

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXV—No. 6

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

In this remarkable book *Objections to Roman Catholicism*, edited by Michael de la Bedoyere (Constable 18s.), practising Roman Catholics—one a Jesuit archbishop, the others laymen and laywomen—voice a series of criticisms of their Church. There is nothing very remarkable about most of what they say, but it is a new development for our own longstanding complaints against the Church to be publicly expressed by people who remain convinced that this Church is an institution of divine origin. As the editor, Michael de la Bedoyere, points out, such a book could not have been published before Pope John's day, and many Catholics, probably a majority, are not happy now at this new freedom of Catholic thought. Many priests, he suggests, despise the intellect of the mass of their flock.

Superstition and Credulity

In "Some Reflexions on Superstition and Credulity" Magdalen Goffin defines superstition as basically "any belief or practice inspired by an unworthy view of God", and credulity as "an uncritical, ill-founded belief in supposed occurrences which are in fact contrary to known truth at any given time. To believe in eternal torment is superstitious; to believe that the holy house in Nazareth flew to Italy with all its furnishings is credulous." The traditional doctrine of hell is regarded as superstition at its worst, presenting God as a hateful monster. She insists that "men can and do lose God by unrepentant rejection of him as he speaks with the voice of conscience", but despite "the dreadfulness of this self-chosen negation and loss" it is a perversion to regard this as "an everlasting state of positive suffering". However hell is still an official part of Catholic doctrine, and "a book published in 1964 with the Southwark imprimatur and intended for Roman Catholic children in grammar schools speaks of the physical fires of hell and the wicked writhing in envy and remorse for all eternity."

Sacraments and Spells

A number of widely-criticised Catholic doctrines Mrs. Goffin considers not superstitious or credulous in themselves, but the idea many Catholics have of them she does believe to be superstitious. The supposition of purgatory, an intermediate state between heaven and hell, she thinks reasonable enough, but not so the elaborate system of remittances and indulgences purporting to obtain the release of souls from it. Sacrament may be an "efficacious means of intensifying God's life in the soul", but "Rome in her general teaching and practice, has often so degraded the sacraments that they are regarded as something in the nature of spells." Similarly the cults of the Virgin and the saints, while reasonable enough in themselves, have been misunderstood, naturally, by simple people. Her complaint is that the crude superstitions inevitable among peasants have been officially fostered. "Catholics in school and parish are encouraged to believe not only facts which most certainly have not been revealed, but many which are clean contrary to what their secular knowledge tells them to be

true. This deliberate fostering of credulity takes many forms and is to be found in the highest places."

Mrs. Goffin concludes that "the stupidities, the absurdities of the Roman Catholic Church are there for all to see," but the person who sees them may be "deluded into believing something far more deeply absurd, false and silly," be "guilty of a negative credulity . . . thinking that the only things which can be true are those which are capable of empirical proof." That is, she is concerned lest the shortcomings of the Church should encourage the spread of atheism.

Mrs. Goffin's essay has been criticised particularly severely by Catholic spokesmen, who say that she is no theologian. This is doubt-

less true, but she goes more directly to the heart of the argument for that. She starts from the orthodox assumption that God is good, and therefore she concludes that he does not commit acts repulsive to her—and our—moral sense. If the tradition of the Church says that God eternally tortures people for his greater glory, then the Church is wrong. This may not be theology, but it is something a great deal more decent and wholesome than most theology.

Feudal Face

John M. Todd, in "The Wordly Church—Political Bias, Autocracy and Legalism", makes a devastating attack on the historical record of the Church. It has, he says, become a centralised system of power, allied to the secular power, which it has supported in unjust wars and used as an instrument to kill heretics. "The Church has institutionalised the gospel" and "has a feudal face because most of her traditions developed in a feudal society."

However, Mr. Todd insists that the Church is changing in the direction of democracy, with a better status for Catholic laymen, and the gradual abandonment of the use of the state to enforce conformity. He insists that there has always been another side to the Church, typified by St. Francis—a spirit of love and service. He admits that "many Catholics have been guilty of terrible evil", but he considers "that the balance of achievement, holy, human and valuable, outweighs the bad". He realises that critics may well think that the Church's apparent change of heart would not last if it again found itself strong enough to enforce its dictates, but he seems confident that the good in it will prevail.

Authoritarian

Frank Roberts, who is a lecturer in education and psychology, writes on "Authoritarianism, Conformity and Guilt". He admits that the non-Catholic may find alien "the authoritarian power which the Church exercises over its members" and its "emphasis upon orthodoxy . . . To the outsider, many Catholics would appear to be pre-occupied with keeping the letter of the law rather than the spirit . . . Many will ask what part the Church played in initiating" important social reforms such as the abolition of slavery and child labour.

"How," Mr. Roberts asks, "can we account for this

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

"Objections to Roman Catholicism"

By MARGARET McILROY

conventionalism and legalism in religious observance?" He looks for the answer in child psychology. The child of about six years has an idea of morality based on the strict keeping on rules imposed from above, and thinks in terms of severe retributive punishment. But at the age of about seven "children are prepared for their first Communion, are, being now at the 'age of reason', considered fit to begin to live by the Sacraments." Thus their religious attitudes may be finally formed at an age when religion can only be seen in terms of rigid regulations and cruel punishments. Mr. Roberts thinks that children should not be faced with responsibility for their religious lives before they are eleven. "Children are very ready to adopt adults' moral injunctions while still very young, thus conditioning themselves to harsh judgments of each other and themselves. They are easily made to feel guilty and anxious."

Mr. Roberts thinks Catholic teachers tend to be authoritarian, and suspects that there is more corporal punishment in Catholic schools than in others. He says that a morbid sense of guilt may induce young people to become priests and nuns when they have no real vocation, and cannot find fulfilment in the religious life. This is, I think, the reason why so many priests and nuns have harsh, disagreeable attitudes to those under them.

Mr. Roberts's conclusion is that "a wider place must be found in society for the active Catholic layman"—a place which the layman will have to make for himself, despite the opposition at times of "his own clergy".

The Index

Professor H. P. R. Finberg tells, with distaste, the story of censorship by the Church. A Catholic may not publish a book on any subject connected with faith or morals without a bishop's licence, but even with this licence the book may later be condemned by the Holy Office, without any reason being given, and without the author having any opportunity to defend his work. He writes with humorous bitterness about the Index of Prohibited Books. The deliberate reading of any of these books without permission is punishable by excommunication—the most severe penalty the Church can inflict. The Index contains many of the masterpieces of world literature, including all the novels of Balzac and romances guilty merely of occasional naughtiness. Other books have been placed on the Index because they told inconvenient truths about Church history. However, he considers that the Index will be allowed to die a natural death. He condemns the general attitude of the Church to controversy, and concludes by praising Pope John for "his total assurance that in confronting the modern world the Church needs no other armoury than that of her abiding truth."

Coercion through Fear

A particularly frank essay is the one by Mrs. Rosemary Haughton, "Freedom and the Individual". She describes the enemy view of the Church: "The belief that the Catholic church is the enemy of freedom has become the first article of the anti-Catholic creed. At a time when free discussion and liberty of conscience were not greatly encouraged by other Christian bodies either, the immorality of the Scarlet Woman was the number one accusation. Non-Catholics believe Catholics are not allowed to think for themselves." "The really awful thing," says Mrs. Haughton, "is not the fact that people think like that. It is that the Catholic church should present to the world . . . an image of herself which allows or even obliges honest and intelligent people" to think on these lines. "But perhaps still worse is the fact that vast numbers of Catholics are not only content to accept as true an image substantially similar though more attractively dressed, but even exult in it." Pius IX declaring in his Syllabus of

Errors that there could be no compromise with "progress, liberalism and modern civilisation" seems to give the final proof of the essentially anti-democratic nature of the Church. Though she seems now to have "suffered a change of heart," her opponents can say that "her past misdeeds show her real nature" and she is merely "biding her time until she is in a position to assert her power once more."

However, Mrs. Haughton asks us to consider not the historical record of the Church, but "whether true personal freedom is the essence of Catholicism as properly understood." (One can only comment that if freedom is indeed the essence of Catholicism the truth about their religion has been unrecognised by almost all its popes.) Mrs. Haughton insists that freedom must involve the right to do wrong and learn by mistakes. The authority of the Church is useful as a guide to self-knowledge—to say, "this is what you are; this what you are for". However, if the Church uses a political type authority to coerce through fear, it takes away "the freedom to respond to God's love by complete self-giving."

While the Church was busy insisting on its authority, "all the great movements of human progress had begun and continued not only outside the area of the Church's influence, but usually in the teeth of her frantic opposition." Although finally the Church has seen herself as others see her, there is still danger of a relapse, for many in positions of authority have no interest in freedom for the laity. "Physical force is 'out' (except apparently in Sicily and Malta) but emotional and moral blackmail is very much 'in' . . . The Monday morning questioning of schoolchildren about Sunday Mass attendance goes on: the cunning learn to lie, and the brave to associate defiance of the Church with freedom and self-respect. As they grow up the children learn to see passive obedience as the hallmark of a good Catholic . . . But those parents who would prefer to take their children away from such influences are branded as traitors . . . Threats of Hell are far from uncommon, and Purgatory is presented by kindly teachers and preachers in terms that make it appear that there isn't much to choose between the two."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Haughton's conclusion is that "the future is full of hope, but only if the past and the present are fully understood."

Contraception and War

The last essay is "Question to the Vatican Council—Contraception and War" by Archbishop T. D. Roberts, SJ—the only priest to contribute to this book. Having worked in India, he is well aware of the seriousness of the population problem there—"a problem that cannot but stun the Western mind by its complexity and its tragic character." Perhaps it is his Indian experiences that have made him think so seriously about contraception, and express opinions so different from those one would expect from a Jesuit and an archbishop. He does not directly reject the Church's attitude, for he accepts its authority, but he says, "If I were not a Catholic, I would probably be compelled on the grounds of reason alone to accept the position taken by the Lambeth Conference. . . How one could deny that conclusion on purely rational grounds—and it is on rational grounds that Catholic theologians base their case against contraception—has never been clear to me . . . It does not do much good to argue on grounds of a natural law that only Catholics are able to recognise as natural: a natural law ought to be a law natural to every being endowed with human nature."

Following Pope John, Archbishop Roberts says that an atomic war could hardly conceivably be just. Though it

(Continued on page 46)

A Disciple of Gandhi

By F. A. RIDLEY

The publisher's introductory notice prefixed to the English translation of *Right Thought* by Vidya Anand (Golden Eagle Publishers of Austria, where it was originally published in German) describes it as "a detailed study of the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and the way his ardent disciple, Acharyd Vinoba Bhave, is trying to give practical expression to his cherished dreams".

The Indian author is a disciple of Gandhi and protege of that great humanist statesman, the late Pandit Nehru. Mr. Anand (whom I had the pleasure of meeting recently and who is now engaged upon a book describing the interaction of German and Indian culture) evidently regards his philosophy as "an article of export". For he recently introduced what is, I believe, an entirely new technique into English Trade Union disputes. In March 1963, he began "a fast unto death" in order to compel the directors of a Pakistan bank in London to grant a substantial pay increase to their employees on strike. This novel form of intervention was entirely successful, for the bank authorities capitulated at once and granted all their employees' outstanding demands. We do not yet know whether this originally Oriental technique of fasting unto death (practised by Gandhi himself with conspicuous success in the course of India's own political struggle for independence) will now become a regular and recognised feature of future industrial disputes in Britain—it is difficult to imagine some of the more prosperous-looking present Trade Union leaders resorting to so drastic a remedy!

Mr. Anand commences his instructive book by a brief, but illuminating (and in part extremely grim) critique of British rule in India. British imperialism, "impelled by a lust for loot" unequalled since the Spanish Conquest of the Americas (according to a quotation from an English source) completely ruined India's traditional economy based primarily upon weaving and domestic handicrafts. Consequently, whilst India had represented a relatively prosperous trading community prior to its conquest by the East India Company in the 18th century, by 1947 when, after a prolonged political struggle, it at last obtained national independence, India had been reduced to the status of a backward agrarian nation, perhaps the most poverty-stricken in the world. It was, and still is, this dolorous economic situation that Gandhi and his present-day disciples had, and still have, to solve. It is perhaps relevant at this point, to remind readers of *THE FREETHINKER* that Charles Bradlaugh ranks amongst the effective pioneers of Indian independence. Known in his own day as "the member for India", Bradlaugh was the first leading MP to address the Indian National Congress in 1890.

As Mr. Anand reveals in a most interesting and informative manner, Gandhi and his surviving followers (of whom Vinoba Bhave, the hero of this book is the chief) attempted their solution of India's fundamental problem, the problem of mass-poverty, of actual destitution by current European standards, in an unusual and original manner. For, instead of advocating a rapid extension of the industrial revolution and of industrial techniques, Gandhi in the last generation, and Vinoba Bhave in this one, pin their hopes upon a revival of the traditional handicraft industry based on the domestic spinning wheel of India (ruthlessly eliminated by the East India Company in the interests of British mechanised industry) and upon a peaceful agrarian revolution aimed ultimately at the effective redistribution of the land

and at the restoration of the traditional Indian system of peasant holdings.

It may be added that whilst this (as it may be termed) anti-industrial revolution undoubtedly ran counter to the main contemporary economic trends, it is not entirely confined to India or unknown in the West. For Tolstoy in Russia and such English Victorian radical reformers as John Ruskin and William Morris advocated a very similar form of social revolution. In his *News from Nowhere* and *The Dream of John Bull*, Morris has given us idyllic pictures of such future Arcadian societies in which modern industry, with all its attendant drabness and squalour, is no more; and in which a free peasantry based on local tillage and handicrafts, have restored "merrie England". Though expressed in more familiar terminology, such an imagined social order appears to be essentially similar to the actual social order that Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave have actually tried to establish in contemporary post-British India.

The philosophy that animates the book is essentially that of Mahatma Gandhi, whose spiritual presence is evident on every page of *Right Thought*. But its actual hero is Gandhi's nowadays best-known disciple, Acharyd Vinoba Bhave, and most of the narrative is devoted to describing the campaign for the voluntary redistribution of the land which he and his disciples have been carrying on all over India since the early years of independence after 1947. As a result of this non-stop campaign vividly described in Anand's pages, literally millions of acres have been handed over to Vinoba Bhave for redistribution to India's vast landless agrarian proletariat, which figured so largely in "the good old days" of Victorian England and of contemporary lands. As Anand emphasises, Vinoba's campaign is based throughout on an appeal to India's traditional communal ethic which, or so the author claims, can be traced back to the days and teaching of Buddha.

However, Vinoba's bloodless agrarian revolution has received universal support from the most varied political sources; India's first President donated all his own land in Delhi and Prime Minister Nehru gave the campaign his official blessing. Both the governing Congress Party and the principal opposition Socialist Party pledged support in official party resolutions; whilst even the Communist Party, whilst entering an orthodox Marxist caveat upon the ultimate success of all such schemes of voluntary revolutions carried out by individuals and not by classes, yet declared that they "were not opposed in principle" to Vinoba's agrarian redistribution; and the Communist Prime Minister of the State of Kerala, officially welcomed Vinoba to his province. More recently, Vinoba has added a subscribers' trust for the voluntary redistribution of capital and personal wealth as well as land. This voluntary revolution is to be extended to all spheres of contemporary Indian society.

Clearly, the movement outlined above constitutes a striking exception to the general trends of modern social and economic evolution, so much so that orthodox (Western) sociology would probably discount its ultimate chances of solving the terrible social and economic problems. Be that as it may, the remarkable originality, buttressed so far by such spectacular results, of India's bloodless agrarian revolution make it a movement of unusual interest and importance. And Mr. Anand's monograph is marked equally by subjective enthusiasm for and objective knowledge of its absorbing theme.

This Believing World

In a series entitled "Why I Believe", BBC TV presented again the other evening a Ceylonese Christian missionary, the Rev. Dr. D. T. Niles, whose sturdy belief seemed to stagger even his interviewer, the Rev. Ian Pitt-Watson. After all, there's a limit even to the credulity of Christians. But not apparently in the case of Dr. Niles. He was utterly devoted to Jesus, and was rather contemptuous of Western Christianity, because its followers obviously did not share his own complete faith. We wonder whether the BBC religious director really believes that the twaddle that poured out from Dr. Niles would bring any erring straggler back into the fold.

★

The "Kentish Mercury" (January 1st) had an article on "A Vague Feeling that Baptism is a Social Necessity". Well, if baptism means a little washing, we can agree that it is necessary. One shudders to think of the sanitation—or lack of it—in the East centuries ago. Even now it's bad enough. Lots of early Christian converts never washed at all, and Jesus was entirely with them (Matt. 15, 20). Of course in those days baptism did not mean washing for cleanliness but "spiritual" washing. You "washed away" your sins. Which in plain language, is rubbish.

★

The best way to make money, if you are lucky, is to win on the pools, or with Premium Bonds, or on the horses. But there are other ways—and one of them is described in *The People* (January 17th). You can make money quite easily, says the Rev. B. Williams. All you have to do is to let him have yours when he visits your town for Jesus's sake—and through his honest-to-goodness evangelism, and because of his divine message, if you entrust him with some of your wealth God will miraculously multiply it "perhaps as much as 40 times".

★

The one great requisite is that it must be you who pays Mr. Williams first, and then God himself will do the rest. Only then can "God make you a millionaire". In fact, Mr. Williams himself has in this way been able to go all over the world without it costing him a penny piece. It all goes to show what faith in Jesus can do with other people's money. And if one doesn't become a millionaire, it simply proves how weak his faith is.

★

It has often been pointed out here, that while hundreds of nobodies can be summoned from the mighty deep by any medium, Spiritualists never seem able to contact murderers or their victims. In fact, in England there has never been a single case of this sort which has helped the police. On the other hand, mediums are in great demand by police in other countries, according to article after article in our weeklies. But no names, no packdrill, is the motto favoured by all mediums.

★

Every now and then however, the truth is revealed—many years later. For example, a "well known" medium, Mrs. Roberts is the heroine of a story by Mr. R. Egan in *Weekend* (January 20th, 1965). It appears that in 1937 a poor child who had been murdered, "came" to Mrs. Roberts in "a vision" and told her where to find the body. It was not until the medium personally investigated the spot that it was found—a story for which the only evidence was Mrs. Roberts's own. The implication was that the medium helped the police, though this was not actually said by Mr. Egan. Of course, those who wish, can believe the story related 28 years after the event, for which the only evidence is what a Spiritualist medium says.

It must be heartbreaking for a thoroughly Christian journal like the London *Evening News* to report that some clergy are boycotting a unity service (January 16th). These parsons claim that the services which took place in Rochester Cathedral and other churches "blurred over the vast differences between the Roman church and Protestant churches". Of course—but is it not rather late in the day to find this out? The main difference is that Roman Catholics insist that their Church is the one founded on a rock by Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, and in fact God himself, and that all other Churches are heretical. And no unity is possible until all heretical Churches give in and humbly acknowledge their dreadful sin. In the meantime, the Roman Church is cock of the walk.

The Perfectionist

"I EXPECT it was a man like my daddy who crucified that carpenter you talk about," the child said.

The nurse flushed.

"Well," the child conceded, "perhaps daddy had some nasty men to help him."

"You mustn't say things like that," the nurse protested. "God might hear you."

"How far away is heaven?" the child sneered. "He couldn't hear that carpenter on the cross, could He? What's the use of a god like that? He's asleep."

"Doesn't He deserve to rest after all He's done for us?" the nurse demanded. "He made this world, didn't He? and everything He made is perfect. Don't you know that?"

"What about me?" the child countered furiously, "what about daddy? We're both hunchbacks, aren't we?"

"Why," said the nurse, "you're the most perfect little hunchback I ever saw."

OSWELL BLAKESTON

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ADVT.

As chief of his jobs, the philosopher Hobbes,
Labelled life: "nasty, brutish and short":
He'd have felt fewer ills, with just one of our pills—
(See our company MO's report). A.E.C.

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THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

OUTDOOR

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London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD.

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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

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, February 7th, 6.45 p.m.: P. D. MORGAN, "The Policeman and the Citizen".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 7th, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "The New Testament Reconsidered".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, February 7th, 7.30 p.m.: PETER FRYER, "Charles Knowlton and the English Birth Rate".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 7th, 11 a.m.: Dr. JOHN LEWIS, "Morality without Religion".

Tuesday, 7.30 p.m.: Dr. LAURENCE KOTLAS, "Does Religious Propaganda in the Schools Matter?"

Notes and News

THIS week we are devoting a good deal of space to Margaret McIlroy's review of *Objections to Roman Catholicism*. The space is justified by the importance of the subject: a searching criticism of the Church by several lay Catholics and the now notorious Archbishop Roberts.

WE are inclined to agree with Lena Jeger (*The Guardian*, 26/1/65) that it was inappropriate to honour "the greatest parliamentarian of our time" by closing down Parliament. Fitting, no doubt, to leave after the tributes on January 25th, but why not—to use Churchill's own coined phrase—"business as usual" the following morning? Part of the answer may lie, as Mrs. Jeger suggested, in a "national willingness to look back rather than look forward . . ."

ON January 24th, for the second time in a week, Pope Paul issued a warning about hopes for Christian unity. The tone of his remarks, the *Guardian* reported (25/1/65) brought out clearly "the sharp difference between his views on the matter and those of the late Pope John". At his Sunday appearance at his study window over St. Peter's Square, Pope Paul warned against "evolving towards a

fragile and ambiguous unity not based on Christ"—another "indirect emphasis", the *Guardian* said, on the special position of the Roman Catholic church.

DR. J. G. BOURNE, a senior anaesthetist of St. Thomas's Hospital and Salisbury Hospital Group, has taken up a suggestion made by Dr. C. C. Clark (in the *New York Medical Record*) in 1908, that Jesus might not have died on the cross, but only fainted. Dr. Bourne has investigated more than 100 fainting cases in dentistry and has recorded that "they appeared as a series of events remarkably like the Crucifixion and Resurrection" (*The Sunday Times*, 24/1/65). Apart from the likeness of fainting to death, death is not always easily diagnosed and, as Dr. Bourne pointed out, mistakes are made even today. What, then, he asked, "could be more understandable than a mistake during the tumult of this terrible event?" According to Renan, recovery after crucifixion was known to the ancients. Dr. Bourne's theory removes the supernatural element from the story, of course, and makes a mockery of Easter Sunday (imagine the Pope celebrating Christ's resurrection from a faint!) but this isn't considered a serious deficiency. Jesus's life was "sublime without physical myths", and nothing Dr. Bourne said, "can take away the miracles of the spirit". Whatever they may be!

ANOTHER *Sunday Times* writer on Jesus, the Rev. Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, believed that the Gospel writers "distorted the message of Jesus". But this, as Margaret Knight showed in a letter to the paper (24/1/65), is a slippery slope. "If the Gospel writers were capable of distorting the fact, deliberately or otherwise, there can be little ground," Mrs. Knight wrote, "for accepting any of their more intrinsically improbable statements—as that Jesus rose from the dead." If the Gospels are not authentic, the whole basis of Christianity collapses. That they simply cannot be accepted as authentic was clearly demonstrated by a letter from J. P. Davidson of Glasgow to the *Daily Telegraph* (23/1/65). Mr. Davidson noted the contradictory and irrelevant genealogies of Jesus through Joseph, and described the birth stories as a cycle of legends. The Gospels were, in fact, "anonymous documents" and nothing was known "as fact" about their authors. What may be "good theology" or even "taught as Church doctrine" cannot, Mr. Davidson said, "be stated or written as historic fact."

THE Parent Royal Commission on education in Quebec recommended that teachers with insufficient conviction should be excused from teaching religion. And the *Montreal Star* agreed (16/1/65). Lack of conviction soon becomes evident to young minds, it said, however conscientious a teacher may be. "No school authority would argue that a teacher with insufficient grounding in science . . . should be required to teach science, even though, unfortunately, this is sometimes the case." And the same applied to religion. But the *Star* added, "the degree of a teacher's orthodoxy should have nothing to do with the evaluation his supervisors make of him as a teacher or potential principal". And yet this, too, was "often the case".

OUR frequent contributor, Oswald Blakeston, will be exhibiting collage paintings at Fontainebleau, 3 Northumberland Avenue, London, W.C.2, from February 15th to March 13th, weekdays, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. February 15th will also be the publication date of Mr. Blakeston's *Fingers* (Gaber-bocchus, 6s.), described as "unclassifiable fiction with illustrations".

Objections to Roman Catholicism

(Continued from page 42)

is not practicable at present to abolish all atomic weapons, he believes that the rights of conscientious objection should be fully recognised, so that no one should be forced to take part in an unjust war. He comments that Catholic countries, with their emphasis on obedience to civil authority, have been reluctant to recognise the rights of conscience. He admits that "the factual evidence seems overwhelming that German Catholics generally . . . supported the Hitler war effort."

It has been clear for several years that the Roman Catholic Church was changing at a speed which previously would have seemed incredible. The publication of this book shows how far the process has gone, and how difficult it would now be for the Vatican to turn it back. The writers themselves seem fairly confident that there will be no return to the bad old days. The criticisms now being made by Catholic writers are often the very ones that we have always made of the Church, though most of these authors seem to try to avoid direct statements, preferring to say "it seems" rather than "it is". This does not apply to Mrs. Goffin, who so firmly rejects the historical teaching of the Church on hell. The moral disgust with which she regards that doctrine is exactly that felt by generations of freethinkers. Other writers show up the Church as the traditional enemy of freedom and the ally of unjust governments. We have Catholic schools condemned for teaching passive conformity, and the admission that some Catholics do not wish to send their children to them but are under pressure to do so. Archbishop Roberts shows the Church's attitude to contraception to be illogical and socially harmful—using many of the arguments traditionally used by ourselves. Even two raise the basic question of whether the Church's present move towards democracy within her own ranks and toleration outside them is merely a facade covering an intention to return to her old ways should she regain the power to impose her will.

Why Stay In?

A question we must ask—and many old-fashioned Catholics are certainly asking it angrily too—is why people who have such fundamental criticisms of the Church remain inside it. (It is noteworthy that they are allowed to, and have apparently not been called to account for their outspokenness.) Catholic spokesmen have often claimed that the historical record of the Church is the proof of its divine origin and inspiration, and that any honest person looking fairly at its achievement would be convinced. Freethinkers on the other hand have seen in the Church's history a record of bloodshed, intolerance, obscurantism, superstition and mental cruelty, which, even aside from the general implausibility of its dogmas, effectively, to us, disproves its claims. Broadly it is the argument from history that these writers are conceding. They admit that the historical record of the Church is not good; it is marked by feudalism; it has accepted the values of authoritarian class societies; it has opposed humanitarian reforms; it has enslaved men's minds. When these people look at the Church they see all the things we see. They have all this common ground with us, yet they choose to remain within an organisation which we detest and see as a main obstacle to human happiness. They must indeed love their Church to wish to be in it, knowing what we and they know. Of course we, as outsiders to whom the Church seems alien and incomprehensible as well as wrong and dangerous, can never see it as it appears to a Catholic

who is accustomed to regard it with love and reverence, however clearly he may come to recognise its crimes.

The Catholic who, then, remains loyal is usually the one who has for his Church the deep love based on happy childhood memories—an emotion more powerful than reason. The Catholic whose religion is based on fear leaves the Church in relief and disgust if he once ceases to be convinced of its divine authority to regulate his life. It is very noticeable that ex-Catholics usually detest their former Church, while people who have been brought up as liberal Protestants if they abandon their religion as intellectually untenable do so with at least a vague regret. There is a fundamental difference between those Christians whose religion is based on the idea of a loving God, and those whose main concern seems to be to propitiate a vengeful monster. Catholics are in a difficult position here, as the God of their dogma combines both aspects in a particularly confusing mixture, but they have tended to emphasise—frequently with expressions of sadistic glee—the doctrine of hell fire, and in their schools the prevalence of corporal punishment has pointed the same lesson. Now, belatedly, the Church is being influenced by more enlightened, modern attitudes to children. Little Catholics frequently learn religion in the context of a happy childhood. These will be the Catholics who, like Mrs. Goffin, see the doctrine of hell as incompatible with, and irrelevant to the religion of their childhood. They will also be the Catholics who are likely to remain loyal to their Church, however much they may see in it to criticise.

Concerning hell, the traditional Catholics are in a dilemma. Most of them now are sufficiently enlightened and sufficiently aware of the dangers to mental health to be wary of teaching this dogma to little children. But the doctrine is so repulsive to the modern mind that only a person who has been accustomed to it from babyhood can accept it without revulsion. Therefore the teaching on hell is certain to be fundamentally modified—and has already been in one direction, as it is not now held to be the inevitable destination of non-Catholic Christians, Muslims and Jews.

The Future

What will be the future of the Church?—we naturally wonder. Is it possible that the reactionaries will win in the end, and the Church become again the completely authoritarian society it once was? I do not think so, just as I do not think Communist countries are likely to revert to Stalinism. Given peace, the logic of the twentieth century leads to democratic and educational advance. There are clearly far too many Catholics thinking along the same lines as the authors of this book for the movement to be easily stifled. The recent affair of Archbishop Roberts and the Foyle's luncheon is highly significant. At the request of influential Jesuits, he did not attend the luncheon held in connection with this book—he only sent along his speech to be read there. What a victory for reaction! They prevented Roberts from attending the luncheon, with the result that his support for it was far more widely publicised than it would otherwise have been, and the Jesuit Superiors were left looking foolish in the background. As an archbishop, Roberts is in a particularly good position to express his views, since he is responsible only to the Pope. It has been suggested that the extent of radicalism among the younger clergy is frequently underestimated because so many young priests are under a

discipline which prevents them from saying what they think. In the course of time, when the higher positions in the Church come to be held by men of this century, we may find that the change has gone deeper than we knew.

It would be a great mistake to see the reforming movement in the Church as merely a cynical attempt to make concessions in order to hang on to power. Here are Catholics shocked at the contradictions within their own organisation, who are citizens of democratic states, and are insisting that the democratic values they have learned outside the Church should be accepted inside it. They will have a long way to go, because the Church is an international organisation with the bulk of its membership in backward countries where democracy is not a generally accepted ideal, but in the advanced countries I think we can safely say the Catholic Church will never look the same again, nor would the laity easily agree to slip back into their old insignificance. In the last sixty years, Protestantism has changed out of all recognition, and, in England at least, it spends most of its energy recommending generally accepted social virtues and doing welfare work, instead of frightening people into fits with hell-fire sermons, and exhorting the poor to be satisfied with the station in life to which it had pleased God to call them. The Catholic Church too, I believe, will move with—though inevitably behind—the times, despite its cumbersome monolithic structure, and its pretence that it never changes. But the Catholics who have taken upon themselves the work of getting it moving have set their shoulders to a tremendous job. Let us appreciate their decency and courage, and wish them luck. They need it.

Victor Purcell—A Tribute

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

It was a terrible shock to learn of the death of Dr. Victor Purcell on the second day of the New Year. He was only 69 years of age and was still at work, striving in the causes of humanism and rationalism as well as making distinguished contributions to Oriental studies. His loss is irreparable in many spheres, both to those who care for fine scholarship and to those who admire its application over wider, rationalistic fields. Indeed, the mordant satire of Myra Buttle had reached the eyes of many to whom his authoritative works upon Chinese history were quite unknown. Purcell was a man who had played many parts in his life and illuminated them all. A whole world of scholarship and affairs is the poorer for his passing.

A distinguished career at Cambridge had equipped Purcell as a potential historian. He was trained in a university where history had come to be defined by such master-minds as Acton, Bury and Coulton and his studies had developed in him a Gibbonian approach to life. He was in every sense a great son of the Enlightenment of which Gibbon was a father. A vast learning and a width of vision were allied to the scepticism and cynicism which gave him realism and balance. He was of a distinguished heritage in the service of history. Names such as Lecky or, more recently, J. M. Thompson spring to mind as great historians in whom the salt of scepticism found its savour. Purcell was of this succession and his background equipped him to the full for every task which he undertook.

Entering upon a career in the government service, Purcell spent many years in the Far East as a civil servant. It was these years which gave him a firsthand acquaintance with Orientalism and made him a student of the ancient civilisations at their sources. His later writings show a discernment which arose from this exact and immediate

knowledge just as his work generally was to profit by the qualities of practical administration which Purcell then learned and developed.

Returning to England, Purcell settled in Cambridge where he became a fellow of Trinity College and the University lecturer in Chinese History. It would be a mere impertinence for anybody but an Oriental specialist to criticise the long series of distinguished books which he published in his chosen field. His early historical training asserted itself and was applied to many of the problems which arose out of the history of China. Indeed, one of his more recent works will take its place as authoritative in probing the wider causes and their specific outcome which were destined to burst forth in the Boxer Rising. Exact historical knowledge allied with practical insight made him an authority on the part played by the Eastern religions in the evolution of social history in Asia. At Cambridge, Dr. Victor Purcell will long be remembered as a distinguished Orientalist who added much to the knowledge of his subject.

Faced with his direct knowledge of the eastern religions, Purcell was quick to see their implications for the rationalist. Those who attended the Rationalist Press Association Conference at Oxford in 1960 will recall with gratitude his learned paper enlightening these topics. Living and working in Cambridge, Purcell soon came to assess the contemporary pressure of established religious beliefs within the university. He wrote the Myra Buttle satires as a telling answer to such sophistry as that of C. S. Lewis, a fashionable theological figure of a decade ago. But he also became a leading Cambridge humanist whose name was feared and disliked by local clergy and religious protagonists. Purcell loved a fight and delighted in an argument. His pugnacity led him into many a battle on behalf of a humanistic rationalism whilst his heart warmed towards the secularist viewpoint. But his combative spirit was called forth by both the motives and the tactics of the ecclesiastics. Purcell was a rationalist of the best type, learned and certain where he stood when faced by Christian claims. In many ways, when dealing with such issues, he was a credit to his great master, Edward Gibbon. It is indeed to be hoped that Victor Purcell may continue to provide an example for the humanist and freethought movements which he served with courage and singleness of purpose during his lifetime. He could hit and hit hard but it was always in the sincere interest of the movement which he was serving and with a striking disregard for his own special comfort within his college and university. His loss is one which can ill be spared today and which can only be overcome by carrying on his work.

EXECUTIVE MEETING OF THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society was held at 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, on Wednesday, January 20th. Present: Mr. D. Tribe who was in the Chair; Messrs. Barker, Collins, Condon, Hornibrook, Kuebart, Millar, Miller, Sproule, Timmins, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. McIlroy, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer Mr. Griffiths, and the Secretary Mr. McIlroy.

Plans for future activities in connection with the campaign against religion in the school were discussed. It was agreed that the Minister of Education should be asked to receive a deputation.

A Working Committee was formed to arrange events during Centenary Year 1966, and the International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers. Messrs. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright and D. Tribe were elected delegates to the Annual General Meeting of the National Council for Civil Liberties.

The next meeting was arranged for February 17th, 1964.

CORRESPONDENCE

APPEAL TO TEACHERS

Could I appeal through your columns to teachers who have had first-hand experience of the problems of being non-conformist, agnostic or atheist in their professional lives?

The magazine of which I am editor is running a series of articles on the practical problems of such teachers, and the extent to which they have been conscious of prejudice or discrimination against themselves.

BARRY RUSSELL, Editor,
New Venture, Birmingham University, Federation of Teachers
Training Colleges Student Unions' Magazine.

A DELICATE TOPIC

I am becoming increasingly convinced that one of the greatest impediments to the Freethought movement is the unwillingness among people to discuss religion or the Church unless they are professionally concerned. The subject is avoided at all costs by otherwise intelligent conversationalists, who seem to be under the impression it is "wise" to avoid such a delicate topic.

This is surely where the strength of present-day religion lies. By regarding it as a great and mysterious thing only to be mentioned with humility, instead of discussing it with the frankness one discusses the brain-drain or juvenile delinquency, religion has been allowed to establish itself side by side with radar and rocketships, and is accepted by complaisant agnostics as part of the modern world. This is a sad state of affairs when one considers how few cannot read or write now and there is no need for anyone to be submissive under Christian indoctrination, thanks to public libraries, TV and radio.

BERNARD WHITING

BURNS

I have read the article by Norman Paton on the religious beliefs of Burns with interest and pleasure. However Burns's house in Dumfries was far from being a slum, and though not of course up to modern standards was nevertheless a respectable middle-class dwelling. As a farmer in a small way of business Burns was a hard working man, but he laboured on his own rented fields, and was not at any time a hired ploughman.

As an excise man, first at £50 a year and later at £70, he was not by any means a poor man considering that the wage of a ploughman in those days was only £7 per year (with food and bothy) or consider Goldsmith's parson, "Passing rich on forty pounds a year". But Burns's rent for his farm at Mossiel was £90 per year, not easy to come by on the proceeds of a small farm.

And this unjust rent was probably the cause of his abandoning farming.

M. CALPIN

I found Norman Paton's article on Burns rather interesting and appreciative, but I think it is wrong to try to fit Burns into any particular category. One can enjoy and appreciate Burns without labelling him a deist, agnostic, or socialist. Personally speaking I would not be put off Burns, even if he believed in the Holy Ghost, because I like his poems and songs.

Burns was too much a genius as a poet to fit into any rigid mental strait-jacket of thought, and I don't think his religious instruction did him much harm, as he had the power to throw it aside. You just can't expect a giant to put on the shoe of a dwarf. Yet for all that Burns was in a way a religious man, although he certainly did not tie himself down to any strict moral rules in order to show himself as being a cut above others.

In that sense I much prefer Burns's morals with religion to Margaret Knight's morals without religion. And to those who think that they are morally superior to other sections of society, it may do them well to read Burns's address *To The Unco Guid*.

O ye, wha are sae guid yoursel,
Sae pious and sae holy,
Ye've nought to do but mark and tell
Your neebours' fauts and folly;

Burns, like Shakespeare, was well aware of human weakness, but was sympathetic toward it.

Ken gently scan your brother Man,
Still gentler sister Woman;
Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang
To step aside is human.

R. SMITH

"GREAT WORLD ATLAS"

May I draw your readers' attention to the *Great World Atlas* published and distributed by The Reader's Digest Association Ltd.

This atlas is interspersed with biblical passages which precede most of the explanations in its section three. These passages obviously represent the "Contributions" made by clerics listed in the "Acknowledgement" at the beginning of the atlas.

Unfortunately I did not notice the passages when I bought the atlas. I would have returned it as I consider it an impudence of that Christian organisation to make propaganda for religious interests by inserting these ridiculous and idiotic passages and let the unsuspecting buyer of the atlas pay for it at that. I informed the Readers Digest Association Ltd. today of my disgust.

WM. A. CURTIS.

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