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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Gods Form a United Front

ON November the 23rd, 1949, that master-purveyor of intellectual soporifics, the B.B.C., made what must be one of the most significant broadcasts it has ever made in the sphere of religious information. For its Rome correspondent reported and quoted verbatim a statement issued by the Palestine representative of the "Congregation for Propaganda of the Faith" (*Congregatio de propaganda Fide*)—the original and prototype of all subsequent "Propaganda" that is, from the official organisation directly and finally responsible for the conversion of the non-Catholic world, both heathen and heretical, to the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church whose president is always a leading cardinal and known popularly as "the Red Pope," and is one of the exclusive inner circle who decide Vatican policy at the highest level.

The broadcast in question may, accordingly, be taken as semi-official and, in view of its startling novelty, would not, we may be sure, have appeared without direct papal sanction.

Briefly, discarding its long-winded ecclesiastical phraseology, this was the substance of this document which, if subsequently translated into action, must be held to constitute the inauguration of a new era in the history of the Church of Rome.

Catholicism has taken "too narrow a view of the Divine Grace." Living in a Mohammedan land, the correspondent has observed amongst the adherents of Islam a religious ardour and a spiritual fervour that often puts Catholics to shame. Moreover, the Mohammedan Church, under the impact of present-day world events, is disposed to relax its traditional exclusiveness and its ancient irreconcilable hostility to the rival Christian Faith. Islam and Christianity both have certain fundamental "spiritual values" in common which it is not impossible that they can unite to defend. To-day, the statement particularises, these common "spiritual values" are directly and aggressively threatened by the secular creed of Communism, Marxist, Atheistic, and Materialistic.

The statement concludes that a "United Front" between Rome and Mecca, between Catholicism and Islam, is now, so to speak, the order of the day.

We have on more than one occasion referred to that quite astonishing flexibility "all things to all men," which, since the now distant days of the Pauline Epistles, has pre-eminently characterised the Church of Rome. And this latest example that we have just quoted, is not the least effective example of this long history of twists and turns and complicated zig-zags. For only consider what it means and how drastically it flies in the face of History? For thirteen centuries ever since the then newly-fledged Muslim creed burst from the Arabian desert like a thunderclap on the West, the creed of the Arabian Prophet has been the fiercest, the most intransigent, often the most dangerous enemy of Rome. It was Islam which wrested the Holy places from Rome, and it was the

Vatican which launched the bloody "Hundred Years War" of the Crusades for their recovery. Again, it was the armies of the Crescent which wrested Spain and Sicily from Christendom, and against which, in the Dark Ages, the Popes could barely maintain themselves in Rome itself. It was, again, Islam that has converted North Africa, the seat of the flourishing ancient Church of St. Augustine of Hippo, into the Mohammedan stronghold that it remains at the present time.

And even since the conclusion of the era of religious wars, Islam remains the one religion from which the Christian Missionary can make no converts: Islam interposes a granite barrier to the Eastern expansion of Rome.

In a popular book on religion written some years back, it was accurately stated that two creations tower over the religious world and in religious history: Roman Christianity and the creed of Islam founded by Muhammed. And, one could add their mutual rivalry is, also, one of the most important facts in secular history as well.

Islam, to give the creed of the Koran its proper name, may be, we think, defined as a kind of Jewish Catholicism: that is, as the Judaic religion deprived of its narrow exclusively national associations and expanded to the universal, to the cosmopolitan level; unlike Christianity, it is a Semitic religion through and through, at least in its orthodox (sunni) form.

The Koran is the real "New Testament," the successor of the Semitic Old Testament; unlike the Christian New Testament, which is largely Greek in its mental outlook—particularly its most important theological parts, the Fourth Gospel and the Pauline Epistles. "Allah," the Muslim God, is a cosmopolitan "Jahveh," and Muhammed himself, far more than the Founders of Christianity, may be termed the legitimate successor of the ancient Hebrew prophets.

Both Catholic and Muslim theology profess a pseudo-rationalism based upon Greek logic, particularly upon that of Aristotle. In the history of Muslim scholastic theology Al-Ghazali (eleventh century) is the Muslim counterpart of St. Thomas Aquinas, respectively, "The Proof of Islam" and the Christian "Angelic Doctor."

However, it is obvious that the coming "united front" between Islam and Rome now proposed by the Vatican, is one not dictated primarily by the theological motives, but by political ones, or, more exactly, by the paramount and over-riding needs of self-preservation. Before the Universal advance of materialism all creeds recoil; the universal adoption of Atheism threatens all the gods equally with destruction. And Gods, too, have this attribute of their human creators, men; the desire for long life, the paramount urge to self-preservation, the urge to avoid annihilation. Nineteen centuries do not exhaust the "will to life" of the Christian Trinity, nor does thirteen exhaust the desires of the monotheistic God of Islam. Hence their, no doubt, mutual desire to pool their joint

\* cp. Dr. Lacy O'Leary—*How Greek Science passed to the Arabs.*

resources in order to ensure a world safe for gods to continue to live in!

One must, we think, regard it as merely an historical accident that it is, ostensibly, to combat "the menace of Communism" that Rome has issued a call for unity with its ancient Muslim foe. For both recent Papal pronouncements and the actual practice of the Church of Rome itself indicate clearly that Catholicism has no insuperable objection to economic collectivism as such (e.g., The Jesuit "Republic" of Paraguay and even the teaching of St. Thomas himself). What it here explicitly repudiates is the "Atheism and Materialism" associated with the creed of "Marxism—Leninism". In other words, it is "atheism and materialism", rather than the Communism with which they are here accidentally associated, that is both the real enemy as well as the effective cause of the present demand for the "United Front" between those ancient rivals, the Christian Trinity and Allah, the Monotheistic God of Islam.

Against Atheism and Materialism, against the intellectual and social revolution of our times, the gods unite: for this universal revolution digs a common grave for all the gods, and it is *this* species of Communism to which all the gods object!

F. A. RIDLEY.

### CHRISTIANITY IN CHAUCER'S CENTURY

MR. H. S. BENNETT'S *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1947, 15s.), ranks with Dr. G. G. Coulton's scholarly study of the same period as an important contribution to the history of our native literature. Bennett's volume forms Part I of the second volume of the Oxford History of English Literature, while Sir E. K. Chambers contributes Part II bearing the title: *The Close of the Middle Ages*.

Mr. Bennett's appraisal of our most eminent medieval author and his environment is based on the most recent researches and will probably long remain the standard authority on life and letters in fifteenth-century England. Our author's first chapter: *Chaucer and his Age*, embraces virtually all that is known concerning the life led by the writer of the *Canterbury Tales*. From 1374-86, Geoffrey Chaucer resided in Aldgate. Then, London was a village, when compared with Amsterdam and the great Italian City States. Visible from his Aldgate window were the Lea marshes, the moors of Fensbury, Stepney Woods, Epping Forest and the heights of Humpstead and Highgate. From the Thames the City streets ascended and, as Bennett observes: "St. Paul's was plainly set on a hill, and nobody could fail to see the slope from the village of Holborn down the present Gray's Inn Road. The Thames still ran out at low tide over native shingle and mud. The Southwark shore was still green with trees; not only monasteries but even private houses had their gardens." Yet, with all the knowledge Chaucer must have possessed of the City's busy life, he tells us nothing in his writings.

Whether Chaucer accepted or rejected the religion of his age it is difficult to say. He certainly assailed without mercy the mockeries and mummeries of priestcraft, but on matters of faith he is silent. Nor is this to be wondered at in an age when the open avowal of heresy was usually met with death in the flames.

For the populace, the 14th century was a period of passive belief. Birth, baptism, marriage and death were all associated with the Catholic creed. Heresy was an utterly unpardonable sin, while the most degrading superstitions were encouraged when they fostered clerical pretensions. "Hence," avers Bennett, "the many stories glorifying the sacrament, or lauding the Blessed

Virgin and the saints to be found in the collections of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries." One of these mendacious stories Chaucer utilises in his wonderful *Prioress's Tale*.

It is true that mystics appeared to whom the customary rites and ceremonies afforded little satisfaction, while Wyclif's zeal for what he deemed truth involved him in heresy, while his moral sense revolted when he viewed the worldliness of the leading ecclesiastics. The protests of Langland, the Lollards and other reformers against sacerdotal infirmities were well warranted and these enormities grew even worse in the succeeding century. As our historian observes: "Archbishop Arundel might invoke the temporal arm with its statute, *De Heretico Comburendo*, and the Church might disinter the bones of Wyclif, and cast them into the river Swift, but things were moving towards the day of the Reformation in England. The faith remained, but its institutions needed reform; the faithful remained, but subject to heavy burdens and to superstitious encumbrances which wearied and depressed even the bravest."

Attendance at church services was general, but what the congregations gained in information or moral instruction, seems slight. The service was conducted in Latin and apparently scarcely one per cent. of the assembly could have understood what the priest said. Every device, however, was employed to exalt the majesty of the Mass. Also the mural paintings in the churches portrayed Biblical stories. The Day of Judgment and the Crucifixion painted on the Church walls awakened wonder and fear for a moment, but then grew dim and remote.

Wyclif, Langland, Chaucer and other scribes all recognised that medieval religion for the masses meant the ministrations of the parish priest. Langland's portrait *Sloth the Parson* is not attractive. This parson had been in Holy Orders for over thirty years. Yet he "confessed that he could not chant, sing, or read the life of any saint, and preferred the task of finding a hare to that of construing one clause of the psalm *Beatus vir* or *Beati omnes*." Yet this is one only of the innumerable strictures of *Piers Plowman*, alias Langland, on clerical ignorance, levity and apathy. He strongly condemns those mercenary ministers who refused the sacraments to those unable to pay. Certainly, upright priests existed then, as now, but they were a tiny minority, for all the leading writers, Chaucer, Langland, Gower and others deplore the evils of their time. As our author avers: "Nor were things better in the succeeding century, and ecclesiastical commentators such as Gascoigne, Chancellor of Oxford, are eloquent in their exposure of the evils of their day."

While Langland had assailed priests and friars with a bludgeon, Chaucer preferred polished irony and innuendo when depicting undutiful pastors and brazen pardoners. Perhaps Chaucer's method proved more effective. In any case, Gascoigne later repeated the poet's charges against the pardoners. "Sinners say nowadays," he attests, "I care not what how many or what evils I do in God's sight, for I can easily and quickly get absolution and indulgence granted me by the Pope, whose written grant I have bought for 4d. or 6d. or have won as a stake for a game of tennis [with the pardoner.]"

All the four Orders of Friars receive Langland's lash. Their rapacity, their wanton indulgence in the solid and liquid adornments of the table, their trifling penances imposed for a money payment, and other transgressions of the cloth are all fiercely castigated. Langland denounces a friar "who was a Doctor of Divinity and

who afterwards preached on continence and then made his way through a crowd of pilgrims and beggars to sit down at the chief table and astonish everyone with his trencherwork."

Wyclif's censures are even more severe for he alleges that, "any cursed swearer, extortioner, or adulterer will not be shriven by his own curate, but go to a flattering friar that will assail him falsely for a little money by the year, though he be not in will to make restitution, or to leave his cursed sin."

All these accusations are repeated in Chaucer's satires and Langland's denunciations, although both writers carefully avoided the deadly charge of heresy, Lydgate, Hoccleve, Rolle and Hilton were among the penmen of the fourteenth century, but when all is said and done, Chaucer remains the great pioneer of English literature in that age. When his obsolete terms and spellings are reduced to modern modes of expression then, with the aid of a glossary, Chaucer's writings become as readable as William Shakespeare's deathless poems and plays.

T. F. PALMER.

### SUNDERLAND CALLING

QUITE unsuspectingly Christians pay The National Secular Society a compliment by their hatred of the Society and its work. Hatred under any circumstances is never pleasant, but when it is dictated by religion we then have one of the most spiteful and vicious forms of hatred. The reason Christians hate the N.S.S. is easy enough to understand, partly because they are Christians, and partly because from the date of its formation in 1866 The National Secular Society has been impregnable against Christian attacks, whether fair or foul, it has led direct and uncompromising criticisms on Christian beliefs, and the hosts of Jehovah are smarting under repeated failures.

The N.S.S. stands out as one of the few organisations or movements in this country that has not been subdued by fear of the clergy. Fear of the clergy dominates our public life to a degree that is not realised by the average citizen. From Westminster to the Parish Council it is there. The clergy, with their religious wares, intrude into workshops, factories, sports grounds, public houses, etc., because those in charge are afraid to say *no*. Cinema managers who have emerged from a fight against clerical-led opposition to Sunday opening allow clergymen to intrude a religious talk in the programme for the same reason. Our Socialist friends have the same fear, but they try to hide it by telling us we are flogging a dead horse, and that Freethought will come via Socialism. They are now paying the price for their timidity. The dead horse now dictates the policy of Socialists towards religion. We see a Labour Government, with Socialists as its chief officials, making a heroic effort to stage a come back to the heavenly twins, Religion and Royalty. On local councils and other public bodies, sports and recreational committees, the fear of the clergy is never absent and Christian members rarely have any opposition to their religious moves.

Mr. J. T. Brighton, one of our best known speakers, applied to hire a hall from the Sunderland Borough Labour Party. Two dates were asked for; the local committee granted the letting for the two dates. Four days before the first lecture was to be given Mr. Brighton received a letter stating that the General Committee of the Sunderland Borough Labour Party had cancelled the letting. The reason for cancelling being that there were all shades of opinion in the Labour Party. But surely that is one of the strongest reasons why all shades of opinion should be allowed expression. It is difficult to

imagine a more stupid reason coming from a large, responsible political party, supposed to be democratic and progressive. The letter, however, goes on to say that a majority of the Labour members accept some sort of religious belief. That is the real reason, but very clumsily stated. No question of justice, right of free speech, or toleration was allowed to intrude. Only the religious members must be considered, because they were in a majority among the members, in other words, fear of the clergy.

There are, of course, Freethinkers in the Sunderland Borough Labour Party, and no doubt some of them are members of The National Secular Society, so we congratulate the General Committee of the Sunderland Borough Labour Party on their courageous support of the religious majority in the party. It is so much easier, and certainly safer, to ignore the rights of a minority, isn't it? We take it that the members of the General Committee of the Sunderland Labour Party are all Christians; at any rate in this case they acted as Christians.

R. H. ROSETTI.

### THE HOLY YEAR

Herewith we announce three initiatives taken with regard to the Holy Year 1950.

The first is a rather commendable scoop, for it is to turn the Pope and his benedictions into a commodity easy to carry. It is a collection of "Cinograms"—authentic photos of the Pope in successive actions of blessing; if you rapidly run your thumb over the pages of this album, such as kiddies do with little illustrated booklets, it results in the optical effect of a primitive kind of moving pictures. This illusion of a Pope pronouncing your benediction can be heightened by scoop No. 2: a gramophone disc with the text of the benediction (available in all languages). In this way, the potential pilgrim will be enabled to carry away to his home, at the least expense, the entire Square of St. Peter.

Still, the most comforting initiative is No. 3. It seems that "Catholic Action" has ordered with the Tobacco Monopoly Board novel cigarette brands named "Jubily" and "Holy Year" to be sold exclusively to the pilgrims. They must be heavily burdened with sin if smoking our ordinary cigarette brands is considered the gravest of penitences. . . .

At Surano, two hundred people came to blows in pursuit of one of these frequent *Peregrinations Mariae*; they could not agree upon the time after which the hymn for "*Madonna di Leuca*" ought to be sung. Be it noted that these processions are being organised with a view to chasing away the evil and refining the soul.

Illiteracy still amounts to 44 p.c. among the inhabitants of Sicily. Yet the Government concentrates on building churches rather than schools.

In a Parish Bulletin in Reggio di Calabria we read a letter written by a lady who thanks St. Anthony for winning at the Pools in these moving terms:

"I have pleasure in remitting, for the second time running, to that well-merited institution one half of my winnings, viz. 1,827 Lire, as promised to the Saint. In fact he has greatly bestowed his providence upon me by allowing me to win, last year, several hundreds of Lire and an odd thousand this year; I am convinced that next year it will be a million."

Well, well, it seems befitting to pay to the heavenly miracle worker a 50 p.c. share out of a 3,654 Lire gain, but somehow we feel that with success going on he will probably ask for as much as 95 p.c. of the intake, if it is to be a million. (From *Don Basilio*.)

P. G. R.

**LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers.**

By William Kent. Price, cloth 5s., paper 3s. 6d.; postage 3d.

**THE EVOLUTION OF THE PAPACY.** By F. A. Ridley. Price 1s.; postage 13d.

**PAGANISM IN CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS.** By J. M. Wheeler. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

## ACID DROPS

There is a cry for the "word of God from all over the world," declared the Rev. D. Morgan at an annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Judging, however, from the last financial statement, we would imagine that the "cry" really came from the Society which ended the year with a deficit of £21,000, and despite the fact that over 17½ million copies of the Bible were distributed. In fact, the whole meeting seems to have been in tears, for according to the Chairman, there is a world-shortage of from 20 to 40 million Bibles. No wonder it is a "best seller" when the distributors can afford to lose £21,000 a year.

The parson who is carrying on a "back-to-the-Church campaign" in public houses has met with very little success to date, even counting the solitary miner whom he beat at darts and "converted". It was a particularly unkind cut on the part of the Spennymoor publicans who barred the parson from visiting their pubs on the grounds that he was likely to cause a breach of the peace: this to a follower of the Prince of Peace must be rather heart-breaking. After all, Jesus did command his followers to mix with publicans and sinners, but perhaps the Spennymoor publicans were not the kind Jesus had in mind.

General Smuts, in the course of his speech at the celebration of Dr. C. Weizmann's 75th birthday, thinks that the Christians owe the Jews some consideration not only as compensation for their unspeakable persecution, but also for producing "the Divine Leader". We could agree with the first reason, but for the second, we would ask why? The Jews did not want him, and he has certainly caused quite a spot of trouble for Christians and non-Christians alike.

The Army Chaplains' Headquarters at Bagshot have arranged a series of courses in Christian information and the practical application of Christian principles in daily life. Courses run for three weeks for Chaplains, and for other ranks, the course on Christian information lasts a week. For such a subject the time seems very short, whether this is due to a paucity of information on Christianity, or whether a week is as much as anyone could possibly stand. If the information is of the kind we are used to from Christian Evidence societies, then we would submit that both reasons apply.

Congratulations to the *Church Times* for printing an excellent article on the Devil, who is, we are told, "very much alive." We fully agree that if the Christian religion is true there must be a Devil, and no earnest Christian has the right to repudiate God's rival for the soul of man. As Fr. d'Arcy rightly says, "Even the Devil as a being and power is good; he is evil in so far as he is a fallen angel, a spoilt spirit with intelligence and will awry."

That fiery Spiritualist, Mr. Shaw Desmond, who used to say, twenty years ago, that Materialism was in its last ditch, and who probably is still saying it, has now come to the conclusion that "the average Spiritualist suffers from extraordinary hallucinations." He also says that many mediums do not "contact" the spirit world at all but "telepath" (quite unconsciously, of course) from the mind of the audience—thus getting no information from the spirit world, but from a "Thought Form". The more we study this kind of thing the more we marvel at its engaging sanity and clarity.

Mr. Desmond thinks that "scientific (*sic*) Spiritualism must stand or fall upon its power to challenge and to hold its own with the remnants of a materialist science"—and we certainly feel that such an admission from a prominent Spiritualist—that there is still left a "remnant" of Materialism—deserves our grateful thanks. To think that we are still alive and kicking after the terrific onslaught made upon us by Mr. Desmond in the past shows that there is yet life in the old boy; and—may we whisper it?—we are fairly certain we shall be alive and kicking even in the far away future.

It is a truism to say that where a man's religion is concerned, reason is conspicuous by its absence, and despite evidence to the contrary, a believer will perhaps stifle the still, small voice of commonsense, when holy statues, medals, and lucky amulets are concerned. For the interest of readers who can view the foibles of the believer with a detached air, the following story will give yet another indication of the absence of logic in the make-up of the Christian. A plane carrying a statue of Our Lady of Fatima crashed in flames in Colombia; the nine passengers and the crew are believed to have been killed. The flight had been planned as a "propaganda" flight and over 10,000 people were waiting to welcome the statue.

The illogicality of Christianity is surely evidenced by the fact that one ought to expect a plane with such a holy cargo to have been at least as safe as any normal flight. Had it been successful, Our Lady of Fatima would have been praised and venerated, and would have been put forward as further evidence of the miraculous; as it is, although the flight ended in disaster, the reputation of Our Lady will not suffer, and she will still be able to inspire ignorant peasant children, and arrange further antics of the sun as she did at Fatima.

"The Miracle," a film telling the story of a simple Italian peasant girl seduced by a man she believed to be St. Joseph has been banned by the Middlesex, Essex and Surrey County Councils, reports a newspaper. A report that these Councils are considering a ban on the original Gospel story of a simple Jewish girl and an old gentleman called Joseph is not confirmed.

A true cry from the heart of the R.C. Bishop Rudderham wells up in his first pastoral letter. "What a shame," he writes tearfully, "it is to find children from Catholic homes coming into our Catholic schools at the age of five and not knowing the first thing about God, not knowing even the most elementary of prayers." We are sure that the learned Bishop at that tender age was already well versed in the theology of Aquinas—or how could he have become a Bishop? We hope that this stupendous example will shatter the hellish apathy of Catholic parents, and make them see that all children, long before the age of five, should be taught the things of God—or rather, of the Pope and his Church, and God thrown in so to speak. Selah!

## THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Will Pastor Niemoeller, who maintains that the Protestant Church has failed to meet the challenge of Marxism, now join the Roman Catholic Church?

Do the many letters by Jesuits to *The Times* indicate the beginning of a mass onslaught of Catholicism?

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

**BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.**—The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 from Anna Shiel.

**Mr. J. HENSHAW.**—Thanks for your cutting. Christians these days are quite unable to square their riches with the poverty of the lowly Nazarene.

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.

## SUGAR PLUMS

Will those who are coming to the Annual Dinner in the Holborn Restaurant on January 7, especially those coming from the provinces, who require hotel accommodation for the Saturday night be sure to state their requirements when applying for tickets. Hotel accommodation is usually in demand in London in the early New Year and early looking is very necessary to ensure acceptance. There are still some tickets left which will, of course, go to the first applicants.

The Brains Trust at the Stratford Town Hall on December 8 was, if anything, even more successful than the previous one held there. The Christian angle of the question "Is there a God?" was in the capable hands of Rev. D. S. Wallace Hadrill and the Rev. D. Wright. The Freethought side was put by Mr. R. H. Rosetti and Mr. L. Ebury. The "Design" argument, as was expected, was keenly discussed. Ald. Cannon controlled the meeting in his usual good humoured and strictly impartial manner. A question from Mr. W. Kent on earthquakes proved to be rather a poser and created some difficulty in the attempt to reconcile an "Act of God" with a beneficent deity. The local branch (West Ham) have a great untapped reservoir of potential Freethinkers in their area, and it is hoped that the opportunity will not be missed.

The Sunday Cinema poll in Bromyard (Worcester) was lost by two votes, which was due, no doubt, to the herculean efforts of those killjoys, the Lord's Day Observance Society, C. of E., Methodist and Congregational Churches. The L.D.O.S. distributed three different leaflets in the week preceding the poll. Readers are urged to inform the General Secretary, N.S.S., of any projected Sunday Cinema campaign in their districts. He will be pleased also to send leaflets for free distribution.

On the other hand at Leigh (Lancs) the election was won for Sunday Cinemas by a 2 to 1 majority. A quantity of N.S.S. leaflets on "Sunday Cinemas" were sent to and distributed by local friends, and we take this opportunity of thanking them for their help; they also have the satisfaction of having helped in the result. Wherever there is a campaign for Sunday opening of cinemas the leaflets will be sent to anybody who will undertake the distribution.

The Register, U.S.A., reports a campaign that is being waged by Catholic groups to "keep Christ in Christmas" and to stem the growing tide of irreligious greeting cards. They should see some of the National Secular Society's greeting cards. Have you had yours yet? There are a few left at 6d. each.

The Bible, "always a best seller," does not satisfy our American cousins, for Fulton Oursler, novelist, has re-written it in American slang. A choice sample is Herod addressing Jesus, "Hiya, King! How goes it King, old King, hey boy?" Another publisher invites his lucky readers to thrill to a story with over 1,200 illustrations, "to see the captive women of the Midianites! To see the wise and foolish virgins!" On the other hand, Mr. Donald Doreus is doing his best to have Bible reading banned in schools on the ground that it is filthy. Truth will out!

Readers of *The Freethinker* who are looking for a Christmas gift for a book-loving Londoner, could not do better than send *London is London*—a selection of prose and verse made by D. M. Low, and illustrated by Edward Bawden. The book contains nearly three hundred pages and the quotations are chosen from a wide range, not merely from hackneyed sources. Here are some authors quoted: Gibbon, Gissing, Goldsmith, Grossmith, George Moore, Frederick Reynolds, Jonathan Swift, Robert Surtees, Ned Ward, Virginia Woolf. The book is published by Chatto & Windus at 10s. 6d.

The latest number of the *Journal of Sex Education*, so ably edited by Dr. Norman Haire, keeps up its reputation for plain speaking and factual knowledge. Apart from many specialised articles it has some excellent reviews and also an appreciative notice, by Mr. H. Cutner, of the late Prof. Norman E. Himes, the learned historian of the Malthusian Movement whose early death is a great loss to all progressive movements. The *Journal* can be obtained from 36, Devonshire Mews, London, W.1, at 2s. a copy.

The *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research* can now be obtained by the public (price 2s.), and the November-December number contains a very fine study and analysis of a case entitled "The Woman in Brown," of particular interest to all who have studied ghosts and ghost-hunting. It is very detailed, and it shows how "a spontaneous apparition" can be traced back, step by step, and why it can eventually be proved to be a pure, unadulterated hallucination. All the same, believers in ghosts will still believe—even their own hallucinations.

Among the *Journal's* reviews is one which we can only call devastating of the latest work of Dr. Hereward Carrington, *The Invisible World*. Dr. Carrington has always admitted something like 98 per cent. fraud in the "phenomena" of Spiritualism, but claimed that the other 2 per cent. was at least "genuine" or "supernormal." In this work, he appears to have tried to distinguish what he considers is genuine from the rest and to attempt some explanation, but he has left his reviewer "in a muddle" and "not sure what sort of a book Dr. Carrington intended to write." We are pleased to see the Society keeps up its solid reputation for keen investigation and impartiality—by no means easy on such a subject as Psychological Research.

## REASON IN THE CHURCH

## II.

ANALOGY is the basic intellectual foundation of the logic of the white elephants of Bertrand Russell and Thomas Aquinas. But unlike Russell's abstract symbol, a real elephant is an intelligent animal and an elephant never forgets. In Aquinas there is also the pink elephant illusions of good and evil, sex and sin, and the certitude of truth and error.

Mystic contradiction arises in the confusion of teaching and learning, or explanation and observation, known in logic as deduction and induction. These are different processes, and to the teacher, forgetting how he learned, induction is a mystery that cannot be explained; and has been variously referred to as inspiration, intuition, instinct or impulse; terms which imply action or effort in observation as reaction in learning. The impersonal mathematical symbol or impulse of Russell's white elephant calls forth no personal reaction, but the personal analogies of Aquinas do, for his teaching concerns actual feelings in personal appeal.

Our Catholic, like the elephant, is not unintelligent and he does not mistake verbosity for meaning. To him a spade is a spade though it may be described as a horticultural excavating implement. He may be more expressive and even use vulgar adjectives. To the unsophisticated a gentleman who indulges in terminological inexactitudes is a damned liar. And when Russell philosophically asserts solipsism it is plainly taken as meaning selfish. So, if the Thomist uses effective old-fashioned language Russell is using a primitive method but his logic is mystically oblivious of personal reactions. Russell deals only with verbal contradictions, he does not empirically observe mysticism.

William Seabrooke's method was different. He travelled, to meet mystics to learn their methods, which he tried himself, to learn their experiences. A favourite way with the Melewi dervishes is to hang themselves up by the wrists, hanging in the dark like bats in a barn. Seabrooke concludes that pain is a primary essential, but his experiments also show that delicately sensitive methods are also effective. Methods of mysticism range from such simple practices as eating opium or hashish, or abstinence from food, sex or social contact, to more intricate or sophisticated technique. Further, there is direct parallel with methods of moral discipline, many being taken from initiation ceremonies, as those associated with adolescence, and may include mutilation. The use of the whip, known as "the discipline" in flagellation is an outstanding example.

In actual practice mysticism is a form of self-discipline using customary methods. Mysticism is a social fact with historic development of more delicate and subtle methods, continuing with teaching and learning in the technique of education; with the birch, segregation of bread and water, or the metaphorical whip of ridicule in the dunce's cap; in a discipline that induces feelings as of shame or indignation. Mysticism within the Church in the history of Christian monasticism shows another aspect of the development. With periodic monastic outbreaks, as the Benedictine, Dominican and Franciscan, each successive monastic order was less confined within its cells and more active in the outside world. The early Christian hermit or monk shut himself off from the world but the last of the monastic orders, the Society of Jesus, uses its mysticism in a technique of education and propaganda.

If the Age of Aquinas was one of scholasticism and the theological study of logic, that of Ignatius Loyola was one of the empiricism of science and the cult of

mysticism. Though the discipline of flagellation and the hair shirt still persisted in monasticism, the mystic technique was logically systematised. The anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing*, described as a handbook of mystic practice, was developed on the Rule of Perfection by Father Benet. The logical method of systematic exclusion of unessentials known as Occam's razor was applied and mysticism was further simplified in the methods of Pierre de Berulle and Loyola. And with Bacon's idea of experiment and test, mysticism became the basis of empirical psychology. In our reasoning Catholic, mysticism and practical psychology meet in personal experience.

To the hypnotic intellectual confusion of Aquinas was added the paranoiac inhibition of Loyola's mystical method of education, with empirical psychology in the study of casuistry. Jesuit education differs from other systems in which the curriculum, as the three R's, is the subject for instruction; to the Jesuit the pupil himself is the subject for education and he learns the use of mystical self-discipline. As Seabrooke would say, it becomes induced auto-suggestion; and as he also said, pragmatic use of an instrument is still effective in ignorance of its mechanism. If an elephant never forgets, our Catholic remembers what he is taught, but is oblivious of how he torments himself into delirious ecstasy; for he reasons from childhood's question why, not how?

To think of Jesuitry as political is to forget theological empirical psychology; it is basically mystical. Casuistry is defined as the study of conscience, known in modern psychology as inhibition; which term, like propaganda, comes from Catholic theology. Russell says there is no logical argument against pragmatism, and theology is practical, if primitive, psychology, using well-tried age-old methods in Thomist and Jesuit technique in the existential subjectivity of personal appeal. Political "realism" uses a similar method in its propaganda; as with our reasoning Catholics, it learns from its teacher and not from experience. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but can politics beat theology at its own game?

H. H. PREECE.

## "JESTING" PILATE WITH JESUS CHRIST

It is surprising how many scholarly authors introduce with their writings the ancient story of Pontius Pilate at the trial of Jesus Christ for the crime of Blasphemy, when Pilate the High Court Judge asks Jesus Christ, "What is Truth?" and did not wait for an answer, as stated in St. John's Gospel, 18, verse 38. And, it is astonishing, also, to read further, according to other writers, that Pilate's question regarding Truth has never been answered.

This mistake shows that "omniverous readers" had not searched for Truth, and clergymen sometimes state that "Pilate did not wait for an answer," whereas, had these clerks in Holy Orders known the Gospel in the Apocryphal New Testament, according to Nicodemus, or The Acts of Pontius Pilate, chapter III, verses 11 to 13, where it is stated:—"Pilate saith unto him, what is Truth? And Jesus said Truth is from heaven," they would have said, that this is the divine answer; not what is Truth, but whence it comes; from a nowhere, an imaginary sphere named Heaven.

Truth is a statement consistent with facts verified by experience.—SELAH.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## DOES CHRISTIANITY STILL EXIST?

Sir,—Mr. Ridley's article of the 4th December seems to give too much credit to scientists and critics for the decline of Christianity, and in fact we Freethinkers tend to pride ourselves a little too much on our achievements. Obviously the published works of the critics and scientists would reach only a very small minority of the population, and that a minority whose Christianity was largely nominal. The main reasons for the decline of Christianity among the masses must be sought elsewhere, and it might in fact be argued that the Christianity which has declined is largely the ceremonial and the pater. The thing itself exists to-day just as it has done since the days of Constantine. Credulity, intolerance, thuggery, conversion by force, persecution of heretics, etc., etc., all in the name of universal brotherhood, are increasingly with us. Little has changed beyond the cut of the saviour's whiskers and the location of the promised land.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. NICHOLSON.

## COMMUNISM.

Sir,—I heartily support my good friend A. D. Corrick. Here is an enlightening incident that is relevant.

A short time ago at Conway Hall there was a discussion between Olaf Stapledon and Prof. Levy on Marxism and intellectual liberty. The former was critical of Soviet Russia, the latter most favourable. Prof. Levy made much of the fact that a workman could criticise the management with impunity, indeed perhaps with encouragement. At question time I asked what would happen if audibly he criticised Stalin? The question—as I expected—was side-tracked. I was told the workman would not want to criticise Stalin. Of course, if he did, his labour would continue—in a concentration camp.

I am sure Mr. Plimmer cannot find in Russia any equivalent to Orators' Corner at Marble Arch. Why not?—Yours, etc.,

WM. KENT.

## RUSSIAN CAPITALISM.

Sir,—It is not unusual to find in this classic capitalist country people who never leave its shores, yet fail to understand the nature of the social system within which they live. Mr. T. D. Smith's European wanderings therefore have no particular significance other than to illustrate that measure of freedom of which he speaks so disparagingly. Further he exercises it by being able to have printed his views without immediate fear of imprisonment. Does a worker in totalitarian capitalist Russia enjoy such opportunities? With opposition organisations denied by law under threats of heavy penalties, any pretence at freedom of thought in Russia is reduced to a farce.

The strange thing is not Mr. Smith's attendance at a course on Marx and Economics, but his complete failure to appreciate the significance of Marx's social analysis. Wage labour and capital are peculiar to capitalism. In Russia exists a wages system in which the more fortunate receive incomes many hundreds of times greater than the average factory worker; investment in State bonds with periodic rates of interest, and thus a privileged class who by virtue of their larger claim on the wealth produced are able to enjoy luxuries denied to the workers. This state of affairs became such an embarrassment to the Communists that they published a pamphlet "Soviet Millionaires" (Russia To-day Society) by Reg. Bishop, in which he makes a feeble and farcical attempt to explain it away.

Do I have to give reasons for propaganda somersaults in this world of intensive economic competition? Mr. Smith is naive almost to the point of simplicity. Russian industry is no more socialised than our Post Office or British Railways. But perhaps he has his own particular brand of socialism.

What are my authorities? Mainly official Russian publications such as *The Bank for Russian Trade Review*, numerous Communist Party publications and the like. In short they condemn themselves by their own words and deeds. But over and above all this, an understanding of scientific socialism, which Mr. Smith lacks.—Yours, etc., R. BOTT.

## "WOWSERS ON THE WAR PATH."

Sir, As a neo-Malthusian, Dr. Norman Haire does not shine. He argues that we should slowly decrease our population by about a third and so secure a higher supply of food for all.

Would this surplus really follow? Would not a decaying population mean a decaying country? And would it be worth while to give up our position as a first-rate power and so sink our potential and significance among our sister nations in the Empire?

But food, like most commodities, can be secured by organizing supplies and not by lessening demand; by reducing tariffs and by paying for incoming food supplies through the higher organization of and by less Government interference with high-g geared industry. It could never be good economic practice for England to attempt to grow all the food she needs, though on the best authority we are informed that, ignoring costs, we could supply at home all our agricultural needs by intensive methods.

Has not Dr. Haire read the recent report of the Royal Commission on Population and pondered on some of the many cogent reasons given for increasing not diminishing the birth-rate in England?

But this thesis on food supply was the tail not the body of Norman Haire's letter with which most rational people would surely readily agree.—Yours, etc., A. FRANCIS CLARK.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: "The Civilised Society: A Foundation Member." Mr. R. J. DAY.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Our 'Planned' Society." Mr. DAVID MURRAY.

Lewisham and District Branch N.S.S. (The Hope Hotel, 73, Loampit Vale, Lewisham, S.E.).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting. All Freethinkers welcome.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: A Lecture.

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

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Man and Atom." Mr. J. E. BARNES.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Age, Youth, and Progress." Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Freethought To-day." Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

## 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).—Lectures every lunch hour, 1 p.m.: Messrs. E. BILLING and G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY.

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

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

44th

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on

Saturday, January 7th, 1950

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## I WAS A LITTLE CATHOLIC

"I AM a Little Catholic" was the title of a school hymn. By such mass asseverations of invincible faith young Nazis and Fascists were trained, and, in like manner young Communist Leagues are prepared for the docile acceptance of their dogmas. Though it is not very uncommon for a Catholic to become a free-thinker, the fact that one such was brought up in a particularly lively centre of religious controversy like Glasgow, might make a brief account of his experiences towards liberation worth the reading, even though it is of half a century ago.

The disputatious nature of Scotsmen has often been commented upon. Whether politics or religion be the subject they argue vigorously without the inhibitions of Englishmen towards "sacred" things. "An argument about religion never did any Scotsman harm," commented one of their writers.

Our schools were definitely Protestant or Catholic, and there from childhood we imbibed sectarianism. As all my early instruction was at the hands of religious teachers, the Marist Order of lay brothers after my infancy with the nuns, I was indoctrinated thoroughly with the stock arguments which claimed to establish without question that ours was the only true Church: in the genuine apostolic succession; the other sects were usurpers. So were we armed for the fray. The little Protestants in their schools were similarly drilled in their dogmas, and the inhabitants of the congested city tenements, either in street, back court or on stair landing, never lacked opportunities for the exercise of the national mental pugnacity. But it was in the more spacious Glasgow Green that the star combatants were to be seen and heard. There, the serious working youth of Glasgow, conscious of their limited opportunities for education sought a broader enlightenment. On Jail Square, at the end of the Green, where public hangings could be witnessed less than a century ago, exponents of every cause held forth and properly conducted debates were organised. In inclement weather we could adjourn under cover to the Bird Market adjoining. There, the poor student could hear, free of charge, lectures and intelligent discussion on every subject of contemporary interest; political, religious or anti-religious; points of view scientific, philosophical or nonsensical; a more extended aspect on every subject than was available anywhere else. The value to the young Papist or Protestant willing to hear all sides, was in the references to authoritative writers that the experienced debaters would quote. These references could be followed up in the public libraries where we were inevitably led to the study of comparative religion to the enlargement of our understandings.

So from our tracts and pamphlets of the Catholic Truth Society and the corresponding Protestant publications we graduated to Gibbon, Hume, and Spinoza. The more popular Macaulay, Carlyle, and Emerson as literary studies we had read as a matter of course; nor could an impending freethinker neglect Bishop Butler and Paley, both of whom, out of date even in those early days of half a century ago, but confirmed us in our scepticism.

It was a source of embarrassment to a young Catholic that so many of the protagonists of his faith were disreputable in habit and appearance. Most were of the class commonly called unemployable, shamelessly collecting coppers at their meetings for, "going round

with the hat." was permitted on the Green. But some seemed to manage very well in this hand to mouth life as they were able to hold a crowd by their particular brand of Irish wit and humour and the use they made of the casuistical tricks they learnt from their sectarian literature. The defenders of Protestantism, on the other hand, though they dressed respectably, and in few cases solicited openly at their meetings, discreetly and surreptitiously did much and more profitable sponging elsewhere.

Among the "merchant princes" of Glasgow were many of Presbyterian and Calvinistic persuasion given to open-handed support of anti-Catholic movements. The Protestant spouters were known to them by recommendation and profited accordingly. It was their practice to wait in the ante-rooms and corridors of the business premises of the men of substance where they successfully collected largesse. Some who combined anti-Socialism with opposition to the Catholics, did very well indeed. By contrast the advocates of Rome, frowned upon by their priests and respectable co-religionists, made a poor enough living by their begging.

This contrast confirmed much of the Protestant criticism of their opponents. "Look at the Irish," they said, "dirty, drunken and ragged. All Catholic countries are the same. Spain! Italy! Travellers tell of the squalor and beggary of them all. You can see the same in Dublin. 'Give us a penny, Scotty,' the ragged muffs on the quay shout at you when the Glasgow boat gets in; 'God's curse on you, Scotty,' when you refuse them. No self-respect."

J. McILWAIN.

(To be concluded)

## BREVIARY IN ASHES

The breviary of my life is burned  
By godless mind controlling godless hands.  
No threat of hell, no scathing reprimands  
Can make me re-embrace what I have spurned:  
The hollow mask of prayer devoutly learned  
To subtly sugar-coat greed's vain demands;  
The empty words, the flatulent brass bands,  
Hailing the hoax of advent, Christ returned,  
I need no ritual for leaning-post,  
No futile fawning in a hopeless plan;  
The thinker's theme, to help one's fellow man,  
Requires no Father, Son, or Holy Ghost.  
With reason's aid we free men shall dispel  
The Churches' lure of heaven, drug of hell.

—WHIT BACON.

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