its silliest. The imagination boggles when one tries to visualise the mental processes of a man—still more a new-born baby—who is simultaneously part of God. Only their grossly limited idea of God could have made the idea credible to generations of Christians, and the naivety of the motives usually attributed to God is breathtaking.

The Christmas story retains its charm because it taps the basic human emotion of delight at the birth of a baby.

It is ironic that the bigotry of the Catholic Church, which more than any other exploits the Nativity, is responsible for the tragedy of many babies being born without the welcome that is their birthright.

Narrowness

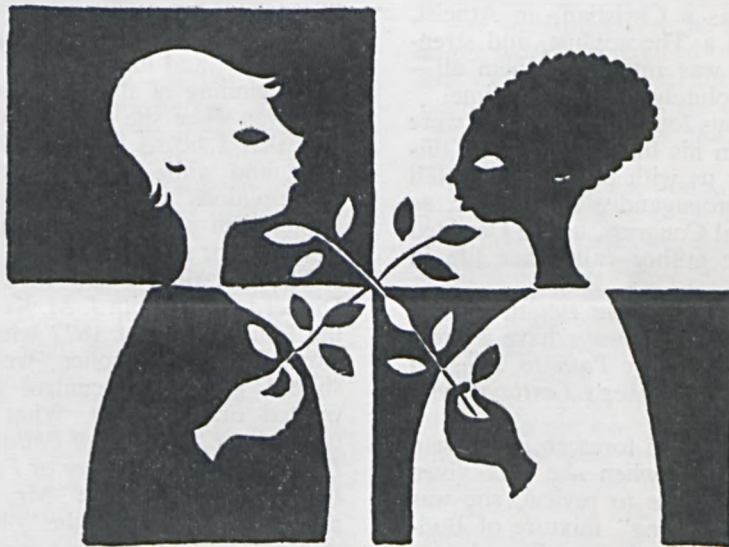
However, we reject utterly the narrowness of the Jehovah's Witnesses who refuse to celebrate Christmas. The date was celebrated long before Christianity as the birthday of the sun, since the days then begin visibly lengthening again, and we and Christians alike live by the sun. But were there no natural reason for the festival at all, we would

be right to celebrate simply because our neighbours do. There is not so much goodwill in the world that we should reject any occasion of adding to it.

Pope and President

We regret the deaths this year of two men who have done great services for peace, Pope John and President Kennedy, and acknowledge our debt to these two good Catholics. Let us not be left behind by the best of modern churchmen, but recognise, with the Bishop of Woolwich and his like, that a man's formal creed is far from being the most important thing about his character. The essential distinction is between those who do and those who do not care for the welfare of other people and of society—on one hand the Samaritan, and on the other the priest and the Levite passing by on the other side. We trust that our readers, as people connected with the Freethought movement, which has always linked itself with progressive causes to a degree unequalled even by the Quakers, are all on the side of the Samaritan, but it would be idle to pretend that the mere absence of belief in a god automatically makes one a virtuous citizen.

We honour Pope John and President Kennedy because they used the influence of their high positions and remark-



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able personalities to work for peace and racial equality. These are the two greatest problems of our time, whose solution will open the way to the solution of all the others. We may therefore echo gladly the Christmas slogan, "Peace on Earth to Men of Goodwill!"

Annie Besant

By H. CUTNER

The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant by Arthur H. Nethercot. Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1963. 483 Pages. 42s. net.

THERE IS NO DOUBT about Annie Besant's remarkable oratorical powers. Like the late Harold Laski, she could imbibe a subject and pour it out without a note to help her—as she did, for example, when she made a speech in defence of Malthusianism in court at her trial with Charles Bradlaugh for publishing the *Fruits of Philosophy*. And the many Freethought lectures she gave for over ten years afterwards on the platform of the National Secular Society and the flood of pamphlets she wrote on atheism and cognate subjects were the delight of the Freethinkers of her period (roughly 1877-1888).

Her first "five lives" were as a Christian, an Atheist, a Malthusian, a Socialist, and a Theosophist, and strenuous "lives" they were. She was intense in them all—and quite certain she was absolutely right every time!

The full account of her various four "conversions" were dealt with by Mr. Nethercot in his first volume. In this second volume he pictures for us with painstaking detail how she fared as an Indian propagandist and mystic, as President of the Indian National Congress, as the Deserted Leader, and finally, what the author calls "her life in death".

For Freethinkers of course what Annie Besant accomplished with Charles Bradlaugh will always have a great fascination, and we can still read *My Path to Atheism* and the second volume of the *Freethinker's Textbook* with profit and pleasure.

Unfortunately, as G. W. Foote had foreseen, she began wandering in fresh fields, so that when she was given Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* to review, she was literally bowled over by the "dazzling" mixture of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Occultism, in that work, and over she went into the camp which Foote called "the maggots of the human brain". So thoroughly deluded did she become, that she actually believed that an Indian boy, J. Krishnamurti, she had discovered was a New Messiah, a Christ, who was to save the world—though the boy himself later strenuously denied he was a Messiah or even wanted to be one. But, while in pursuit of Theosophy in India, she became an ardent fighter in the cause of Indian independence, and Mr. Nethercot narrates this phase of her life with full detail.

How easy it is to give full astrological details to prove the stars never fail us can be seen in the Horoscope of Annie Besant published in the *Theosophist* for 1894, by the then very popular "Sephariel". As Mr. Nethercot shows, the astrologer,

did surprisingly well when he looked at the past, the present, and the near future, when he predicted trouble till the end of the century. But then he took a deep breath and plunged into the sea of tangible prophecy. "Annie Besant will live to her sixtieth year, but will not reach her sixtieth birthday...

In actual fact, she lived till her 86th year.

In the chapter entitled "The New Unveiling of Isis"—a reference to Mme. Blavatsky's book *Isis Unveiled*—will be found an excellent description of the *Westminster Gazette* articles by Edmund Garrett entitled, "Isis Very Much Unveiled"—a most devastating attack on the hum-

bug of Theosophy with its "Mahatmas" wafting letters from Tibet to Mrs. Besant; letters which she had guaranteed were genuine before a meeting of the members of the National Secular Society. Later, when she found that they had been written by W. Q. Judge, of the Theosophical Society, she did not speak to the National Secular Society again and admit she had been bamboozled. Mr. Garrett's exposure was popularly but mistakenly thought to be the end of Mrs. Besant and Theosophy.

All this and much more are described by Mr. Nethercot very fully. The parts played by people like W. T. Stead, A. P. Sinnett, Archibald Keightley, Colonel Olcott, the Countess Wachmeister, Herbert Burrows, the Rev. C. W. Leadbeater, Professor G. Chakravarti, G. S. R. Mead, and many others, are described in many pages which some of us who know a little about the early history of the Theosophical Movement recall with interest. Most, if not all, are long since dead, but Theosophy has survived, and its lecturers continue on the same old path completely undisturbed by the scientific advance.

In her Freethought days, I think Annie Besant had no belief in an historical Christ (or Jesus), but Theosophy soon made her think otherwise. Mr. Nethercot's chapter "Searching for a Christ" gives us all the relevant details. She gave a series of lectures at Adyar in 1899 on "Avatars", and insisted that "the Christ will come back at the beginning of the new age".

It was when she had got into the morass of Reincarnation that I heard her in London, before the first World War, and while I admired the way she could pour out her opinions without a pause, the higher reaches of Esotericism and Occultism mixed with Hindu mysticism were not for me.

The last time I saw Mrs. Besant was at the Jubilee Dinner in 1927, with J. M. Keynes in the chair, to celebrate the famous trial of 1877 when judges and aldermen and particularly the police were horrified that anybody should give birth control information to people who wanted or needed it. What the people who staged the trial over *The Fruits of Philosophy* would have thought of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* or *Fanny Hill*, I shudder to think. Incidentally, has not Mr. Nethercot made a slight mistake in saying that the "old-timer, Dr. C. R. Drysdale" was present? I have no means at the moment of checking it, but I think Dr. C. R. Drysdale had died many years before. It was Dr. C. V. Drysdale, his son, who was there with Mrs. Drysdale, both enthusiastic Malthusians, as was H. G. Wells, who was also present.

Mr. Nethercot's last chapter is headed the "Most Magnificent Lady", and in some ways, however much one disagreed with her, Annie Besant deserved some rich title for all she had accomplished in her long life. Mr. Nethercot himself perhaps had some doubts, especially when he thought of *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, which exposed her credulity and belief in the hotch-potch of Asiatic mysticism. But it is difficult to do justice to the patient research with which *The Nine Lives of Annie Besant* is enriched and which has given us so detailed a picture—when all is said and done—of a remarkable woman. It will be the standard biography for many years, and may indeed never be surpassed.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged, £175 6s. 5d. F. Fairhurst, 10s.; M. Lechner, £1 12s. 6d.; S.C., £5; F. Soater, £1; E. Lloyd, £1 2s. 6d.; J. Wilson, £3; B. Clifton, 10s.; R. Brownlee, £1 1s.; S. Merrifield, 3s.; F. Pearson, £1 14s.; A. Georgetti, £3 2s. 6d.; E. Cybart, £1. Total to date, December 6th, 1963, £195 1s. 11d.

Is Christianity the Only Hope?

A chapter from *God and My Neighbour* (1903)

By ROBERT BLATCHFORD

CHRISTIANS tell us that their religion is our only refuge, that Christ is our only saviour. From the wild Salvation Army captain, thundering and beseeching under his banner of blood and fire, to the academic Bishop reconciling science and transfiguring crude translations in the dim religious light of a cathedral, all the Apostles of the Nazarene carpenter insist that He is the only way. In this the Christian resembles the Hindu, the Parsee, the Buddhist, and the Mohammedan. There is but one true religion, and it is his.

The Rationalist looks on with a rueful smile, and wonders. He sees nothing in any one of these religions to justify its claim to infallibility or pre-eminence. It seems to him unreasonable to assert that any theology or any saviour is indispensable. He realises that a man may be good and happy in any church, or outside any church. He cannot admit that only those who follow Jesus or Buddha, or Mohammed, or Moses can be "saved", nor that all those who fail to believe in the divine mission of one or all of these will be lost.

Let us consider the Christian claim. If the Christian claim be valid, men cannot be good, nor happy, cannot be saved, except through Christ. Is this position supported by the facts?

One Christian tells me that "It is in the solemn realities of life that one gets his final evidence that Christianity is true". Another tells me that "In Christ alone is peace"; another, that "Without Christ there is neither health nor holiness".

If these statements mean anything, they mean that none but true Christians can live well, nor die well, nor bear sorrow and pain with fortitude, do their whole duty manfully, nor find happiness here and bliss hereafter.

But I submit that Christianity does not make men lead better lives than others lead who are not Christians, and there are none so abjectly afraid of death as Christians are. The Pagan, the Buddhist, the Mohammedan, and the Agnostic do not fear death nearly so much as do the Christians.

The words of many of the greatest Christians are gloomy with the fears of death, of Hell, and of the wrath of God.

The Roman soldier, the Spartan soldier, the Mohammedan soldier did not fear death. The Greek, the Buddhist, the Muslim, the Viking went to death as to a reward, or as to the arms of a bride. Compare the writings of Marcus Aurelius and of Jeremy Taylor, of Epictetus and John Bunyan, and then ask yourself whether the Christian religion makes it easier for men to die.

There are millions of Europeans—not to speak of Buddhists and Jews—there are millions of men and women today who are not Christians. Do they live worse or die worse, or bear trouble worse, than those who accept the Christian faith?

Some of us have come through "the solemn realities of life", and have *not* realised that Christianity is true. We do not believe the Bible; we do not believe in the divinity of Christ; we do not pray, nor feel the need of prayer; we do not fear God, nor Hell, nor death. We are as happy as our even Christian; we are as good as our even Christian; we are as benevolent as our even Christian: what has Christianity to offer us?

There are in the world some four hundred and fifty millions of Buddhists. How do they bear themselves in

"the solemn realities of life"?

I suggest that consolation, and fortitude, and cheerfulness, and loving-kindness are not in the exclusive gift of the Christian religion, but may be found by good men in *all* religions.

As to the effects of Christianity on life. Did Buddha, and King Asoka, and Socrates, and Aristides lead happy, and pure, and useful lives? Were there no virtuous, nor happy, nor noble men and women during all the millions of years before the Crucifixion? Was there neither love, nor honour, nor wisdom, nor valour, nor peace in the world until Paul turned Christian? History tells us no such gloomy story.

Are there no good, nor happy, nor worthy men and women today outside the pale of the Christian Churches? Amongst the eight hundred millions of human beings who do not know or do not follow Christ, are there none as happy and as worthy as any who follow Him?

Are we Rationalists so wicked, so miserable, so useless in the world, so terrified of the shadow of death? I beg to say we are nothing of the kind. We are quite easy and contented. There is no despair in our hearts. We are not afraid of bogies, nor do we dread the silence and the dark.

Friend Christian, you are deceived in this matter. When you say that Christ is the *only* true teacher, that He is the *only* hope of mankind, that He is the *only* Saviour, I must answer sharply, that I do not believe that, and I do not think you believe it deep down in your heart. For if Christ is the only Saviour, then thousands of millions of Buddhists have died unsaved, and you know you do not believe that.

Jeremy Taylor believed that; but you know better.

Do you not *know*, as a matter of fact, that it is as well in this world, and shall be as well hereafter, with a good Buddhist, or Jew, or Agnostic, as with a good Christian?

Do you deny that? If you deny it, tell me what punishment you think will be inflicted, here or hereafter, on a good man who does not accept Christianity.

If you do not deny it, then on what grounds do you claim that Christ is *the* Saviour of all mankind, and that "only in Christ we are made whole"?

You speak of the spiritual value of your religion. What can it give you more than Socrates or Buddha possessed? These men had wisdom, courage, morality, fortitude, love, mercy. Can you find in all the world today two men as wise, as good, as gentle, as happy? Yet these men died centuries before Christ was born.

If you believe that none but Christians can be happy or good; or if you believe that none but Christians can escape extinction or punishment, then there is some logic in your belief that Christ is our only Saviour. But that is to believe that there never was a good man before Christ died, and that Socrates and Buddha, and many thousands of millions of men, and women, and children, before Christ and after, have been *lost*.

Such a belief is monstrous and absurd.

But I see no escape from the dilemma it places us in. If only Christ can save, about twelve hundred millions of our fellow-creatures will be lost.

If men can be saved without Christ, then Christ is not our only Saviour.

(Concluded on page 404)

This Believing World

The world-shattering news that the Pope is going to visit Palestine has already circled the globe. Newspapers have made it a front-page story and, when the great event occurs, the Pope will be fully accompanied by an army of photographers, cinema and TV experts, and journalists. Nothing so wonderful has happened in history before, especially as the journey is not made merely for publicity purposes—perish the thought!—but to help bring all “our” separated brethren into the Roman Church.

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The Pope is going to visit all the fully authenticated and undeniably historical churches, grottos, streets, and towns where “our Lord” went about when he was “doing good”, and establishing his own Beloved Church. There can be no doubt whatever that only by submitting entirely to the Pope as the sole Representative of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, will there be—can there be—“unity”. We hope in addition the Pope will come across more and more Holy Relics so impudently hidden away by Muslim Arabs to get better prices. Our own Churches will require a good stock of them when they return to the one Holy and Happy Fold.

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Professor Trevor-Roper's lectures on TV deal with many aspects of *The Rise of Christian Europe*, but what he said about the Crusades (on December 3rd) will certainly be intensely disliked by all good Christians. He had the utmost contempt for all they did in the name of God and Jesus and the Cross. But at least they smashed the Christian darkness which had covered Europe for many centuries, and at last let in some precious light from the infidel followers of Mohammed. And it was quite interesting to see how the audience reacted to some of his sallies which were as blasphemous as anything heard on a Freethought platform. They laughed, though if they had been true Christians, they should have *squirmed*.

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The Rev. M. Edwards, vicar of St. Michael's, Highgate, London, evidently does not like the Ten Commandments. In his parish magazine he says, “If you had measured the lives of Hitler and Stalin against the Commandments you would find they weren't so bad. It is perfectly possible to follow the whole Ten, and yet be the greatest scoundrel in the world”. But cannot the same thing be said of the teachings of “our Blessed Lord”? Have not some of the most bestial thugs in the world been thoroughgoing Christians? All the same the Commandments do say, “Thou shalt not kill”, a teaching which Christians all the centuries have completely disobeyed. And “gentle” Jesus was ready to consign all who disobeyed him to “the damnation of Hell” for eternity, a fate far more terrible than merely killing somebody.

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So, after all, the Roman mosaic allegedly depicting a portrait of Jesus recently discovered by archaeologists in Dorset, is not of Jesus at all, but (it is surmised) of Constantine. And if not of Constantine, it could be anybody. As we commented earlier on the discovery, the really important point about the Romans occupying Britain for over four centuries is that though Christianity had been the religion followed by thousands in the Roman Empire, the Romans in Britain never left a trace of it after about 400 years of occupation. We find Mithras and his temples, but never a church to Jesus. Why?

Spacemen and Puppets

DONALD ZEC of the *Daily Mirror* recently (3/12/63) described how Hollywood director George Stevens inspires his Navajo Indian extras into expressing joy at seeing Christ. “Good morning, folks”, said Mr. Stevens, “Let's make this a good scene. Let me tell you about it. You are seeing the first appearance of Jesus Christ the Lord. He mounted this little animal [a bleached-white donkey] and rode into Jerusalem. You were the first people to see this—your faces should show wonder and awe. You can laugh and smile, but it's a strange kind of joy. Perhaps if it happened today, it is the look you would have if John Glenn landed here in his space capsule. Either expression will do—seeing Christ or John Glenn”. Mr. Stevens didn't carry the comparison further and say that both Christ and John Glenn were space-travellers, but when the Swedish actor, Max von Sydow, moved along on his bleached donkey, the director shouted: “Hosanna! All right you people, this is Jesus Christ the Lord! Show awe! Show awe! Joy, you people in the foreground, joy! This is the Lord—wave, run, folks, run!”

From the Bible on the big screen to the Bible on the little screen. And with puppets instead of Navajo and Swedish actors. That is how ITV proposes to present a series of Bible stories if the Church Religious Advisory Council approves. The author, Roberta Leigh and her partner, Arthur Provis believe that a combination of puppets and cartoon animation “can achieve a realism hitherto unattained in this field” (*Daily Telegraph*, 3/12/63). As for ITV's interest: “It will cost about a fifth of the expense of using real people”.

IS CHRISTIANITY THE ONLY HOPE?

(Concluded from page 403)

Christianity seems to be a composite religion, made up of fragments of religions of far greater antiquity. It is alleged to have originated some two thousand years ago. It has never been the religion of more than one-third of the human race, and of those professing it only ten per cent at any time have thoroughly understood, or sincerely followed, its teachings. It was not indispensable to the human race during the thousands (I say millions) of years before its advent. It is not now indispensable to some eight hundred millions of human beings. It had no place in the ancient civilisations of Egypt, Assyria, and Greece. It was unknown to Socrates, to Epicurus, to Aristides, to Marcus Aurelius, to King Asoka, and to Buddha. It has opposed science and liberty almost from the first. It has committed the most awful crimes and atrocities. It has upheld the grossest errors and the most fiendish theories as the special revelations of God. It has been defeated in argument and confounded by facts over and over again, and has been steadily driven back and back, abandoning one essential position after another, until there is hardly anything left of its original pretensions. It is losing more and more every day its hold upon the obedience and confidence of the masses, and has only retained the suffrages of a minority of educated minds by accepting as truths the very theories which in the past it punished as deadly sins. Are these the signs of a triumphant and indispensable religion? One would think, to read the Christian apologists, that before the advent of Christianity the world had neither virtue nor wisdom. But the world is very old. Civilisation is very old. The Christian religion is but a new thing, is a mere episode in the history of human development, and has passed the zenith of its power.

THE FREETHINKER

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

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.
- Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street,) Sunday Evenings
- 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.
- Wottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 22nd, 6.30 p.m.: FILM, "On the Threshold of Consciousness".
- Marble Arch Branch (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, December 22nd, 7.30 p.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, "Christmas Legends Today".
- North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, December 20th, 7.15 p.m.: A Meeting.
- Wales and Western Branch NSS (Bute Town Community Centre, Cardiff), Thursday, December 19th, 7.30 p.m.: "Any Questions?"

Notes and News

CHRISTMAS comes but once a year . . . and we hope that this year it will indeed bring good cheer to our readers. As for the world at large, we have nothing to add to Margaret McIlroy's sentiments as expressed in Views and Opinions. "Peace and Goodwill" are the greatest aims of mankind. If only man would realise it . . .!



NEXT WEEK, Mrs. McIlroy considers the changing attitude to birth control of progressive-minded Roman Catholics, and especially of Dr. John Rock, Emeritus Professor of Gynaecology at Harvard University, who has been associated with the development of the "pill". Speaking to the Family Planning Association in London on December 19th, on "Sex, Science and Survival", Dr. Rock said that a society which practises death control must at the same time practise birth control.



POAU (Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State) is often asked why it doesn't advertise in magazines as Catholic organisations like the Knights of Columbus do. The Executive Director, Glenn L. Archer has explained why in a circular to members and supporters. POAU's advertisements are reprinted by the major American magazines. "On my desk

right now", says Mr. Archer, "are letters from *Time*, *Look*, *Newsweek* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. All say the same thing in different words: No!" And because "POAU's programme cannot be held back until the day all publishers are unafraid", it has trained teams of men during the summer "to go back to their home states and set up public rallies in every town over 10,000", concentrating especially on areas where "front" groups are trying to trick local governments into tax support of Roman Catholic institutions.



IN A letter to *The Guardian* (9/12/63), W. W. Hill of Muswell Hill, London, replied to the oft-repeated claim that long before the state schools, churchfolk subscribed the money to build schools. So far from the Church unselfishly leading the way, it actually held up educational progress for 63 years—until the Education Act of 1870. In 1807 the House of Commons passed a Bill (brought in by Mr. Whitbread) to establish a publicly-financed and publicly-controlled universal school system. This Bill, as Mr. Hill pointed out, "was killed at the instance of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who based his opposition on the ground that education should be 'under the control and auspices of the Established Church'".



REVIEWING Peter Fryer's *Mrs. Grundy: Studies in English Prudery* (Dobson, 35s.) the other week (29/11/63) in the *Daily Telegraph*, David Holloway referred to "one of the strangest victories of the sabbatarians", the closing of children's playgrounds in many parts of the country on a Sunday. "I know of one South Devon town", Mr. Holloway said, "which to this day solemnly padlocks its swings on Saturday night, but leaves the slide and see-saw free for the youthful sabbath breaker". And going back to 1900, he cited this amusing Band of Hope "blackboard summary" of "The Drinking History of England":

- Britons and Romans: Occasionally intemperate.
- Saxons and Danes: Great Drinkers.
- Normans: Copied English intemperance.
- Plantagenets: Lived luxuriously.
- Tudors: Intemperance increased.
- Stuarts: Wild excesses.
- Hanoverians: Drunkenness became a National Vice.



THREE ten-year-old boys admitted at Bromley Juvenile Court that they had caused £3,000 of damage in raids on a churchyard at Orpington, Kent; and the only conceivable motive they had, said Detective-Sergeant Brian Smith (*Daily Mail*, 4/12/63), "was that one of them came from a family of Jehovah's Witnesses. His father was teaching him to become a full member of the sect and the boy did not understand what his father meant. He seemed to be incensed against other religions". The boy's father told the court: "My son was confused. It is not part of our teaching to destroy other people's churches".



A FEW days earlier (29/11/63) the *Daily Sketch* had reported that 15-year-old Bernadette Lange had been appointed a minister by Jehovah's Witnesses. "I'm looking forward to making door-to-door calls and meeting plenty of people", Bernadette said. But the work will not be full-time until next April, when she leaves school.



THE Communist Party of Great Britain (16 King Street, London, W.C.2) has reissued a valuable little booklet, *London Landmarks* (1s. 6d.), a guide, with maps, to the places where Marx, Engels and Lenin lived and worked. An appendix lists the known Manchester addresses of Engels.

Pioneers of Social Change

By F. A. RIDLEY

Pioneers of Social Change by the veteran Humanist author, E. Royston Pike (Barrie & Rockliff and Pemberton Publishing Co. Ltd., cloth, 15s., paper, 10s. 6d.), may best be approached as a valuable and heavily-documented study of social reform in that "century of stupendous progress" (as the late Joseph McCabe once aptly described it), the 19th century; an era which in English history reached its climax in the Victorian age. Actually it is rather incongruously titled, since Queen Victoria herself played a quite negligible part in contemporary projects of reform and would, most decidedly have been "not amused" by a good many of them.

The 19th century in general and the Victorian age in particular, were essentially ages of reform; for this was the precise era when (what it is now the fashion to entitle the first Industrial Revolution) was in its heyday with Britain as its unchallenged metropolis. Between 1800 and 1900, a still predominantly rural England became effectively industrialised as "the workshop of the world". The results of this drastic transformation were of course not entirely beneficial. At the inception of "the century of stupendous progress", the radical William Blake, denounced "the Satanic mills" of Lancashire and Yorkshire which were then simultaneously creating wealth and poverty upon a hitherto unprecedented scale; whereas at the end of that self-same century another percipient critic (a high Tory this time, Dean Inge) went on record with the caustic observation that: "If it indeed be progress to turn the woods and fields of Essex into East Ham and West Ham, then we may well be thankful that 'progress' is a transient and sporadic phenomenon".

Incidentally, the only serious criticism which I feel inclined to make of Royston Pike's admirable little volume is that its introductory sketch of the social, cultural and religious background against which his pioneers of social change actually worked, and the contemporary failings of which determined their respective spheres of social activity appears to be rather inadequate. For example, that worthy pillar of orthodoxy in church and state, Hannah More, whom Royston Pike exhibits as the pattern of her contemporary orthodoxy, was actually a very minor lightweight in the social annals of the 19th century. Why not have taken someone more representative and influential, say Victoria herself, or perhaps Mr. Gladstone, whom an unkind political destiny ultimately compelled effectively to undermine the entire Victorian social order of which he was nevertheless subjectively such a completely representative figure?

This said, there is little enough to criticise and much to admire in Royston Pike's eleven concise sketches of pre-Victorian and Victorian *Pioneers of Social Change*. Some of the eleven are still remembered; e.g. Malthus, Bentham and Mill, all notable pioneers in their way and day. Others for example, "Tom" Paine and Robert (why not Bob?) Owen, have become long ago virtually canonised saints in radical literature, but at any rate, until quite recently, were systematically ignored and/or denigrated in orthodox literature. Indeed, they were systematically misrepresented.

How often for example has it been stated in both print and speech that "Tom" Paine was an Atheist—"a dirty little Atheist" was the description by an American President, Theodore Roosevelt, despite the surely obvious fact that Paine was an ardent Deist, who wrote his classic

Age of Reason, as much to refute atheism (then fashionable in French revolutionary circles) as to demolish the verbal inspiration of the Bible, whose teachings he held to be unworthy of God, and who began his critique of then fashionable Christian orthodoxy with an eloquent and evidently heartfelt affirmation of belief in the Supreme Being, the God of the Deists.

Nor as Mr. Pike shows in revealing detail, were his other reformers much more exempt than was Paine from inaccurate and bigoted criticism. In which connection it is perhaps a pity that our Humanist author did not include a sketch of the great founder of the National Secular Society, Charles Bradlaugh, who surely ranked as one of the most versatile reformers of his day, whether as the militant apostle of atheism, republicanism, neo-Malthusianism (a sketch of Malthus is included here) and colonial reform. For was not Bradlaugh known in his day as "the Member for India", who did much to prepare the way for the ultimate political emancipation of that vast sub-continent? As it is, several of the reformers here depicted, though certainly worthy enough champions of various progressive causes in their day, nowadays are dim and well-nigh forgotten figures. Who today, knows much about say, Samuel Romilly and/or Lord Shaftesbury? Or who nowadays could readily quote that utilitarian philosopher and cat-lover, Jeremy Bentham, or even that somewhat nebulously noble saint of Rationalism, John Stuart Mill?

Incidentally, Karl Marx's opinion of Mill was about as unfavourable as is apparently Mr. Royston Pike's of Marx himself. I must add that the one "pioneer" to whose inclusion in this volume I take some exception, is Sir Edwin Chadwick, for whilst Chadwick was no doubt a sanitary reformer who "reduced the stink", he was also a principal author of the Draconian Poor Law of 1834, that monument of man's inhumanity to man" with its penal workhouse. Contrarily, Francis Place is, we are inclined to think, rather better known than Mr. Pike appears to imply.

It is somewhat ironic but it is probably true, that the major achievement of social reform in Victorian days, as concurrently its most revolutionary innovation, was represented by the economic and educational emancipation of women, a cause which incidentally owed nothing to that pious reactionary, Queen Victoria herself, though in fairness—a small point but one worthy perhaps of mention—she, like Jeremy Bentham, was a great cat-lover and perhaps did make a contribution to the immense improvement in the treatment of that attractive anarchist of the animal universe. But if so, it is about the only claim that the "great queen" has to be considered as "a pioneer of social change".

However, far more solid was the (pre-Victorian) contribution of Mary Wollstonecraft, that tragic pioneer of "Rights for Women" and of the more bourgeois, but perhaps not less useful, Victorian feminist and pioneer of higher education for women, Barbara Bodichon.

Personally, I found these "rebels of the drawing-room" the two most instructive sketches in Mr. Pike's new book. They afford fascinating glimpses of the astounding mental and moral revolution that has transformed the formerly humiliating lot of the feminine majority of the population of Victorian England.

Mr. E. Royston Pike is to be congratulated upon continuing his long career of intellectual enlightenment, with

this admirable primer of social progress. No student of English social history can fail to learn much from it, whilst our author's lucid manner of presentation makes *Pioneers of Social Change* an altogether excellent text-book for

elementary students of social history. We congratulate its veteran Humanist author and hope confidently that this excellent book will be first widely read and then kept for permanent future reference upon its readers' shelves.

French Freethought in the Nineteenth Century

By HENRY GEORGE FARMER

THE SPIRIT of free inquiry in science and philosophy had pervaded the schools since the dawn of the century. With the end of the Romantic period came a longing for reality. In art and literature, realism was partly the reflex of the growing scientific spirit. Many, indeed, like Bertheroy in Zola's *Paris*, looked upon science as the panacea for all evil, social and political. Said Albert Regnard in his *Chaumette*, "Science suffices to give harmony to a regenerated society. She forms the solid ground on which future generations will raise humanity to an eternal temple".

Church and state immediately fell foul of those intellectuals who would regenerate humanity by science, and just as the former set out to silence the Freethinkers, so the latter sought to coerce the political rebels. Professors inclined to the slightest deviation from orthodoxy were dismissed summarily. That was the fate of the brilliant Auguste Rogeard for refusing to attend Mass, whilst a few bolder spirits who dared to publish their heresies were consigned to durance vile and their publications confiscated. We see a Michelet, a Quinet, a Renan, expelled from collegiate precincts for their unorthodoxy. What then could have been the portion of lesser fry in that frenzy of the church militant—with the backing of the state—to curb rebels and heretics. It soon became apparent to the scientific realists that so long as the clericals had the power to suppress opinions which did not fit into their doctrine or creed, all progress was checked. Church and religion had therefore to be combatted with as much strength as the state and the empire.

There had been a number of journals issued by the advocates of Freethought, and among them the *Libre Penseur* and the *Rationaliste*. The most popular was the *Morale Independente* of Louis A. Martin. He, like others of a "similar kidney", had tasted prison for a book entitled *Les vrais et les faux Catholiques* in 1858. After that there was a short lull until 1865 when a very outspoken journal the *Candide* was launched by a very gifted young Doctor of Laws named Tridon whose book *Les Hébertistes* (1864) won for him the plaudits of the Paris intellectuals as well as a spell in jail for his trouble. His biting line, "Gods, Priests and Kings are blood relations", was never forgiven by church or state. He was sentenced for more than two years on account of his journal which was suppressed. Among his contributors were a few notables, including Auguste Blanqui, whose article on "Monotheisme" attracted attention. He was the brother of Jérôme Blanqui the economist, who held even stronger views than Auguste, and was condemned to death in 1839 for his militant views, although the sentence was commuted for life imprisonment. Fortunately the brighter days of 1848 set him at liberty for a while. His motto, "Ni Dieu ni maître", is an index to his philosophy.

Three other young Freethought advocates, all Doctors of Medicine, were Regnard, Naquet, and Clemenceau. Together they issued the *Revue Encyclopédique* in 1866. It was red hot with blasphemy, whatever that may mean! It was seized at its first issue simply because it contained

an attack on theism. Regnard was the author of a daring volume called *Essais d'Histoire et de Critique Scientifique* published in 1865. In it he proclaimed scientific materialism. It was so utterly unorthodox that no publisher would risk publication: so Naquet issued it at his own risk and cost. Naquet was famed for some medical books which brought him wide recognition in his profession. Clemenceau, who afterwards became the French Premier in 1907, was a prominent advocate of Freethought in his early days, and was still fighting the clericals—smiting them hip and thigh—during his later governance. He never forgot that he was a *libre penseur*.

Turning back to the suppression of the *Revue Encyclopédique*, in 1866, it is obvious that the clericals did not have it all their own way. Regnard and Louis Asseline immediately issued *La Libre Pensée*, and among its contributors were Rigault, Eudes, Casimir Bouis, and André Lefèvre, all of whom took a prominent part in the Paris Commune of 1871, which made secular education a firm plank in its principles. Both Eudes and Regnard were immediately clapped into prison and the journal confiscated. Unfortunately the "powers that be" never seem to learn that you cannot suppress thought by edicts, and much to their surprise the suppressed *Candide*—as the Christian creed avers—was "born again" as the *Critique*, whilst the banned *Libre Pensée* reappeared as the *Pensée Nouvelle*. The result of tyranny over the press was that the *élite* of the literary world—including Letourneau, Hovelacque, and Thulie—not only came out in defence of the Freethought press, but became contributors to *La Pensée Nouvelle*. Meanwhile the clericals had not finished with Naquet. They contrived to secure a sentence of fifteen months against him in 1867 for "belonging to a secret society". Secret! It's enough to make a cat laugh. In the following year when his *Religion, Propriété, Famille* appeared, Naquet was condemned to four months' imprisonment, a fine of 500 francs, and perpetual interdict of civil rights. Fortunately he was able to escape to Spain.

GIUSEPPE VERDI

IT WAS 150 years since the birth of Verdi on October 10th. His operas are still performed, but it is not always recalled that he was a deputy (MP 1872) and later a Senator (1874); not only strongly anticlerical, but—as his wife wrote in her copialetrre—"he is a shining example of honesty; he understands and feels every delicate and elevated sentiment. And yet this *brigand* permits himself to be an atheist with an obstinacy and calm that makes one want to beat him". Verdi gave instructions in his will that there should be no religious service at his funeral, and this was carried out. Whether he was a member of the Societa Atea, of which Garibaldi was president, I do not know. In 1870 he wrote to Clara Maffei, "I cannot reconcile Parliament with the College of Cardinals, the freedom of the press with the inquisition, nor the Civil Code with the Syllabus".

C.B.B.

A Freethinker's Anthology

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

Idéal Laïque: Concorde du Monde ("The Secular Ideal: World Concord"), an anthology by Jean Cotereau.

Fischbacher of Paris has just published this anthology gathered from writings and speeches by leading Frenchmen over the past four centuries. It opens with a quotation from a modern, Joseph Brenier, which can be translated briefly, "We should look forward, but it would be ungrateful and foolish to forget the work of our predecessors"; and the title is taken from a 16th century writer Guillaume Postel. By *laïque* is understood secular education; and the book gives a survey of the struggle for the schools which is still vitally important in present day French politics. As Turgot wrote a century and a half ago, "Our ideal is eternal; our opponents always the same, and our struggle ever unachieved". Four hundred years ago Montaigne in his *Institution des Enfants*, asked for the children that "conscience and virtue should have reason for sole guide". Talleyrand, although he became bishop of Autun in 1789, nevertheless proposed a scheme of public education to the Assemblée Constituante in which he claimed that, "apart from system or opinion, considering men in their relations with other men, children can be taught what is good and what is just, and to love the good and seek happiness in right action". In fact, bishop though he was, Talleyrand was also strongly anti-clerical and, according to Napoleon, an atheist. Napoleon did not like Talleyrand, but could not get on without him. Talleyrand disapproved of the Emperor's imperialism and could get on without him. Condorcet, the year after Talleyrand, presented to the Assembly what we should call here an Education Bill, which was eventually adopted; in it he favoured strictly secular education without any state bias. For 80 years the struggle for the schools between church and secular state continued till Jules Ferry established a secular system for the state schools. Today about 80 per cent of French children attend the state schools. If a

reader wishes to know something of what Lamartine, or Victor Hugo, or Erckmann-Chatrian, thought on this subject, he will find it in Cotereau's anthology.

There is a regrettable indifference towards the schools in this country. We were late in adopting a system of state education; for half a century the subject was fiercely debated between Anglicans on the one side and Nonconformists on the other, and the resulting compromise gave us the dual system, of which I do not think we are proud.

Friend Cotereau's book is a remarkable work, displaying very wide study of writers of quite different opinions, and should be read by those who wish to understand the need for secular education and the problem of the schools in France.

CORRESPONDENCE

DOGMA

Mr. Dent makes two points in criticising my article on dogma. I agree with his first and disagree with his second.

To use selected examples in the way that I did was careless and invalid. I hope that other readers have noticed this error in the article. (On the other hand, my main point stands—the First World War was caused by dogmatic and bigoted people.)

Mr. Dent's second point is a curious one. He says I should know "that Stalin's purges cannot be attributed to Christianity". My article does not imply that they can be (although even this can be argued since Stalin was educated in a seminary). My point in mentioning Stalin was really quite the opposite—to indicate that dogma can be secular as well as religious.

G. L. SIMONS

THE LOVE OF GOD

Every morning the BBC has a 5 minute religious talk to which I occasionally listen. (Some times they are quite useful but usually quite silly.) However, on November 23rd, i.e. the day after President Kennedy had been assassinated, the speaker came out with the amazing statement to the effect that "God loved the assassin". I didn't take down the exact words, it was to the effect that "God loves everybody—even including the man who had assassinated President Kennedy".

ADRIAN PIGOTT.

WITHOUT COMMENT

A ghost is said to be haunting courting couples in a village lane.
—Daily Mirror (25/11/63).

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