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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Political Catholicism

ONE of the most remarkable features and, from the point of view of International Freethought, quite the most sinister feature of the post-war (1945-9) era, is represented by the astonishing re-emergence of the Roman Catholic Church as a primarily political force. This atavistic re-emergence, which is an indisputable contemporary fact, whatever view may be taken of its present causes, confronts the advanced movements of our generation with a situation which is, actually, unprecedented since the now distant era of the counter-Reformationism. Since we live in an era of revolutionary social change, in which even questions of culture are decided ultimately by political means, as demonstrated notably by the recent startling victories of Fascism and by the present world-rise of Communism, we will ask the readers of this issue of *The Freethinker* to turn aside for a moment from the battle of ideas and to consider this new reincarnation of Catholicism in the political sphere.

Is the Catholic and Roman Church primarily a political or a religious body? Is it a Church which skilfully utilises politics for its alleged supernatural ends, or an empire which uses religion with political artistry in order to intimidate and to strengthen its hold over its effective membership? "A question hard to answer" as the old Latin tag went! Almost as hard as the still older and much-debated conundrum "is Judaism a race, a religion, or a social 'way of life'?" Whatever the answer is in the case of the Vatican, at least, it is not possible to dispute that in the course of its chequered history its political intrigues and its "spiritual" thunderbolts have been all too frequently intermixed. Hitherto, the Church of Rome, like all human institutions, has known its successive eras of youth and maturity, and of old age. So far, so good! It is only what we might expect from an institution the human origins of which are ineffacably stamped on it despite its own protestations of supernatural origin. The only fact at which a Freethinker may legitimately express surprise, is that an institution could be so old without becoming senile!

The Church of Rome derived its original political character from the Roman Empire under which it originated and whose "ghost," in the famous phrase of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury (1588-1679), it still is! And it is most unfortunate that there are a score of students who know something of the democratic institutions of the earlier republican Rome for one who knows anything of the later totalitarian empire of the Caesars which furnished the working model for the Papacy's subsequent historic evolution. It was the Roman, St. Augustine (354-430) whose *City of God* (412-27) enabled the Roman Church to create in the name of the spirit what was in effect a new empire in place of the old political secular one that was just then going to pieces. Since which distant day, the fundamental aim of the

Vatican has been to subjugate human society and human culture to the totalitarian rule of "The City of God" conceived as identical with the Catholic Church "militant here on earth."

When considered from the standpoint of politics, the history of the Papacy since the fall of its secular counterpart the Roman Empire, can be conveniently divided into two main epochs: the mediæval era of totalitarian or near-totalitarian sway over European civilisation which reached its zenith in the age of Hildebrand (1073-85) and of the Crusades; and the modern defensive age since the counter-reformation, during the last four centuries, when the Church has fought a defensive battle against modern revolutionary nationalism, which last began with the protestant Reformation in the religious sphere. It would probably be true to add that the effective leadership of political Catholicism throughout this last period has usually been in the hands of the Jesuits, those master opportunists and, in particular, experts in clerical strategy and demagogic manœuvres.

Throughout this long, defensive battle during which the clerical *Torres Vedras* has been tenaciously defended against, successively, Protestantism, Liberalism, Socialism, and Communism, with their respective philosophical ideologies and political instruments, the Church of Rome has displayed consistently an opportunism that has frequently passed over into cynical effrontery (incidentally, no motto could be more inappropriate to the strategy of political Catholicism than is *semper eadem* ("Forever the same.") Alternatively, the Vatican has backed regicide and the "Divine right of Kings," extreme radicalism and political absolutism: in the former connection, it is often forgotten that the political theory of "The Social Contract," which started the French Revolution, was originally invented by the Jesuits, who also ruled a socialist state in Paraguay (17th and 18th centuries); whilst the absolute monarchies of the Habsburgs and Bourbons and the terrorist fascist dictatorships of our own day can be cited in support of the latter political rôle.

To-day, the trump card of political Catholicism is represented by the prevalent fear of the rival Communist creed. It is in anti-Communist waters that the "Successor of the Fisherman" is casting his net to-day, not at all unsuccessfully! As a bulwark against too precipitate social and intellectual change the Vatican will find many political and social allies—sometimes in surprising quarters!—in a revolutionary age such as this.

What are the present aims and prospects of political Catholicism? Its immediate prospects would seem excellent. It is astonishing, rather terrifying, to find how successfully the old mediæval Church has succeeded in imposing its ideology as the prevalent alternative to the rival Moscow creed of Communism. To-day, political Catholicism and Communism, represent beyond any doubt, the two strongest political forces in Europe, and the hold of Rome in the "New Worlds" of the Americas and Australasia is hardly less than in Europe, whilst

even in Asia and Africa the hand of Rome is increasingly visible.

Over wide areas of the world the Pope of Rome confronts the "anti-pope" of Moscow, whilst in an age of economically and intellectually bankrupt European civilisation the mediæval master, St. Thomas Aquinas, becomes the alternative intellectual master to the Prophet of Socialism, Karl Marx. This is a situation absolutely without parallel in the last century.

At what type of social order does present-day political Catholicism aim? Here, we must be careful to distinguish between temporary manœuvres forced upon Rome by expediency and her long-range permanent aims. For Rome has had many strange bedfellows throughout her long history, not all of whom have been her own free choice. In general, the type of social polity beloved by Rome is culturally static, politically authoritarian and hierarchial, economically rural, with the predominance of country over town, agriculture over industry, but unavoidable circumstances may modify this social scheme, which was substantially that of mediæval Europe.

What no circumstance will ever modify is the final aim of political Catholicism, its ultimate perspective in the age of Pius XII as, formerly in that of Hildebrand and of Løyola: universal domination of a totalitarian pattern over all phases of life, culture, and of the social order.

F. A. RIDLEY.

A COMMUNIST PROFESSOR'S PRONOUNCEMENTS

DR. J. D. BERNAL'S *Freedom of Necessity* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, 18s.) is a variety of essays chiefly relating to the scientific aspects of sociology. His ideal is the careful application of the extended powers of physical science to social betterment and industrial and agrarian improvement, rather than their devotion to the appalling purposes of war. A convinced Communist, Bernal hails the U.S.S.R. as perhaps the most progressive contemporary State, and thus well worthy of West European and American emulation.

In Bernal's estimation, Marx and Engels were among the wisest of men and, indeed, one sometimes wonders, when noting his eulogies, whether men of equal intellectual power ever existed, before his idols appeared upon our planet. Also, Victorian biology is sentenced to extinction and eminent biologists, such as Thomas Huxley and Ernest Haeckel are airily dismissed. Even Darwin seems outmoded when we are solemnly informed that: "It is important to remember that Darwin did not prove the truth of evolution; that proof is only now being completed. . . What he did was to make it an attractive and understandable doctrine to the ruling class of his time. The explanation that Darwin offered was that new forms had arisen and old forms had been wiped out as the result of free competition in the struggle for existence between slightly varied forms. This was called National Selection and by implication it meant that the way to get on in the world of free trade capitalism was not only the practical way but was the way of nature itself."

This travesty may be presented with what follows, when Bernal wishes to stress the open-mindedness of Marx and Engels, when compared with official obscurantism. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, he tells us they acclaimed as the death blow of teleology in the natural sciences. "If we compare this attitude with that of the official philosopher of science, the physicist

Whewell, a great derider of Hegel, who was at the same time urging that Darwin's book should not be accepted by Trinity College Library, we can measure the greater breadth and penetration which their philosophical outlook had given Marx and Engels." Yet, according to Bernal, Whewell must have represented the wicked capitalist exploiters! Could inconsistency and inconsequence further go?

Nor is this all, Bernal notes that Engel's *Dialectics of Nature* remained in manuscript for 45 years and might never have been published, save for the initiative of the Soviet Union. Engels is praised for his belief in the natural development of the organic from the inorganic. But this conclusion was also Darwin's, Huxley's, Tyndall's and several other scientists. Yet Bernal strives to give priority to Engels who, he declares "joined issue with two of the greatest scientists of his age, Pasteur and Liebig. All that Pasteur has shown," he asserts, "was that it was not possible to produce life afresh in sealed vessels, not that life had never arisen from lifeless matter." Yet in England, Tyndall subjected Charlton Bastian's claims to have produced living organisms from sterilised infusions to experimental examination, with negative results, and concluded that all attempts in our time, to prove spontaneous generation had utterly broken down. But, as to life's natural genesis in the past, both he and Huxley were in agreement. In the preface to his *Fragments of Science*, Tyndall tells us that holding the Nebular Hypothesis, he was logically bound to regard life as inherent in the nebula. Again, he avers, that: "Not only the noble forms of the horse and the lion, but man with his emotions, will, and intellect, were once lying latent in a fiery cloud." Certainly, when the simplest specks of life arose, the atmospheric, chemical, and other conditions of the earth, were far different to what they are to-day.

Bernal chides Victorian evolutionists for their folly in tracing man's emergence from his simian ancestors to brain development alone. Yet the power of speech, improved vision, and the greatly increased range of experience gained by primeval man through the use of the hand as a grasping and manipulative organ, were not unknown to Victorian evolutionists. If Bernal will turn to that much misunderstood philosopher, Herbert Spencer, he will find in his *Psychology*, the importance Spencer attached to the possession of tactual organs in the evolution of intelligence. The hand of man, the elephant's trunk, the parrot's claw, and the sensitive lips of the horse, are all given by Spencer as illustrations of this truth. Thus, it appears mere propaganda to parade Engels as an almost unique expositor of evolutionary principles.

When acclaiming Marx as a prophet whose foresight was far superior to that of his contemporaries, Bernal is compelled to concede the absence of any reference to Russia or the U.S. in his and Engel's Communist Manifesto in 1848. Yet even in the 18th century, David Hume counselled Gibbon to compose his immortal history in English rather than in French, as Hume truly forecasted the coming enormous English-speaking population of North America. Moreover, in the 'forties of last century, even the Tory, Archibald Alison, predicted that in a hundred years the U.S.A. and Russia would become the leading Powers of the world.

Dr. Bernal is an eminent physicist, and therefore speaks as an expert when dealing with atomic themes. His survey of the evolution of atomic energy is excellent in every way. He heartily endorses Churchill's hope "that these awful agencies will be made to conduce to

peace among the nations " instead of wreaking untold miseries on mankind.

In tracing the scientific advances that have made the atom bomb possible, Bernal notes Röntgen's discovery of the X-rays in 1895, followed by that of radio-activity by Becquerel, which revolutionised physical concepts. Then came Rutherford's theory of the atom with its nucleus and revolving electrons. Later, Max Planck and Bohr with their quantum theory, disclosed material activities previously unsuspected. "These ideas," observes our author, "led to an almost unbroken sequence of discoveries—neutron, positron, meson—culminating just before the war with the splitting of the isotope of uranium which is the basis for the atomic bomb. The bomb itself is therefore the first large-scale, practical result of fifty years of intense, fundamental scientific activity, but the power of the understanding of nature latent in that scientific work can and will express itself with increasing force and rapidity in many other ways." This clear and concise statement leaves nothing to be desired.

Bernal opines that, despite atomic weapons, armies and navies will still be necessary in warfare between major Powers, should this recur. But, as he states, many of the details of atomic energy are shrouded in secrecy, while his conclusions are those of a scientist who has had no connection with its development. He is far more concerned with the social services atomic energy is likely to render. The energy stored in this atom attains a million times the energy previously available. But for some years to come, it appears that the atomic atom's colossal cost of production, coupled with the rarity of its constituent elements will probably leave us dependent upon coal and oil for most productive purposes. But, be that as it may, however, we are assured that "in the availability of an enormous variety of radio-active elements in hitherto unthinkable quantities, we have means for the rapid increase of our chemical, biological and medical knowledge out of reach of all previous scientists."

T. F. PALMER.

THE LIMITS OF SCEPTICISM

Telepathy—Where does the Rationalist Stand ?

IN representing as a form of popular entertainment something which purports to be a genuine demonstration of telepathic powers, the B.B.C. has released a rather elusive, crafty and unmanageable hare (or is it only a talking mongoose?). The result has been a widespread stimulation of interest in thought-transference by a popular treatment of this subject in magazines and newspapers. I will not add to the strictures which the B.B.C. has received for confusing scientific research with a kind of fireside game, but dwell rather on the position that rationalists might adopt in regard to the controversy. "The Limits of Belief" has always been a fascinating subject of rationalist discussion. So let us now reverse the procedure and consider "The Limits of Scepticism." Not only telepathy, but other types of phenomena classed as "paranormal cognition" and "extra-sensory perception" which enjoy only the most frigid and off-handed acknowledgment with the orthodox scientist fall into our purview.

In fairness one must recognise (a) an inclination towards acceptance of thought-transference at least as a possibility by respectable and unprejudiced scientific workers (including Freud) and (b) the existence of some considerable evidence, albeit of an empirical type, for it. Next one may profitably consider the limitations of the

human sensory apparatus. The concept of sight would be totally unimaginable to a blind creature, just as the concept of three-dimensional existence was meaningless to Sir James Jeans' hypothetical flatworm. Let us apply the analogy to our senses. Our five senses bring us into relation with the objective world, with things that can be seen, heard, touched, tasted and smelt. We cannot be sure, however, that the external world does not contain other forces, types of sense-phenomena of which, for the lack of perceptive machinery, we remain completely ignorant.

Not only the evidence for straightforward telepathy but the famous mind-reading experiment in which cards were "divined" by the receiving mind before their markings were observed by the transmitting one must also be considered; the "diviner" was always one jump ahead which suggests some queer and inexplicable characteristic in the nature of time. Now it may be argued that some individuals, possessing what may be described as telepathic powers in however rudimentary a degree, are to some extent in tune with aspects of reality, and can therefore do things with these aspects of reality, from which "normal" intelligences are debarred.

I admit that I have never had a telepathic experience in my life; and I doubt very much (my brain being the dull, matter-of-fact sort of instrument it is) whether I ever will. Let us, purely as a tentative beginning, admit the possibility of types of phenomena we are not equipped to comprehend; and let us further admit a kind of preternatural sensibility on the part of some people whose peculiar endowments are completely inexplicable both to their friends and themselves.

The chief danger is a semantic one because the investigation of telepathic claims is so often bedevilled by its identification with the branch of inquiry known as "psychic research," and the danger here is that minds which are fundamentally unscientific, superstitious and irrational are encouraged to confuse telepathy with mystical and religious theories about human survival, reincarnation and so forth. The investigation of telepathy should be regarded as purely scientific (and it would profit from a less conservative attitude on the part of the scientific world); it should be treated as a branch of abnormal psychology, while beliefs of a religious or mystical nature which are not subject to the rational method of inquiry should be kept rigidly behind their theosophical boundary.

SAM HEPPNER.

TELL HIM NOW

If with pleasure you are viewing
Any work a man is doing
If you know him and you like him
Tell him now.

Don't withhold appreciation
Till the parson makes oration
And he lies with snowy lilies
On his brow.

For no matter how you shout it
He won't even hear about it;
He won't know how many teardrops
You have shed.

If you think some praise is due him
Now's the time to give it to him.
For he cannot read his tombstone
When he's dead.

[Masonic Journal (South Africa), October, 1948.]

ACID DROPS

The recent Anglo-Catholic Congress at Bristol wanted "One Church, One Faith, One Lord." This seems to fit Judaism pretty well—especially the "one Lord," for even the most unmathematical Christian has never managed to make three Gods into One Lord. In actual fact, one of the speakers did refer to the way "God made a Church and called it Israel," but he hastily repented and made a clarion call for the later Church—if possible, to compel people to come in. Priests should visit the people and tell them the Glorious News about "the One Church and the Unity of God." No doubt some people will be impressed—but most would prefer a return to the no-ration period and unlimited food—blatant materialists as they are.

Readers who have noticed the articles in "The Freethinker" "Exorcising the Possessed," translated by our Portuguese correspondent N.F., may be doubtful that such things could possibly happen now will be interested in the following report from the *Vancouver Province* (Canada), August, 1949, which quotes a Roman Catholic newspaper that "a priest has successfully freed a 14-year-old boy possessed by the Devil." The case had been referred to clergy of various denominations who were unsuccessful until a Catholic priest was called upon, and after the boy was received into the Church he was baptized and successfully exorcised. The belief in demoniacal possession is even now an article of faith in Catholic theology but the subject is cautiously approached, although every priest is an Exorcist—in major cases, a Bishop must be consulted.

The importance, or otherwise, of the Clergy in the marriage Ceremony was particularly brought to the fore in the case of a wedding at Holy Souls Church. The Bridal party and guests left Holy Souls Roman Catholic Church, Blackburn, recently, without the marriage taking place, when the officiating priest told them that as the Registrar had not been notified, he could not conduct the ceremony.

In cases where no Registrar is present, the officiating Clergyman (and the Church building) may be licensed by the State, and he acts as a Registrar. The legality of the marriage hinges on the license, and the religious performance that precedes the signing of the Register in the presence of the witnesses is, so far as the law is concerned—superfluous.

Devaluation has not only hit the country pretty hard but it has even hit God's missionaries. The SPG has news of "serious repercussions," and sending money out of the country, even for God's work, seems beset with difficulties. Yet what a glorious chance for a miracle! Instead, we are told that "the present situation" is a direct challenge to all who want Christ taken to the "heathen." If so, isn't it time for God Almighty to do something about it?

The Rector of Zurich University is of the opinion that in time to come men will speak of Mr. Frank Buchman as they do of St. Francis of Assisi. Is this the beginning of a Protestant drive to break the R.C. monopoly of saint making, and will the Oxford Group hold a solemn conclave in the Catholic manner complete with a Diabolus Advocatus discussing the pros and cons of Saint Frank's beatification and sainthood? One of the conditions of elevation to the Saint's calendar is that at least one

miracle has to be proved, and that is going to be rather difficult in, at least, the non-Catholic world, to-day.

Seven girls aged 16 and 17 pleaded guilty to stealing at Seaton, Devon. The prosecutor said "they went from shop to shop stealing as they went. They were light fingered, they acted like greased lightning, they were absolutely expert thieves and they gloried in their skill." They came from an Approved School for Catholics. An unsolicited testimonial to the value of religious instruction.

Southend-on-Sea licensing justices are taking no risks on New Year's Eve this year. Dancing at the annual Hospital Ball, on December 31, must cease 15 minutes before midnight. Auld Lang Syne may be sung, but not with music. The licensing justices are cutting things fine in allowing 15 minutes only to separate Southend from danger as the 1st of January will be a Sunday.

We are still waiting for a clear account of the Mission to London which ended last June. We want to know whether it was a success—that is whether many infidels and unbelievers were roped in to Christ Jesus. No one can seriously say that making believers go to church a little more could be counted a terrific victory for the time and money spent. The Church is now asking "What Next?"—and that is what a lot of people would like to know. So far the answer is—nothing.

This does not mean that there are no suggestions. Of course there are. One is that a priest and two laymen should be sent for a period to a parish where "Church life is low." But surely they know in advance that visiting unbelievers would be a sheer waste of time, while visiting the "indifferent," even if these believe in a God (as they always say they do), would not get the Church much further. The truth is that the only people who can be appealed to by a new London Mission are already pious believers, and a fat lot of good roping them in would be for a new revival of Christianity.

But if London presents an unsolvable problem, an eleven-day mission in Bolton and Ardwick has at least brought back some of the lapsed. These simply could not ignore the wonderful processions led by crucifixes and servers. Five masses were also said each day, and 300 people renewed their "baptismal vows" as a result. But where were the unbelievers? It is sad to consider their awful fate—in the hereafter.

"Less than two centuries ago mental affliction was regarded as a just punishment for some evil committed by our parents and it was felt right that the afflicted should be punished. We have, however, changed our views since then." Thus spake Sir Harry Cohen at the opening of a new institution for mental deficient at Birkenhead. The fact that it was the religious attitude that was responsible for such belief and for the horrible treatment meted out to the unfortunate lunatic was conveniently ignored. Yes! Our views have altered on this subject and we have become more humane in direct proportion to the retreat of religion.

THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Were the white ants that invaded the Vatican Protestant ants—or perhaps, Atheists?

Could one describe Miss M. Baldwin (ex-Nun) who has just left her Convent after 28 years, as a divorced "Bride of Christ"?

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

WILMOT HASTINGS, J. T. SYKES, A. HANCOCK.—Thanks for cuttings.

Will correspondents be good enough in future to keep their letters as short as possible. We regret to omit anything relevant to an issue and short letters will give all writers a chance of publication.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), THE FREETHINKER (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIDENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

SUGAR PLUMS

Bills announcing N.S.S. Lectures in Conway Hall were placed on two sites in Gray's Inn Road. One, in a quiet spot, was ripped off before the paste was dry, and thrown amongst the blitz debris. The second, in the busy spot by a bus stop, remained in position until after dark and was then torn off. A few days later the billposter made good the damage, and exactly the same destruction followed. This is only one of the countless examples of Christians in action and indicates the ideas of those Christians as to what is helpful and pleasing to Jesus and to the Creator of the Universe.

Bingley in Yorkshire, and Hitchin, Herts, have the Sunday Cinema question under discussion. In both places there is an opportunity for Freethinkers to swing into action. The General Secretary N.S.S., 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, will send a supply of a leaflet "Sunday Cinemas" to anyone who will distribute them in the respective areas. They will be sent free on the payment of postage.

The new Lewisham and District Branch N.S.S. has lost no time before getting on with the job. To-day (November 6) Mr. F. A. Ridley is the speaker and takes for his subject "The Roman Catholic Church and Superstition." The lecture will be held in the Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, Lewisham, London, S.E. 13, commencing at 7-15 p.m. Admission free. Mr. Ridley is well known in our movement and is sure of a good audience.

On Sunday, November 6, at 7 p.m., Mr. R. H. Standfast will speak at Coopers' Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6, on "Freethought at the Crossroads." Birkenhead Freethinkers are earnestly requested to attend, when after the meeting it is hoped to discuss the reorganising of Birkenhead Freethinkers. Will those unable to attend please communicate with Mr. W. C. Parry, 476, Mill Street, Liverpool, 8, or telephone Princes Park 3640.

Some months ago, Prof. Findlay, who was asked in the *British Weekly* what was the evidence that Jesus existed, gave a smashing reply. He claimed that the Rationalist Press Association published a work by the unitarian, F. C. Conybeare, in which that gentleman maintained that Jesus really had existed—and what further proof was necessary after that, asked the Professor, with crushing irony? Alas, some of his readers appear not to have been satisfied for he heads another article in the same journal, "An old question again." This time the annihilating argument about Conybeare is gracefully ignored.

Prof. Findlay wants to know who could have written the story if it was "invented"? Was it Peter? Was it any of the Apostles? Was it "Saul" of Tarsus? Dear, dear, one has only to mention their names to dismiss them with contempt. Their purpose was "to prove that Jesus was the Son of God," and to invent anything was "to defeat their own ends." So the whole story with its Miracles, Devils, Saviour, Virgin Birth, Hell, and Angels, must be true. Even the story of the Jewish saints who rose after Jesus, and appeared unto many, could not have been invented. It is all ineffably true. And now we hope that readers of *British Weekly* will leave the pious Professor alone and believe with childlike and trusting Faith.

DUPLICITY OF TRUTH ?

THE Rationalists as well as the Religionists claim to possess The Truth. Since one Truth excludes the other, what is the criterion to decide which truth is actually true?

Let us take a few concrete instances.

To all appearances the sun rises daily in the east and every evening sinks again in the west. So the saying "As true as that the sun will rise in the morning" seems to be a truism.

Yet, every schoolboy nowadays knows that this statement is absolutely false and that the *apparent* movement of the sun is conditioned through the real movement of the earth.

To an observer on the moon the truth would seem to be that both the earth and the sun spin around (his) planet and from the point of view of an observer on the surface of the sun, the movements of the earth would be apprehended correctly as to content, but inversely as to form. So all these statements are only *relatively* true, but false when considered as absolute truth. Yet, the relativity is only *relatively* relative in that all these statements are of *absolute* validity within their relation, which is a persisting relation and so far absolute.

Up to the time of Copernicus the opinion of the earth being the centre of the Universe was absolutely correct, but relatively wrong; vice-versa, the theory of the Earth moving around the sun was temporarily incorrect, but: when corroborated by practical experiences—such as the deduced calculation of the position of an unknown planet—it became truth. In fact, Truth is progressively unfolded, all truths attained and attainable by mankind are contingent, provisional and relative.

This relativity is not only conditioned by Time; our position in Society, the social factor, is another criterion.

With a view of selling with profit, the employer is quite correct in saying that the wages must be lowered in order to meet competition in foreign markets. On the other hand the worker is equally right in his demand for higher wages in order to keep body and soul together. You cannot argue *which* truth is actually true, unless you decide the standpoint from which to evaluate: do you

want to get dollars or do you prefer to raise the living standard at home and by supplying the home market give the people the means to buy the produced commodities? So long as society is divided in classes, truth, too, is twofold, conditioned by the actual social relations in which they arise. Therefore, it is impossible to search for truth if, as most Rationalists prefer, you avoid to tackle the social issues connected with it. Whether a given thought or a body of knowledge has at any moment objective *Truth* is a question that *can never be settled* by abstract argumentation.

It is self-evident that every formulation of the Truth is of necessity a statement of the Truth as it *appears*; it is at best only so much of the Truth as a man in the then existing conditions can attain. So far, then, only *relative* truth is attainable by man—relative in quantity as compared with what was known generally yesterday, and that which will probably be known tomorrow. But, does this mean that absolute Truth is entirely out of question?

There are four answers to this question:—

(1) *Idealistic Philosophy*, i.e., religion in all its shades and disguises, asserts that Absolute Truth is only God's, that Man is unable to see more than a mirage, an imagination, that human truth is that of a fictional substitute for Reality. There are two appendages to this anti-rational outlook:—

(a) The Agnosticism of Hume and Kant of discrediting all the seeming certainties attained by human thinking; and

(b) The school of those who argue that nothing exists except in one's own mind, and one may dream even that (Solipsists).

(2) *The Rationalists*, on the other hand, contend that the human Reason, without the help of material practice, is in a position to argue out what IS true; yet, the Absolute Reason is just another term for the "Idea" or any other substitute for God. Therefore, on this plane the disputes between believers and non-believers are hardly more than a squabble between orthodoxes and heretics.

(3) *Dialectical Materialism*—as against metaphysical materialism and the host of speculative philosophies—whilst admitting the limitations of human cognition, applies the Criterion of Practice. We can only grope our way and establish theories, but if it can be proved in actual objective practice, i.e., practice through objects, that that theory really works, if we are able to prove by experiment and industry the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it for ourselves, we have established Absolute Truths within their limits. Atomic theory had long been a relative truth until it could be proved to be absolutely true. And proved it must be, not philosophically, by arguing, but by concrete and definite results in practice.

(4) *The Pragmatists* start with the rather bold contention that "science has proved that matter does not exist" (though they by no means refuse to eat a material dinner); so what in real life only matters is a *subjective* valuation and terminology.

Since under the umbrella-name of "Pragmatism" it has become convenient to lump together those "modernist" tendencies highly fashionable among the Anglo-American intelligentsia, it may be advisable to go into some details.

William James, the American psychologist, brought Pragmatism, that is, "something laid down by arbitrary decree," into modern usage. In his "Varieties of Religious Experience" he advanced the notion that in matters of Faith and Morals one can make a belief "true" by "*proving it salutary*". This sort of philo-

sophy tends to reduce all knowledge to the status of belief as an artifice of religious apologetics. No wonder then that the rise of the Pragmatic-subjectivist schools has coincided with a rapid growth in the number of Catholic converts from among the intelligentsia which in itself can suffice to reveal the reactionary character of Pragmatism. It boils down to the late Dr. Goebbels' famous dictum: "People take a lie for truth if you repeat it three times." And no doubt, these were lies "salutary" to the cause of Nazi barbarism.

The trick is done by leaving the individual to judge and rule what one considers "salutary" and good, and since the dominant notions of moral and righteousness are those beneficiary to the dominant set of people, the social consequences of this solipsist conclusion are to fling wide open the doors for the return of the Dogmatic Theology and the consolidation of Fascism.

So our four answers are reduced to two only; out of four, three move on an idealistic-subjectivist plane which ought to be rejected *a priori* by anyone calling himself a Materialist. We are therefore left with the Dialectical solution only that the search for Truth must be the co-ordination of the verified results of the search, i.e., the Union of Theory and Practice. Therefore, genuine materialists call themselves, not Rationalists, but Atheists.

PERCY G. ROY.

CORRESPONDENCE

ON GENIUS

SIR,—As a teacher of languages, I should like a great deal of proof before swallowing, as Mr. Barnard does, the ridiculous story that Tolstoy learnt Greek in three weeks. Does he mean that Tolstoy was then able to translate Pushkin into perfect Greek? Did Tolstoy submit to a Greek professor for a stiff examination? Nor do I believe for a moment the infantile legend of Buckle, in his very short life, mastering 19 languages and reading 20,000 books in them. In any case, could Mr. Barnard tell me how Shakespeare (of Stratford) mastered the 15,000 words found in his plays?—Yours, etc.,

J. R.

REPUBLICANISM

SIR,—Turning the pages of Tom Paine's imperishable *Rights of Man* I came upon the following words, penned over a century and a half ago.

"I do not believe that monarchy and autocracy will continue seven years longer in any of the enlightened countries of Europe. If better reasons can be shown for them than against them, they will stand; if the contrary they will not."

I ask the readers of *The Freethinker* to consider the question of the monarchy in relation to the intellectual and moral crisis of our times, and to ask themselves: What is this kingship which has survived in our land, accommodating itself to changing society with the subtlety that one usually associates with the Roman Catholic Church?

Cradled in luxury, emasculated politically, the monarchy persists, representing the principles of useless ritual and enthroned idleness; what is the King but the supreme priest of a secular nation, a focal point for the modern form of worship, the adulation of the State?

I submit that the institution of monarchy is alien to every principle of rational thought, that it ought to be opposed because it is dangerous to the minds of men even as the priesthood is dangerous. At the heart of the idea of kingship is the old myth of divinity, and divinity is in essence the worship of death.

Kingship strikes at the dignity of man. It prescribes a greater and a lesser man. It is the father of caste, even as caste is the father of class. Where there is monarchy there is servility. Whether kingship comes in the form of a man anointed by priests, or in the secularised form of the modern dictatorship, it remains freedom's greatest enemy.

The coming crisis may well witness a return to older modes of thought, for as society contracts and the vision of mankind darkens, so the old gods begin to shine with increasing brilliance. Then light is the measure of our darkness.

This is a matter transcending politics. Republicanism is as old as the idea of freedom. Charles Bradlaugh awoke the flame to life in his day, surely the time has come to tend that flame again.—Yours, etc.,

ERIC MAPLE.

GENETICS

Sir,—I think the following note by Maurice Cornforth in *The Modern Quarterly*, Autumn, 1949, at the conclusion of two articles on "The Situation in Biological Science," by J. I. Fyfe and P. W. Brian, is deserving of note.

"In his article 'In Defence of Genetics' Professor Haldane writes: 'I am much more convinced that collective farming is superior to capitalist farming than that Soviet breeding practice excels our own. If, of course, they can produce more wheat per acre, or more milk per year from a cow of given weight, than the best British or Danish farms, I shall have to change this opinion.'"

In *Soviet Weekly* of July 28 it is reported that the top yield now obtained from the branched wheat being grown over an area of 1,000 acres or more in Moscow Region is 80 cwt. per acre. This compares with the highest-ever yield of the capitalist world which was 65.2 cwt. per acre in New Zealand. The highest-ever yield in Britain was 53.5 cwt. per acre obtained in Kent.

Secondly, the Kostroma cow bred in the Karavayev State Farm mentioned by V. A. Shaumyan during the discussions at the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences, yielded 16,262 litres of milk in one year. This compares with the best British Frisian which yielded in 1947 a little over 11,000 litres. The fat content of the British Frisian's milk was 4.76 per cent. The fat content of the Kostroma cow's milk is said to be over 4 per cent.

The high yield cows of this Kostroma breed have a milking life of anything from 15 to 20 years.

So much for Lysenko and the demands of scientific integrity and freedom.—Yours, etc.,

SYDNEY HARBOUR.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Sir,—In his criticism of Mr. Chapman Cohen Mr. Preece suggests that he is confused over the problem of evil. Not religiously but metaphysically; and fails to realise the unity of man and nature. But surely it is absurd to suggest that Mr. Cohen with his wonderful clarity of thought does not quite understand this nor that he has never read Mill's essay on Nature. To the atheist who rejects the supernatural there is nothing but the natural to be understood. That there are many things in our experience that are very dangerous and painful has no metaphysical significance. Reason informs us aware of the facts and conceiving the universe as non-conscious that these things are incidental to life and are to be not mystically metaphysically explained but by physical commonsense. Mr. Preece somewhat impresses as having lost himself in verbal fog of his own making.—Yours, etc.,

M. BARNARD.

OBITUARY

It is with sincere regret we record the death of Fredrick William Wyse. After a short illness he died on October 18, in his 85th year. A member of the Merseyside Branch N.S.S., a staunch Freethinker, he recalls vividly G. W. Foote's visits to Liverpool. The body was cremated at Landican Crematorium, where a secular service was read by Mr. W. C. Parry, who expressed deepest sympathy to his widow in her grievous loss.

W.C.P.

BOOKS FOR SALE.—Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit. mint condition, 15 vols., £3 15s. Other scarce books on magic, witchcraft, vampirism, perfect condition: list on request. BRENNAN, 51, Mead Way, Bromley, Kent.

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting, October 27, 1949

The Acting President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the Chair.

Also present, Messrs. Seibert, A. C. Rosetti, Morris, Griffiths, Ebury, Hornibrook, Page, Woodley, Barker, and Mrs. Qinton.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented. New members were admitted to Merseyside, Kingston, North London, Lewisham Branches, and to the Parent Society.

Permission was given for the formation of a Branch of the Society to be known as the Lewisham and District Branch of the N.S.S. A successful lecture by Mr. Glanville Cook, in the Conway Hall, was reported.

Grants were made to Merseyside, Bradford and South London Branches.

Correspondence between the Executive and H.M. Treasury on the exportation of £50,000 for a film on the Life of Christ was read and dealt with.

The delegate reported a meeting of the London Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers, and a proposal to hold an International Summer School in Britanny next autumn.

The addition to the Rules passed at the Annual Conference, 1949, under which, in the event of a card vote, the General Secretary will record the votes of members of the Parent Society in the same way as Branch delegates at Annual Conferences, was ordered to be circulated to all members of the Parent Society.

Other matters of a purely domestic nature were discussed. The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, November 24, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "Has Christianity Collapsed?" Mr. H. L. SEARLE.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, November 8, 7 p.m.: "The Law on Insanity," Mr. R. C. FITZGERALD, LL.B.

Lewisham & District Branch N.S.S. (The Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, S.E. 13).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Menace of Catholicism," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "The Present and Future of European Jewry," Mr. S. SUGARMAN (Jewish Lecture Committee).

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (The International Club, 64, George Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers' Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Freethought at the Crossroads," Mr. R. H. STANDEAST (Wallasey).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Conservative Policy," Mr. REES DAVIES (Prospective Conservative Candidate).

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, November 8, 7 p.m.: "Reason and Belief in Social and Moral Behaviour," Sixth Lecture. "Symbols and Morals," MEYER FORTES, M.A. Ph.D.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Law and Ethics in the Eighteenth Century"; (2) "Lord Hardwicke and Equity," Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A. LL.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Enthusiastic Inventors," Mr. P. H. POOLE (The National Anti-Vaccination League).

OUTDOOR

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Bombed site, St. Mary's Gate).—Every day, lunch-hour lectures, 1 p.m.: Messrs. BILLING and WOODCOCK.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, SMITH and BILLING. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, SMITH and BILLING.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

COMMON PEOPLE

I

WE are the greatest of all men; the common people. Hundreds of millions of us are living on the earth to-day; thousands of millions of us have lived and died in recorded time, possibly millions of millions if unrecorded time is contemplated: back to when the first of us left treetops or jungle or swamp and painfully stood erect, to disengage our front limbs from walking and climbing so as to free them for multifarious uses; wherefore the reactions upon our simply folded brains led through eons to a complexity of convolutions in our minds and an uncountable variety in our manual dexterities which threaten to become a burden and a danger to us, because we have not enough occupation for our infinite and intricate capabilities except when others exploit us.

So the great ones of the earth are not so great as us, for without us they would be naught; could have done nothing; might never have existed. We are the foundation, the material, the agency of everything human which exists.

The archeologist digs and reconstructs and deduces, finding our relics of ages past; skeletons and skulls; bones, horns, tusks, antlers, hoofs and shells of creatures we consumed. We made weapons and tools from them and stone and flint of amazing variety and quality, and in our leisure drew and carved in caves and on bone memories which are astonishing, because formal art was then unknown.

We constructed lake dwellings and earth apartments, cromlechs, dolmens, mounds, stone circles and dugout canoes. Before music and drama were we danced and mimed our emotions and experiences, and hammered rhythmical sounds from skin-covered hollow logs and shells.

II

When life grew too crowded, insupportable on the vast drying-up plains of Central Asia, we moved outward, becoming ancestors of all the nations of Europe.

In China we have lived civilised lives for thousands of years, producing pottery and cloth, growing crops, painting beautiful patterns and writing wonderful literature. Scarcely inferior was the civilisation we evolved in India.

The Nile valley saw us transform it into a huge granary, with time to build Pyramids and other massive structures now half-buried in sand. Elsewhere across Africa our brethren became separate tribes in forest and jungle, wresting livelihood from them under the tropic sun.

Throughout Asia Minor and along the North African coast we erected cities which are still marvels, or in some cases only storied memories, legendary.

In Greece we elevated the mind of man to seek intellectual triumphs after an initial period in Crete, long antedating other North Mediterranean communities.

We created Rome and overthrew it; fought countless wars following the break-up of its Empire; plunged into the Crusades; achieved the Reformation and counter-Reformation; battled bloodily for opposing faiths in Christ, and gloried in the Renaissance.

Germany we founded out of forest benighted tribes, as we did all the Baltic states up to the Arctic. Russia of the barbarically splendid Emperors, and Revolutions are equally our work. We swept the seas, fishing and fighting and exploring, to discover new worlds unknown to Europe.

III

Already in those worlds we had attained greatness. From the savage splendours of Aztec and Mexican and

Central American States to wandering myriads of Indians roaming North and South American prairies and pampas we were alike the heirs of past ages, makers of the present and creators of the future.

Across the Pacific Ocean we voyaged, peopling the thousand archipelagoes with a thousand ways of living. In Australia we left a race high and dry to degenerate into the Blackfellow; in New Zealand to become the proud physically splendid Maori; in Japan to petrify into hidebound feudalism.

For our teeming millions there is no rest or stop. We supplied the mingled elements which North America assimilated as the United States; and a variant of the British genius, the Dominion of Canada.

To Australia we went in shame and bondage, to eventuate with pride into a Commonwealth. Our black brothers went more shamefully and with less hope to toil and suffer on the plantations of America. Wherever conditions permit existence we survive and flourish.

IV

We are the people who go down mines and dig out mountain-sides. We till the soil and rear or hunt animals, fish and dive in deep waters and navigate ships upon their surface. In factories and mills, workshops and forges we work, and along the railroads and highways of the earth we go, having constructed them. Sometimes we fly machines in the air; at others control them under the oceans.

All warships and fortresses are manned by us, as we comprise the bulk of armies. When pestilence and famine, earthquake and fire, flood and drought happen we die in thousands and even millions, as we do in glorious wars.

We are the abiding denizens of the earth, nearly as long established and everlasting as the hills and seas. Governments come and go; principalities, kingdoms, empires; republics rise and fall; policies, systems of philosophy and ethics, moralities, theories and practices, religions, all are upstarts. We have seen them begin and seen them end. We were born before gods, whom we have created by hundreds, worshipped and discarded, but we continue.

The whole structure of human society changes as well as its component parts, but we unknown people keep up our unending succession of birth, life, labour and death; then again life.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

THE WHITE v. BLACK ARMY

Catholic Evidence sustained a distinct check and was found to be very flimsy before an army of white ants which invaded Vatican City last week. Many copies of books and holy documents were destroyed, as well as a Cardinal's cape. A column were bent on attacking the archives of the Secretariat of State, but were prevented. What have God's elect done to deserve this evidence of displeasure, as usually such measures are only sent to plague His enemies. However, did the Pope follow tradition by ordering a day of special prayer and intercession, including a solemn procession with Holy Relics. Not likely! He acted in a quite secular manner and ordered out the Swiss Guards and modern rationalistic sanitary implements, including shot-guns. 'Twas a famous victory. Had the ants invaded the Congress of Freethinkers, which was held in Rome in September, we should not have been surprised, but the Head Office of the Church of Earth! Words fail us!