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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Churches and Society

IN our contemporary, *News Chronicle*, an article was recently featured which appears to be worth commenting upon in *The Freethinker*. The article bore the interrogatory title "Has the Church turned Middle Class?" Its author was a minister employed in the Home Mission Department of the Methodist Church, and its theme was the changed role of the Church, in particular, of the Methodist Church in relation to modern society and the contemporary problems of what it is now the fashion to term, the "Welfare State."

Our Christian author begins in the traditional manner by lamenting the "good old times," when religion really amounted to something in the texture of British social life. He recalls the golden age of Methodism in the days of that monarch amongst religious demagogues and revivalists, John Wesley, and of the Methodist pioneers trained by that formidable protagonist of religion as Big Business. In this connection he again advances the claim, originally propounded by the nineteenth century historian, Lecky, that Methodism saved Britain from imitating the French Revolution.

Whether the England of that age of "rotten boroughs" in the political arena, and the unbridled exploitation of women and children in the Industrial Revolution's first unchecked phase, would really have been ruined by the adoption of the radical principles of Robespierre and Thomas Paine, is, perhaps, a question outside the scope of this column. But the actual claim made by our Methodist author that Methodism prevented a revolution in England is arguable, and the fact that it is arguable, does itself throw quite a lot of light upon the social role of Methodism.

The Established Church of England in the eighteenth century was essentially a class-church, and had no hold whatsoever on the masses, and its plutocracy and absentee bishops were far more apt to promote a revolution than to prevent one. It was the Church of a class and of a narrow class at that; of the Tory oligarchy that misgoverned Britain during those years.

Its motto was the old jingle, "God bless the Squire and his relations and keep us in our proper stations." There was not much of "Christian Socialism" about the Church of Pitt, Eldon, and Castlereagh, indeed, an Anglican democrat would then have represented a contradiction in terms. The social role of such a Church reduced itself to maintaining undiluted the rigid caste barrier between "the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate" as a popular Anglican hymn phrased it.

Such a church could have no appeal to the masses of the people caught up in the maelstrom of an age of unparalleled social change in which all the old securities were disappearing. But the new Wesleyan movement did. For Wesley was a religious demagogue of undoubted genius. His crude evangelical theology, completely "fundamentalist," made no appeal to the cultured and sceptical upper class, who were educated to read

rationalists like Bolingbroke and the Deists, or the latitudinarian semi-rationalist theologians like Butler and Conyers Middleton, who, whilst opposing the Deists, met them half-way, and to whom the one word that was taboo, was "enthusiasm." But the effect of Wesley's religious demagogy upon the mentally and physically starved masses of that period was tremendous. Multitudes quitted the gin-shops, in which Hogarth's brutally realistic art had depicted them, and flocked to the Wesleyan convecticles to imbibe a different but equally effective spiritual nourishment.

John Wesley was the first and greatest of modern religious revivalists: General Booth, Spurgeon, and their legion of bible-banging American copyists, were merely second-hand imitators. Wesley was the master-revivalist, and an organiser as well as a preacher who knew how to transform ephemeral religious revivalism into a permanent ecclesiastical Big Business. The Methodist Church represents the greatest monument to his peculiar genius. Indeed, when considered as a demagogue, Wesley has probably had only one successor of equal potency as a mass spell-binder, and he, though essentially a religious type, operated ostensibly in the political sphere, Adolf Hitler. This historical parallel also extends to the fact that both men prevented the outbreak of revolution in their respective ages and lands.

Wesley himself, as is well-known, desired to operate within the confines of the Anglican Church. But the then Tory bishops had as little use for his demagogy and his revivalist enthusiasm, as their latitudinarian theological colleagues had for his cruder gospel of blood by the bucketful and of hell fire by the ton. Much against their will, the Methodists had to form a separate Church, and, as such, it remains to-day. As Lord Macaulay once observed, the Church of Rome has usually been more successful in keeping its revivalists within its ranks.

In modern times Methodism has become less blatantly reactionary than it was in the days of the French Revolution and the *Age of Reason*. Even demagogues have to study their dupes, and the workers are now organised and possess votes—which was far from being the case a century and a half ago. Accordingly, we find our Methodist writer now boasting of the role played by Methodism in the Labour and trade union movements. In a movement as mentally confused and emotional as British Labour still unfortunately is, in which the anti-clericalism and rationalism traditionally associated with continental socialism are conspicuous by their absence, such claims have a certain plausibility. However, as that *enfant terrible* of the Anglican Communion Dr. Inge once pertinently observed, the conversion of the clergy to "Christian Socialism" would appear to the world in a more sincere guise had it occurred before the workers got the vote and became potential rulers of Britain and dispensers of ecclesiastical patronage.

However, Methodism, our author laments, is now facing a new problem: the problem of superfluity. In our era of "municipal socialism" and of the "Welfare State"

the social functions of the churches are like the proverbial "old soldiers" who simply "fade away." The hundred and one welfare functions, which the churches alone performed in an age of economic *laissez faire* like the nineteenth century, are now being taken over by the State or by municipal bodies. As a result, organised Christianity, for the same problem confronts all the churches, finds itself increasingly socially functionless. In an age of burning revivalist enthusiasm, like that which witnessed the origin of Methodism, this might not have mattered. But such a revival is not likely in our sceptical age, and an institution which is socially functionless is most unlikely to survive in so highly integrated a social age such as ours. The outlook for the churches is gloomy in the extreme, for rival social attractions to Christianity are constantly on the increase.

The *News Chronicle* article ends by quoting the dictum of the late Archbishop Temple that England is now a missionary country, that is, it is no longer effectively Christian.

There is little doubt that this is so. In bringing about the decline of Christianity social causes are not less important than are intellectual ones. Probably, on the whole, they are actually more important, at least where organised religion is concerned.

F. A. RIDLEY.

A REVERENT RATIONALIST

THE difficulty of writing about a book by the late Llewelyn Powys is that one hates to be unfair to a brilliant writer faced with the knowledge that death was inevitable in a more or less short space of time, facing his tragic fate with splendid courage. Here in his *The Cradle of God* (Watts & Co., 8s. 6d.), we have him at his best, a master of beautiful prose, describing his journey through the Holy Land. The Bible has left its mark so strongly on us that the names of the towns and villages in Palestine seem as familiar as those in our own country, and given a fine writer, we cannot be but enthralled with a fresh recital of the old, old story as it appears to a newcomer in the East.

How much did Powys really believe? At the outset, he uses the Bible narratives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as if they described what happened exactly as written. And it is a fact, whether we Freethinkers like to admit it or not, that these stories are very vividly described, and somehow, if properly taught at an early age, they are difficult to forget. Powys was the son of a clergyman, and it was only to be expected that with his upbringing he found it difficult to look upon the greater part of the Bible as myth and legend. He does not trouble himself with the doubts and worries of, say, Bishop Colenso. The facts and figures of the Pentateuch which got a very bad shaking at the hands of this mathematical-minded bishop mean nothing to a writer for whom they represent poetry and romance of the highest order.

Powys loved to dwell on such stories as that of Jacob, for example, though it is true he does not commend that patriarch's little trick played on poor, blind Isaac, in which Esau (who seems to us to have been a gentleman) got the worst of it. He would probably have had a shock had he been told that the description of the sons of Jacob at the old man's deathbed was, in actual fact, a description of the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

But whether this will be disputed or not, it cannot be denied that for sheer narrative power, the story of the sons of Jacob, multiplying enormously in the land

of Egypt, with their exodus, and their conquering of Palestine, can hardly be surpassed. Powys gives it to us again as if it were genuine history, sometimes in his own picturesque language and sometimes in the magnificent prose of the Authorised Version. Or should I call it poetry? Let the discerning reader judge for himself which he prefers.

You can let yourself go when you come to the story of David or that of Solomon as, indeed, the old writers themselves did. Powys certainly revelled in re-writing some of the details of their amorous adventures and he must have thrilled to the high heavens when he trod on the footsteps of the fiery old prophets. Listen to him:—

"When, in the month of May, we sons of a righteous father, sons of Eli, used to read the magnificent passage at the brass lectern, I never imagined that it would be my lot to visit the stony terrace where Elijah had mocked the false priest. It has happened so. I carry with me my memory of the historic mountains, with its glen and honey-combed dongas, with its sage and black-berried bay trees, with its slanting dew-dropped rocks gleaming like plates of copper in the early sunshine. It takes over three hours to reach the place by a wild mountain road; and from its high crest, which was once 'black with cloud and wind,' a man can look down upon the Promised Land, upon the hills of Samaria, upon the hills of Nazareth, upon the slopes of Gilboa, upon the snow-capped head of Hermon, and the loft mountain ranges on the other side of the Jordan.

Out of the blazing heat of noon I sought refuge in the cool, white-washed interior of a vaulted monastery cell; and there, as I lay meditating, with an incipient fever in my blood, my attention was caught by a single picture in the room, a tawdry-coloured Catholic print representing Elijah, sword in hand, standing with his foot upon the neck of a false priest. I regarded it at first with an interest entirely detached. Then suddenly I recognised in the narrow, bigoted, fanatical countenance of Elijah the very expression that I have seen upon the limited faces of the people who are my natural enemies. . . ."

Writing of this kind is not easy to answer exactly. Powys would simply have smiled if told that there wasn't a scrap of evidence that Elijah had ever existed. His name is purely artificial—a combination of El and Jah—both no doubt ancient Palestinian Gods, quite probably merely stone totems. Possibly even such a name as "Israel" is just as fictitious. "Is" sounds as if it is part of Isis, "Ra" is an Egyptian Sun-God, while El is the old deity of the original inhabitants of Judea. But one cannot write romantically of the dear Old Book if its stories are analysed so prosaically, and Powys would have laughed us to scorn. And he writes as if Jeremiah, Isaiah, and the other "prophets," had really lived. Note how both these names have "iah" (that is, "jah") at the end.

The most exciting moment Powys experienced was when he tells us he was looking "upon the dust of the planet Earth, that had actually supported the human feet of Christ." I suspect that he never tried to distinguish between "Christ" and "Jesus" as names for his hero. If he believed in Christ, then Powys was a Christian, no matter how much he demurred. If he merely believed that there was a man called Jesus, then he has a good many Freethinkers behind him—

though some of these often like to think of Jesus as a Man. But I am afraid that he will anger even some Rationalists when he insists that Jesus "was a Jew, dark-skinned, and with eyes brightened and illuminated with genius." Dark-skinned indeed!—when every picture ever painted of Jesus shows him as Aryan as Hitler.

Needless to add, Powys will have "no Saviour of the mild Christological conception, to set up in a shrine with bleeding heart and clasped hands." Like so many other lovers of Jesus, the Christian Deity must conform to what they consider he should be—a poet, an orator, a Prince of Peace, a War Lord, a Spiritualist, a Vegetarian, a wine bibber, or the whole lot for that matter. "No man had ever spoken as he spoke," exclaims Powys. "no man had been like to him." One feels it is useless to deal with such hopeless adoration. Even if I were to prove that lots of people did speak like Jesus, it would make no difference. Renan went off the rails in much the same manner—only his Jesus was like Renan himself, just as this Jesus seems to me to be a projection of Llewelyn Powys himself.

Of course, long after Jesus was dead, he is certain that the tenacious memory of St. Peter was able to recollect everything about him. If Powys had ever heard of the Myth theory he must have spurned it quite as much as the modern defenders of Will Shakespeare of Stratford spurn the "ridiculous" heresies of the Baconians and Oxfordians. And I am quite sure that if he had been asked, how did the Gospel writers get hold of some of the incidents related in their "biographies" of which there were no witnesses, he would have loftily replied that there was such a thing as "revelation." He did, of course, insist that miracles do not happen—yet, yet . . . Oh, yes, in the case of Jesus something did happen. It always has.

The Cradle of God is a beautifully written book—just as is *Renan's Life of Jesus*. But I read them both with impatience. I cannot see, no matter how I try, all the wonderful things, the poignant beauty and emotion, which so many Rationalists find in the Gospels. They are, in essence, crude recitals of primitive Oriental superstitions well written, of course, but of no more value than the rejected Gospels. But Powys can write, and for those who love good writing and who like a travel book vivid and eloquent, I can heartily recommend this one.

H. CUTNER.

CLERICALISM IN ISRAEL

A PICTURE of the new State of Israel is presented which is completely out of focus with its reality. The Press gives us to understand that the reactionary and chauvinist forces inside the Zionist movement are basically equivalent to the clerical parties and tendencies. The Socialist Zionist Press joins in the chorus of the correspondents, hostile and friendly, who look upon the Rabbis as the embodiment of all the traditional and outworn dogmatism which fetters the free development of an otherwise basically sound and progressive political and economic totality.

A consideration of the distribution of the seats in the Knesset (Israel's Parliament) will put the position in perspective: the United Religious bloc despite strenuous efforts was unable to poll more than 13 per cent. of the total vote. Of course it will be objected that there is still strong clerical influence in the Cherut (formerly the "Terrorists"), the ruling party Mapam and the

Communal organisations like the Sephardim (Oriental Jews) and the Yemenites. It is true that there is more respect for the rabbinical authorities amongst the Right Wing organisations and parties—the Cherut has gone out of its way to propagandise the oriental masses who are either apathetic or merely at the communal stage of political consciousness—but this is a different thing altogether from support of the general clerical demands for Religious Education and interference with civil liberties. The best analogy that can be given is the attitude of the Conservative, Liberal, and Labour Parties to the Church of England.

The outlook of the majority Party, Mapam, can best be summed up in the statement: As long as we rule Israel for six days a week, we don't mind if the religious bloc rules on the Sabbath! The real weakness of the Religious bloc is precisely its apparent strength, it holds the balance of power, and the reason is simple enough: the Prime Minister, Ben Gurion, has but to point to the pro-Stalinist Mapam with its 17 seats and the Religious bloc knows what is implied in the gesture. Mr. Ben Gurion is quite capable of forming a United Workers' bloc with the Mapam, which would command a majority even though this would not meet with American approval, either the White House or the Zionist organisations in the U.S.A.

The Mapam leaders asked if democratic freedom means the rule of the "Shulchan Anich" (the redacted code of Jewish Law associated with the name of Joseph Caro (13 cent.) over all citizens of the State. Can this Government talk of social progress and democracy?*

This hyperbolisation of the religious forces at work curtailing the free growth of civil liberties, is part of the Opposition's attempt to divert the attention of Jews in Israel from the significant and decisive features of negated democracy, as for instance, the isolation of the Arab population from the creative aspects of the Jewish State, the partial conscription and direction of labour, etc.

The Religious bloc has gained the following "positions" in its struggle with the Right and the Left. It has banned the import of non-kosher meat, it has influence in the Immigration Department (the Minister in charge is a representative of the Hapo'el Hamizrachi, and it has stopped the operation of public services on the Sabbath in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv). (Taxis do excellent business!)

Only a detailed analysis of the heterogeneous parties inside the united Religious bloc can complete the picture of the political and religious power of the clerical forces. The two main divisions are the Mizrahi Zionist Party and the non-Zionist Agudist Party. The Agudists are the more orthodox, insisting that the Binyan Ha'arety (the Zionist slogan of building up the land) can have no significance unless this implies Talmud Torah (the theory and practice of Jewish tradition). The Agudists were opposed to Zionists until the State of Israel was proclaimed but their unpopularity forced them to compromise.

They participate in the Government as part of the united religious front, but insist that they are non-Zionist, as distinct from anti-Zionist. The Mizrahi organisation has powerful connections abroad and is the more important. They insist that one cannot be a Zionist unless one accepts the whole corpus of Judaism, but in practice they have been forced to turn a blind eye to the many modernist tendencies in the structure of

* Statement of Mapam's position, March, 1949, by Meir Yaai in the Knesset.

modern Talmudic and traditional Judaism (in particular, in respect of the difficulties of that arise on the Sabbath in the collective farms).

Apart from the two main divisions, there are two more important divisions. These derive from the difference of social character that make up the religious organisations, the Hapo'el Hamizrachi and the Poate Agudat Israel, the workers' organisations which tend more and more to dominate the councils of the Mizrachi and the Agudists. Politically they support the Government, and it is only on the religious question that there are any differences. The Government parties proper have an uneasy alliance with their "Socialist" partners, and often express their discomfort by quoting the prophet Isaiah "My sons have become great and rebelled against me."

In the above quoted groups there are still more divisions, and co-operation is very limited. If one faction wants the religious workers to enter the Histadut (Trade Union), another will oppose in case the religious workers are "contaminated" by the non-religious. If one faction insists on closer co-operation with the Mizrachi proper, the other insists that this very co-operation will damn the religious workers in the eyes of the non-religious workers.

As one could expect, not all the religious forces swallowed the idea of unity. Four splinter groups broke away from their parent organisations and put up candidates of their own, and one group, the Neturei Kartel (Guardians of the City), refused to co-operate with the "idolaters" and Zionists or their co-religionists.

The Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi has considerable influence despite his "supporters"; his integrity is respected, and but for him, the Religious bloc would not even have assumed an appearance of unity. The half-hearted resistance to conscription of women in the Armed Services on the part of the Religious bloc, has provided fuel for the "Left Wing," who take every opportunity of equating religion in politics with reaction in its most hidebound form.

To round off the picture I must refer to the coming conflict between American Jewry and Israel's Jewry. The U.S.A. has given scope to the growth of Liberalism and Reformism in religion, which however, has never been recognised as "religious" by the Orthodox in Israel. Liberal and Reform Rabbis are not recognised as valid executors of marriages in Israel. In the near future a conflict will arise between the assimilated Americanised Judaism and the rigorous Traditional Judaism which is still the important tendency in Israel today. Religion in Israel is slowly losing its grip, its influence becoming smaller, if only for the fact that the Rabbis have failed to interpret rightly the Psalmist's verse: "How pleasant and good is it for brethren to dwell together in unity."

AKIBA.

THE DOCTRINE OF NECESSITY

READING his "Materialism Confusion" left me wondering if Mr. M. Barnard is a member of the reverend confraternity. In my "Misconceptions of Materialism" I put the question whether, accepting the Christian statement of our ease we are now talking like Christians? I did not anticipate open confirmation. In saying that to accept Prof. McDougal's statement of Modern Materialism was to support the theologians case, I did not expect to be told that "it is consistent with, and confirms theological teaching—to wit, predestination." Maybe Mr. Barnard is unaware of how he is answering the question.

We can see how Prof. McDougal mis-stated the case for

he was not a materialist and was seeing it from his own point of view. He has been referred to as "our leading exponent of animism" and according to E. B. Tyler, animism, summed up in his definition "belief in spirits," is the basis of religion. Mr. Barnard quotes the pantheist Spinoza's definition of mind as "spiritual automaton," but this seems to be in line with Tyler's animism. It also seems that Mr. Barnard believes in "spiritual entities and so is an animist like Prof. McDougal. He agrees with McDougal's definition of Modern Materialism for he sees it from the same point of view.

Mr. Barnard does not quote any materialist for his "rigid principle of necessity." He not only identifies science with "mechanistic" science but goes even further in making his "necessity" objective, that is, outside man as fate; for it is "destiny alone" by which "man's actions are determined." To assert otherwise is a "vain boast," apparently with or without the "infallible prediction" of science. Further, "it is a subtle point" whether "consciousness does influence action" or if man is like a drugged "victim" though "conscious" yet "not able to act by his volition." Is this our merciless atheism? Even a theologian with his Almighty God could not make men more powerless. But what is the purpose of such a fatalistic doctrine?

And where is the need? What is it that is necessary and for whom? Human beings or animals have needs. Necessity characterises or is an attribute of, or is the basis of purposive action in, living things; but to assert necessity in nature is to make Nature a living thing. Nature is the sum total of all things, how then, is nature in need of anything? It is this false analogy, reading human or animal qualities into nature; this animism, projecting our own thoughts or feelings into the objective world; this objectivity leading to renunciation; that is the basis of religion; and that distinguishes the Necessary Being of Thomas Aquinas from the "necessity" of Democritus.

Democritus laid the foundation of Materialism, asserting "nothing happens by chance but of necessity." Necessity is then a basic concept. But to say things happen by chance is simply to say we do not know. But he also said: "We should strive, not for fullness of knowledge but for fullness of understanding." So, he was not thinking of his "necessity" objectively, it was a matter of understanding. Our own Chapman Cohen put it very neatly, as a matter of determinism, which is "a necessity of thought" and "a condition of sane thinking." This "necessity" is then, not objective, but expresses our own needs, which are reflected in a variety of conceptions of necessity in the development of science.

We need different criteria for the various fields of inquiry. In mathematics we have units and symbols and methods of their combination in systems of calculation. In physics we need measurable quantities for computation of observable fact; with new criteria in dynamics from those of mechanics. So also biology, with actual living forms as subject matter. But man as a social animal needs more than mathematical, physical or biological consideration for a comprehensive understanding. Just as mathematics does not supply the needs of biology, so biology is insufficient in the social field, for man changes his environment, and we, ourselves, are the subject matter.

As against this "rigid necessity," the history of science shows different concepts of necessity arising out of a variety of needs. The mathematical or calculable necessity of Democritus was followed, arising in dialectic argument in the need for tests, by logical necessity in Aristotle's Logic. But this is confused in the logic of

Augustine's doctrine of predestination, that is, theological necessity. In physical science, Bacon realised the need for experiment, and Galileo, that for demonstration, in the notion of physical necessity. And out of the violence of medieval conflict and the study of living forms, came the idea of biological necessity, the law of self-preservation.

The implications of the biological struggle for existence the need for food, clothing, shelter, the means of livelihood, brings the notion of economic necessity. But man is a social animal, and survival implies the persistence of customs and beliefs, institutions and prejudices, and personal relations involve psychological necessity, expressed in personal idiosyncrasies. The modern idea of evolutionary change clashes with medieval ideas of rigidity and finality, and involves us all in notions of political necessity and moral necessity, and all together in social necessity.

Science arises in human needs. Science is not merely theoretical, it is practical; it is not a matter of "explanation" or "prediction" but arises as a social product in the social needs. Surely the object of science is to fulfil our needs, and not to deny our potentiality.

H. H. PREECE.

FREETHOUGHT DEFINITIONS

ATHEIST: One who refuses to believe in the supernatural until such time as the supernatural can be proved. As instance, he disbelieves that the world is a flat plane supported on the back of an elephant, which, in turn, stands on the back of a tortoise. The plane having four pillars, one at each corner, supports a solid heaven above the clouds, and from its position, the tortoise obviously stands in eternal torment, or the Christian Hell.

In this disbelief the atheist is now supported by a number of eminent divines and theologians, who have been compelled to revise the original church belief in view of the general increase in knowledge of the cosmos; an increase which all connected with any church have ever done their utmost to suppress.

Contrary to the general view the atheist is not a disbeliever. Quite otherwise. He believes in any proved fact. He even believes that there is no limit to human credulity, and that therefore man will go on creating new gods in place of old, just as he has always done, and just as we can watch modern church apologists changing the original anthropomorphic god of the Bible into a "value" or even a mathematical symbol. He also believes that all the thousands of gods which have figured in man's mind are completely unable to influence natural causes, even when begged to do so by witchdoctors and other godists.

CALL: A shout, summons or invitation. With Christians, this usually comes from God. These people get calls from God exactly as though they have a celestial telephone concealed somewhere about their persons, which rings them up at intervals. This is particularly the case with the Gentlemen of God who administer His church services. If He rings them up to advise them of a new sphere of work they pray most devoutly for guidance in the problem set them. Should this earnest prayer reveal the new ministry to be paying a better stipend; should the rectory be a better building; and, above all, should their spouses react favourably, they "accept the call" after a suitable interval. Should these conditions not obtain one can almost hear them pressing button B as they refuse the call without even troubling to pray about it. One imagines they do not even take the receiver off its hook.

F. W. RENNIE.

INDIA CALLING

TOWARDS the end of November last, the N.S.S. received news of the First Convention of Indian Rationalists to be held in Madras in December. It was a historic event and the Executive of the National Secular Society at once sent fraternal greetings, and pointed out the interest and work Charles Bradlaugh gave on behalf of the rights and freedom of the Indian people.

A report of the Convention just to hand indicates a very substantial success, with good promise for the future. A picture of the inside of the Rajaji Hall, Madras, shows a spacious floor packed with delegates, among whom all manner of political opinions were represented, and 12 of the major languages of India were in evidence. The delegates were welcomed by the Chairman of the reception committee, Mr. S. Ramanathan. The Convention was held in the large Banquet Hall of the Government House which was packed to capacity and some hundreds of visitors sat outside and listened to the speeches.

An Indian Rationalist Association was formed, Sir R. P. Paranjpye, M.A., D.Sc., a leading Indian scholar and government official, was elected President, S. Ghosh and T. S. Selvaraj will share the secretarial duties, and a strong panel of influential members will complete a working committee.

The Resolutions passed reveal a clear and forceful grasp of Freethought principles demanding freedom of thought, inquiry, expression and association; complete separation of religion from the State; Secular Education in the schools, free medical advice and aid on the limitation of families; a major problem for India, eradication of the caste system, etc. The new Association will link up with The World Union of Freethinkers.

We congratulate our Indian comrades on the very successful launching of their first Convention, and we wish them every possible success in the future. They have a very difficult task before them in a country of well over 300 millions of people, of whom 90 per cent. are illiterate; an easy prey for religion and superstition. Mass ignorance is a terrible affliction, but is fertile ground for priests and their gods.

The priests of India will not celebrate the birth of the Indian Rationalist Association. History has a habit of repeating itself and well might priests tremble at the first gleam of enlightenment among their victims, and the first exposure of the secrets of their trade. We know what happens when an ignorant and oppressed people begin to see the light. They demand something better than the ignorance they have known, and realise that the first and most formidable obstacle to be cleared away is the priest and his stock in trade.

R. H. ROSETTI.

GRIEF

In ancient times the Chinese sages said,
Speaking of laments for dead, or dying,
That folk who outcry make while tears they shed
Are crying, crying.

Others, they said, who lamentations loud
Utter, like cawing rooks, or lost dogs prowling,
But have no tears for him who wears the shroud,
Are howling, howling.

Some few they marked whose tears did freely flow
Without a sound, silent as one sleeping;
By that, these sages said, true grief we know:
It is—weeping.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

ACID DROPS

The Bishop of London, Dr. Wand, admits, apparently against his will, that in "all essentials a marriage in a Register Office is the same as a marriage in church." It is not often that we are on "the side of the angels," nor in such distinguished company.

Torquay churches apparently resent the good business done by boarding houses and hotels last summer, and the Rev. G. Posten wants to share the "spoils." He suggests that the business people should hand over a "thank offering" to the Church because they, too, "have helped to provide visitors with a good summer holiday." We hope the Torquay Chamber of Commerce will tell their spiritual business colleague exactly where to "get off," or at least, inquire what part the churches took in making visitors comfortable.

Week by week the sea slowly washes away the cliff on which stands the twelfth-century church of the Rev. C. Cox, who has appealed to the pubs of Lyme Regis to help collect money for repairs. We hope the devotees of "Demon Drink" will give him the obvious retort—watch and pray.

Seventeen hundred people attended a Church "unity" meeting in London recently, and it was made conspicuous by the absence of any Roman Catholic. The Bishop of Exeter presided, and he claimed that the Roman Church was divided on this issue—some holding out the hand of friendship, while others do not. How far the hand is held out, however, is quite another matter, and we can only repeat again that the Vatican is prepared to engulf the Church of England entirely on its own terms—unconditional surrender. All the same, we cannot see our bishops giving up their well-paid jobs for Roman (or Italian) bishops however much they might want one Church, Faith, and Pope. What a farce is this Christian "unity"!

The Rev. P. Caporn is having a spot of bother with his Parochial Council because of his showmanship in connection with his church services. The parson decorated his church with tyres, wheels and car radiators, with clippies and conductors in uniform, to take the collection at a special service for transport workers. Even the assertion by their parson that he was appointed by God to lead the Parish did not deter the Council from objecting. And so this "Bertram Mills" of the Church will arrange further stunts for other sections of workers. When his imagination dries up, we would like to suggest that he holds a special service for such workers as dustmen—together with their open vans and dustbins, with the dustmen in complete costume. Any more suggestions?

For one penny you can get from the S.P.C.K. a leaflet containing the forms of prayer all good Christians should follow at Election Time; and considering these prayers have the blessings of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, they ought to be good value. Alas, the *Church Times* complains that they are of "deplorable quality." One of the prayers contains "cheap and meaningless sentiment," and altogether this Anglo-Catholic organ insists that, as this is not the first time it has complained, now "there seems more need for this protest than ever before." For our part, we would add that for sheer nonsense, there seems little difference between any kind of prayer—and this includes the prayers of all religions.

The Labour Candidate for the Hertford Division is already angling for the Catholic vote. He has promised to support them in their campaign to retain their schools. The fact that so many Catholic schools are far below the minimum standard required under the Education Act is considered of little importance, and the attitude seems to be that no matter whether school buildings are old, insanitary, and derelict, so long as they can turn out thousands of little Catholics, that is all that is necessary. We repeat, and hope not *ad nauseum*, that if Catholics think religious instruction is so important, it should be given outside school hours, and at their own expense—not ours!

During the rally at the Albert Hall, Cardinal Griffin urged all Catholics to ascertain from all candidates in the General Election their attitude towards Catholic education and to ask for a definite and candid answer, and then to use their vote "according to their conscience." That the party returned will hold the destiny of the nation for the next few years is, to a Catholic, merely secondary. Despite all we have heard to the contrary religious emotions may well decide election issues.

In an article on "Miracles" in the *Teachers' World*, Mr. J. E. Brown, M.A., states that children should be permitted to accept miracle stories "as they stand," for Jesus asked "for faith not credulity." A finer distinction without a difference it would be hard to find. But worse is to come. Mr. Brown, who, be it not forgotten, has the responsibility of training children for future citizenship, asserts that it is important to remember that "we do not believe in Jesus because of the miracles, but believe in miracles because of Jesus." That means, of course, "faith," not "credulity." Is it to be wondered that these future electors will wait for "guidance" from their "betters" before casting a vote?

It is not always Roman Catholics who have given God a Mother (capital "M")—our Anglo-Catholics are not far behind. A book has just been published with the title *The Mother of God*, a Symposium by a number of adoring believers. According to one reviewer, there is a fascinating essay by Dr. Thornton, "The Mother of God in Holy Scriptures," in which "the mysterious fulfillments of the Old (Testament) in the New (Testament) are brought out." To show the Mother of God Almighty in the Old Testament must be a unique literary and theological miracle. We wonder what the compilers of the Old Testament—the Jews—have to say about it?

A Fr. Parker, however, takes the medal. He is so devoted to God's Mother that he gives as a "safe" rule to follow—"Never to think of God without Mary, and never of Mary without God." And in the face of this bilge, we are continuously told that our work in attacking the Bible is now quite unnecessary. In actual fact, we should never cease to attack this mass of sheer myth and legend.

Now we know. The Pope has made it quite clear that he has never "either directly or indirectly spoken against Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, or against Fatima." We are bound to believe the old gentleman. It would be as much as his job is worth to ride full-tilt at this almost unbelievable balderdash. As one famous Church Father used to say, the sillier a Biblical story was, the more he believed it, and the Pope could never by-pass such a dictum.

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.
Telephone No.: Holborn 2801.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. I. G.—Glad to find *The Freethinker* circulates in Malaya.
J. P. TUCK.—Thanks for cuttings.
E. G.—The "Prophecies" regarding the Jews and Palestine were all written after the first and second captivities when the Israelites had been dispersed.

P. T. LECKIE.—You are quite right. The text should be, Luke 2, 48—"Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."
BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 10s. from the Glasgow Branch N.S.S.

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.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (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), 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.

Will correspondents please write on one side of the paper, and keep their letters brief. This will give everybody a chance.

SUGAR PLUMS

Mr. R. H. Rosetti will speak in the Socialist Hall, Royal Arcade, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, this evening (February 19) on "An Evening with the Gods." Those who desire a change from evenings with the politicians should make a point of attending and bring their religious friends. The lecture begins at 7 o'clock, admission is free, with some reserved seats at 1s.

In an Exhibition of the National Bible Society, a section will be devoted to illustrating pagan worship and objects connected with it. There will be idols, gambling cards, prayer wheels, and African fetishes. No section dealing with statues of the Virgin Mary (black and white), scapulars, holy oils, relics, etc., will be on view. There will, however, be Bibles in 900 different languages, but up to date there has been no request for the *Age of Reason* or our *Bible Handbook*.

St. Anthony's Day was not a conspicuous success when a priest blessed parrots, donkeys, mules, monkeys, and dogs, in Rome. It took a squad of police to disentangle the traffic, and the whole-time efforts of hundreds of people to quieten the howling, screeching, braying and barking mass of animals. A priest can perform a miracle every day, but when it comes to something useful, it is a little more difficult.

A plough, symbolic of man's labour on the land, was blessed by the Rev. T. Alexander in his church near Exeter. We understand that the plough still needs something more solid than symbolic men and horses to make it effective.

INTERNATIONAL FREETHOUGHT CONGRESS AT ROME, 1949

V.

(Summary of the Hon. Secretary's Report and of the national reports and messages sent to the Congress—Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Finland, France, Great Britain, Holland, India, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, United States.)

ALTHOUGH the movement for the liberation of human thought extends to the farthestmost quarters of the globe, there are great areas without any freethinking organisation. In countries such as China, Japan and Indonesia, conditions have been too disturbed; in Scandinavia groups have appeared without permanence; in Spain, Portugal, Catholic Canada and Latin America, the Roman Church has overmuch political power. Those countries where there exist freethinking bodies, fall into four categories: (1) the non-Christian, e.g., India; (2) the Roman Catholic, viz., Italy, France, Belgium, Eire; (3) the Protestant, viz., Holland, Finland, Great Britain, Germany, United States, Australia, New Zealand; (4) the Communist.

The problems vary greatly, but the solution is the same, the dissemination of scientific knowledge and the development of a critical sense.

In India there has for long been much uncorrelated freethinking among intellectuals and from time to time societies have been formed; but the obstacles of language and of difficult communications, together with political preoccupations, have soon brought them to an end. Recently, following on the establishment of the new states of India and Pakistan, there has been a revival of rationalist activity; groups have been formed in many parts of the country and an All-India Convention has been convened for December 18, 1949, under the Presidency of Sir R. Paranjpye. As in India the very tissue of the social structure is woven from ancient religious dogmas, little social advance can be made without energetic rationalist effort. The World Union welcomes the new Indian Rationalist Nucleus.

In Italy, Belgium, France, Eire and Mexico, one form of Christianity is outstandingly powerful, the Church of Rome. In the first three there were formerly powerful freethought federations, allied to some extent with political movements, e.g., Radicalism and Socialism. The two wars, occupation by the Nazis who favoured Catholic organisations such as the Rexists in Belgium; or domination of the Fascists in Italy, and the growth of the Russo-Communist movement, reduced these associations to shadows of their former selves. Little by little, thanks to heroic efforts by the few, the freethought federations are regaining their memberships. Their main work is anti-clerical, for the Catholics have come into the political arena overtly and covertly. There are small humanist groups of intellectuals; and the Freemasons are largely freethinking. In Mexico the movement is organised in the philosophic lodges of the Freemasons; in Eire a Rationalist Society has just been formed which promises well. In the former there has been, and is still, a stern struggle between the State and the Church; in the latter the Roman Church has greatly gained in power under the new Republic. In Mexico, therefore, the movement takes on an anti-clerical aspect; what will happen in Eire remains to be seen. In all these countries the great gain in political power made by the Church of Rome as a result of the two wars is now becoming apparent to the rationalist intellectuals, and the need for co-ordinated effort is urgent if that advance is to be stemmed.

In the Protestant countries, i.e., those in which Rome is not a dominant sect, the same phenomenon appears; the Catholics, thanks to their close-knit organisation of submissive elements, are able to gain an influence out

of all proportion to their numbers, to such a point that they can threaten the civil liberties of the individual, yet the freethought bodies are divided, usually on points such as an objection to the label "freethinker" or "rationalist" as out-of-date; or on the need or not of anti-clerical action. Generally the Churches lament a falling-off of attendance and a growth of indifference, which is reflected in the rationalist organisations. There has in fact been a general drift away from the theology of last century, which the Churches do not appear to be able to check. Those who feel that "freethinker" is offensively anti-clerical, emphasise the need of brotherly co-operation and the dissemination of principles which shall lead to world friendship instead of world war. In Germany in particular, where after World War I there arose political freethought societies of over half a million members, there has been a powerful reaction against anything savouring of political-theological strife, a reaction marked by the reappearance of the Free Religious Movement of a century ago, which effectively says "let us find what we can do of good working with our neighbours, no matter who they may be, and forget all theological dogmas and political doctrines; be free of them." In three years this movement has drawn to itself 100,000 members. The widespread increase of freethought is typified by the figures sent by the New Zealand Rationalist Association, which show that in 1936 in New Zealand, 9,381 persons declared themselves as without religion (including rationalists, freethinkers, atheists and agnostics), and in 1945, 20,253, an increase of over 120 per cent., whereas the total population increase was about 6 per cent. Similar increases are met in places as wide apart as Holland and South Africa.

In Finland the situation is somewhat different; there is one Church, the Lutheran, and a strong feeling against Soviet Russia, and the religious atmosphere is narrow and intolerant. The organised freethought movement dates from 1945 only and is making rapid headway in over fifteen centres.

In the Communist countries, the Russian Union of Militant Atheists has not only been less active since the adoption of the Orthodox Church by the State; it has also ceased all communication with the World Union. In Poland the movement was reorganised in 1945 and has been very active on popular lines; the mass of the people are Roman Catholic and illiterate, and freethought militancy is mostly anti-clerical. In Czechoslovakia, before the war, there were three main societies, the Volna Myslenka, non-political, of 50,000 members, the Moravian Socialist Society of 10,000 members and the Communist League. Under the new regime there is one League of Churchless, numbering about 18,000 members. Though the leaders of the Volna Myslenka, Voska, Milde, etc., are leading members of the new League, it has to toe the Communist line and ranks on the same footing as the Churches, receiving a State grant according to the membership. The Polish and Czech societies announced delegations to the congress, but none came. A report and a message came from Prague, and a telegram from Warsaw.

In the schools the religions have generally gained in the past ten years; the 1944 Act in Great Britain was symptomatic. The Church schools, which had been condemned on account of their general inefficiency by the Ministry of Education, were not only allowed to remain, but schools of religious foundation were enabled to obtain aid from State funds. Similar laws have been introduced in Canada; and the religious sects have endeavoured to gain entrance into the schools in the United States and New Zealand in spite of clear-cut laws against them.

In France, Belgium and Italy, the clericalisation of the schools has been a marked feature of the war period.

In few countries are Rationalist Societies allowed to broadcast regularly; France and Australia are the most favoured. In Great Britain some noteworthy emissions have been made by individuals invited by the B.B.C., but no freethought organisation has yet been allowed the free use of the microphone, even for a few minutes.

The official delegations including officers and speakers were:—

America: C. Smith (National Liberal League, Association for the Advancement of Atheism).

Australia: W. Glanville Cook (Australian Rationalist Society).

Belgium: Mlle. P. H. Pardon, Senator A. Boulanger, L. Courtois (Federation Rationale Belge).

France: A. Lorulot, J. Cotereau (Federation Nationale Francais).

Great Britain: R. H. Rosetti (President of National Secular Society), E. J. Fairhall (South Place Ethical Society), H. J. Blackham (Ethical Union), C. B. Bonner (Rationalist Press Association).

Holland: A. L. Constandse, J. de Ronde, G. Rausch (Dageraad).

Italy: On Dott. E. Bartalini, Profs. G. Conforto, G. Pepe, C. Giglio, P. Sanguini, C. Serafino, Dr. G. Polidori and C. Silvestro (Giordano Bruno).

The Dutch Humanist Verbond sent Dr. van Praag and Mevr. Polak-Schwartz (who also represented the United Secularists of America) to participate without voting power. The total non-Italian attendance came to over 50; which, in view of the difficulties of travelling and other obstacles, was satisfactory and comparable with the attendances at London, 1938; Prague, 1936; and Barcelona, 1934.

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER.

LOVE BIRDS, HOLY BIRDS

FROM time immemorial, and especially in the Eastern religious cultus, the Dove or Pigeon always had a sacred status and was worshipped as a Holy Bird. And as a *Divine Dove*, its image was stamped upon coins whose dates are fixed hundreds of years before the time assigned to the appearance of the Holy Ghost Dove, according to the Gospels. Why pigeons and doves should have been specially selected for religious rites will be explained by the following discourse.

It is recorded that when Orion pursued the virgins of Artemis, they were rescued by being changed into doves, and then placed in the Heavens under the name of Pleiades, the constellation of dove stars. Pleiades and Doves become interchangeable. From them, also, auguries were taken respecting favourable times for setting sail; hence the deification of doves. Then, again, from the allegorical to the personal was but natural according to those times when men personified an imaginary from which benefits were derived. For there were certain persons, in various places, called doves, who were the most ancient prophetesses at Thebes, where oracles were founded. According to Herodotus, the priestesses had pigeons which spoke from a beech tree, in a human voice, directing a temple to be founded at Dodona, in honour of Zeus. These sacred women also received the appellation of *Doves* as being the ministers to the dove-god. Like the daughters of Anius, the women become doves, and doves become women. Zeus was also in the shape of a dove. Doves were also sacred to Venus. A dove was also the emblem of the deity

Semiramis. And the history is: that when Semiramis died she was changed into a dove under which form she received divine honours. Hence, the Babylonians consecrated the dove, which they attached as their national emblem or totem, and fixed it to their city gates. Moreover, the Babylonians were called (Ioni) children of the Dove; all this is corroborated in the Bible, (Jeremiah 50). The Chaldeans were dove worshippers, and so were the Samaritans. The Assyrians worshipped it. The dove, in fact, was as a great god. The Greek God Aesculapius, when exposed as a child, was preserved by a dove. It became a divine emblem with the Hebrews and is still the symbol of the Christian's Holy Ghost, who appeared in the form of a dove and spoke at Christ's baptism.

All the earliest and most authentic writers, even Clemens Alexandrinus, declare the foregoing to be true. The pigeon and dove were the only birds that the people of Hierapolis (the Holy City) worshipped.

All of these renderings are clearly primitive in origin, yet they are accepted now, with the same adaptation respecting their meanings which are readily received and also well understood, in comparative religions. These characteristics account for causation and effect of particular groups of phenomena which can only be explained and understood by tracing them to their original source in remote antiquity; the only means of deriving an intelligible genesis. It furnishes the reason, which would be otherwise unaccountable, for the moulding of words applied to inanimate objects, and bestowing upon them ideas of actuality, human passions and sex. It shows us why they were venerated, deified, and worshipped, and ultimately becoming a form of belief, a creed and faith necessary to the well-being of those for whom a religion is a code of life here and hereafter. It bridges over a yawning and awful precipice of despair, and made man feel that his spiritual cravings may be satisfied and that having devoutly and reverently fulfilled his duties on earth, he looks forward to the certain reward of peace, joy, and eternal bliss in the blessed realms of a Heavenly Mansion. All for The Dove, particularly sacred, never to be killed, nor eaten: yet, sold for a Jerusalem farthing.

The reason why, in far-off India, the "kapotas" or doves are especially cared for, with as much consideration as those which are regularly fed at St. Mark's, Venice, is because the Dove is a Holy Bird.

And in the oldest "Rigvedas," the Dove is a favourable messenger "that we may do no evil, O gods, in the houses." The bird is also typical of loves, the messenger of good tidings. It is doves who draw the chariot of Venus.

And for their immortal remembrance they were assigned to the Pantheon of the Heavens, as a particular constellation or star, whose names furnish their metaphorical significance, and with as good a general meaning as we call a distinguished singer or actor a *star*.

The same idea is readily understood in the poetical sense as in "Love's Labour's Lost," where the princess is called "a gracious moon."

This "mysterious" theme made the *firmament* a canopy of their joyous songs; and the *spring* gave vigour and agility to those graceful displays which took the form of dances, as typical of the revolutions and rotations of the celestial bodies. The rites were essentially connected with agriculture, because as the Earth's process of reproduction is similar to that of the human species, so too, were these linked up with, what was to them, the miracle of general fecundity. Hence, the culture of the ground and the propagation of human beings were not only viewed in the same light, but were

even named by the same term of "tillage"; the beneficial exercise of life from the earth, and from human parents, all of which were displayed by religious "mysterious" ordinances. There can be hardly a doubt upon this point of connection between earth culture and man culture. The ancient worship in these terms and their sexual identification is more fully displayed by an analysis of the two divisions, and ingenuity which subsequently mystified celebrations, by the sanctity afterwards attached to the parts and organs themselves. The esoteric meaning was that which the initiated would never divulge. But after all, apart from terrors, artifices and menaces to maintain the utmost secrecy, was but the regeneration rite, exactly in the same meaning as we find in the Baal-Peor of the Scriptures, the Baal-Pheargh of our ancestors, the Copulative Suty of the Amative Universe.

It is not every nation that adopted Nature and sex-worship, with equal veneration, who carried out their religious ceremonies in secret. And although each division worshipped the symbols privately, there were also the public services, and public images, such as the phallus and lingam, some of which were of monstrous dimensions, and grotesquely designed.

Here, we might recall the fact that the Lingam was Budh, and Budh was also The Sun.

The whole essence and substance were not as many have imagined, a ritual of sensuality, because of its secrecy. It was a devotional system, as innocent in exercise as it was pious and sacred in its intent. Its adoration was the old Sabian veneration of symbolical gratitude. To redeem the lost and wilfully misrepresented characteristics imputed to those mysterious ceremonies is the duty of all sincere archaeologists, who are able and willing to oppose the sinister imputations connected with ancient secret rites, in which there certainly was much good and more purity than we are usually given to understand.

The Eleusinian mysteries were for excellent purposes. And an excellent authority* declares that there is not a single instance on record of an initiation having been conferred upon any person of evil repute. The priests (hierophants) were guardians of men, women, doves and the gods.

The word "tillage" is used in the "Koran"† as stated by Mahommet for propagation of human species, when this prophet wrote: ". . . in consideration of doves and pigeons, being lovebirds, as men and women; for, wives and women are given for "tillage."

Mahommet was fond of doves and pigeons. He trained the birds when released from their cotes to fly towards him and alight upon his shoulders, and having previously put some seeds inside his ears, the trained birds picked the seeds, and the congregation seeing this performance; Mahommet declared that the birds were giving to him divine messages, brought from Allah in Heaven, to be delivered to the faithful. There is an extensive and marvellous library giving extraordinary information about birds in connection with religious creeds of all nations, and of these books, "Zoological Mythology," two volumes by Professor Angelo de Gubernatis, is well worth studying.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

* Chamber's "Edinboro" Journal, Oct. 12, 1833 (Prof. F. Sharpe).

† George Sale's Translation, with Notes.

Rulers push poor pawns into famine, battle, debt and slavery, and gain titles, money and historical renown thereby.—Anon.

MAHATMA GANDHI'S GOD

IN his biography of Mahatma Gandhi, Mr. Polak says that to many he is a strange enigma, an aggregate of inconsistencies. To whatever else in the Mahatma's life this remark may apply, his idea of God is certainly incomprehensible. The inconsistency displayed in this respect in his writings and more so in the life he lived, is, however, excusable, for the subject of God is such that no believer, real or pretender, can help being contradictory. God was created by man in the barbaric stage of civilisation, in his own image both physically (mental picture of a devotee) and mentally. With the gradual advance of civilisation, this barbaric God has constantly been reformed and refined. Man has always tried to lift Him up to his own mental and moral level. But the vestigial marks of the barbaric age continue to exist in Him, as in man himself. The inconsistency of the believers in God is therefore inherent to the subject. The Mahatma, in fact, appears to admit this himself. Mr. T. F. Palmer, in reviewing his autobiography, says: "Gandhi's concept of God was that of *Absolute Truth*. In a life-long search for the eternal verities, Gandhi deemed himself a devout adherent of a principle, through which the divine is adumbrated. But, however closely he approached divinity, he confesses that 'it is an unbroken torture to me that I am still so far from Him.' Still there is scarcely a gleam of a personal deity and a hazy Pantheism seems to pervade Gandhi's attitude towards sacred absorption."

"But what is Truth," said Jesting Pilate, and Absolute Truth at that. If in the Mahatma's concept of God, the expression Absolute Truth, is only a translation of the Sanskrit word, *Sat*, a technical term in *Vedanta*, it can only mean "the reality," the one thing existing without a second, all else being "illusion" or "*maya*," then the "Absolute Truth" has no reference to any personal deity, or to any god at all. This concept can not be called a hazy Pantheism; we can call it a misunderstood Monism, which is altogether a different notion.

At a public meeting at Delhi the other day, one of the Mahatma's chief disciples defined God as a "Mysterious Power." Now the word "mysterious" is a very convenient and useful word; it serves effectually to cover the ignorance of the speaker, and to impose upon the credulity of the listener, but it explains nothing. Power or Force, as conceived by modern man, is certainly not intelligent, which any acceptable God has to be; matter and force or energy are two abstract ideas, which thinkers have evolved for convenience in the process of thinking, otherwise these two do not and cannot exist independently of each other.

The maxim "God is Love," carries us no further than "God is Truth" has done. Truth, love, good and justice, only indicate the standard of moral excellence that man has reached in his social evolution by his own effort and without any extraneous help. And "All-good, All-wise, Almighty," is an ideal he has placed before himself, the eminence to which he aims to rise, and again all by himself. This ideal exists within himself, although he may personify it and think of it as placed somewhere outside of and above him. This mode of thinking may even help him in his moral ascent upwards, but the ideal remains an ideal only; it does not solidify into a Supernatural Intelligent Being, interested in the well-being of the human race, and meting out rewards and punishments, according to our deserts, with a view to reform us.

But Mahatma Gandhi certainly did not think that way. To him, his deity was very much of a Personal Being, sitting somewhere on high, and sending down all sorts

of calamities to punish man for his shortcomings. When a severe earthquake in 1934 razed practically the whole of Quetta to the ground, and many thousands of people were killed within a few minutes, the Mahatma's *ipse dixit* was that it was a punishment sent down by his kind, merciful and All-good God to punish man for his sins, not to reform him, but in order to satisfy His own passion of vindictiveness. Let us consider this point a little in detail. We can imagine that the Hindus among the victims of this Act of God, were punished for the sins committed by themselves in their previous births, and the Christians for the sins of their forefathers to the third and fourth generations backwards. But what were the Muslims punished for? Their number was the largest. Clearly it must be due to their *taqdir* or fate, as determined by the capricious whim of the *Qadir*, the All-powerful Ruler over Nature or *Qudrat*, for according to their beliefs they did not exist before they began this life. And the punishment meted out, had no reference to the sins committed in this life, nor did any of the victims know what he or she was being punished for, or given an opportunity to improve. Some men who were returning from their evening's spree in the houses of ill-fame, not only escaped unscathed, because they happened to be in the open, but later on helped in extricating the dead and the dying from under the debris, while people saying their midnight prayers or telling their beads in their private houses or in the houses of worship, were killed or otherwise ruined.

Clearly the Mahatma degraded his God from the high level of Truth and Love, to the low level of the man in the street, the vulgar, a reversion to the primitive concept.

G. B. SINGH.

(To be concluded.)

CORRESPONDENCE

THE LATE E. C. SAPHIN

SIR,—May an opponent be allowed to add his appreciation to that of "R. H. R." in the current issue of *The Freethinker*. The late E. C. Saphin was always an opponent of considerable merit and one who endeavoured at all times to uphold that standard of debate which is appreciated by those who undertake this difficult work in the open air.—Yours, etc.,

(Rev.) F. H. E. HARTITT

(Secretary, Christian Evidence Society.)

COMMUNISM

SIR,—Alfred D. Corrick, on the above, quotes Charlotte Haldane, Douglas Hyde and Fred Copeman. Still, just because three individuals proved that they were not cast in "the special mould," i.e. worthy of the name of Bolsheviks, does not signify that Communism is an evil force whose main characteristics are persecution and a lack of freedom.

Mr. Corrick is not quite correct when he states that the Webbs were against Communism. They definitely had changed their minds when they went to Russia, saw, and returned convinced, that Fabianism was not the real road to Socialism. In other words, Communism had come to stay.

When I hear so much misinformed criticism and, from the Press and the B.B.C., downright malicious slander, I become more convinced that Russia is a real Socialist State as compared with this so-called Welfare State of Capitalist Britain. That Russia is hated by the Capitalist powers because only a war can hinder that country's advance to Communism. The decadent Capitalist system is on the way out and a more sane system of society, beneficial to all mankind is taking its place. The tide is coming in fast and not even atom bombs can stop the spread of ideas.

He is anything but a freethinker who would wish to put back the clock. Does Mr. Corrick seriously believe that the millions living under a Communist government are worse off than when they were ruled by the Czar and the Greek Church? Was Holy Russia superior, from a freethought point of view, than the present Soviet Union?

If there is the persecution and terror which Mr. Corrick so thoroughly believes in, why have the "poor oppressed" not

risen in revolt? A glorious opportunity was missed when the Nazi armies invaded Russia to win the people over to the Hitler way of life. If the people could throw off the yoke of the Czar, surely the people who are now more literate and better fed can do the same with the present government.

I can only conclude that the peoples of the Soviet Union know when they are well off. Also, that not even the threat of atom bombs will shake their belief in their present leaders. If freethinkers were doing their duty they would be rising in their wrath to denounce the callous preparations for war in the form of Atlantic Pacts and hydrogen bombs which can destroy whole cities, etc.

Reading the letters of your correspondents, I have come to the conclusion that there are two classes of freethinkers. Those who believe that we are living in the best possible country in the best of all possible worlds; and those who believe that lasting peace can only be won when the majority rule and the dictatorship of the wealthy and privileged is broken and thrown into the dust-bin of history.—Yours, etc.,

HUGH MILLAR.

A FAMOUS TEXT

SIR,—I have often wondered whether the following verse has ever been taken as a text for a sermon:—

“But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me.”—LUKE XIX, 27.

It seems strange that an outburst of that kind should immediately follow the parable of the ten pieces of money.

The verse is worthy of a place in the “Bible Handbook.”—Yours, etc.,

V. H. SMITH.

THIS CLERICAL DICTATORSHIP

SIR,—It cannot be denied that in many ways the churches are abridging the liberties of our people by warring against our schools, by interference with our public libraries, by the three B's (Ballot, Boycott and B.B.C.)—in short, it cannot be denied that the awe and apathy of the populace still allows the churches to exercise their ecclesiastical tyranny whilst clamouring against the vileness of Communist dictatorship.

It is an unquestionable fact that the Roman Church to this day officially and uncompromisingly rejects liberty of conscience as a principal; still, they have the nerve to complain about the same thing if it happens to come from the other end—say in Russia or Czechoslovakia. Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical on “Human Liberty” (June 20, 1888) writes:—

“It is nowise permitted to demand, defend or grant liberty of thought or of press or of teaching or of religion.”

If this is not fascism, what is!

And yet, even in Catholic countries, the dull English Sunday is a matter of horror and derision. This puritan anachronism is the cause of many an anomaly in our social life; attendances at churches are slowly dwindling, it is true, but the masses seek instead to dope themselves in pubs, which, among other reasons, breeds political apathy and crimes.

The church has no right to dictate how anybody shall spend Sunday—the rest-day which ought to be the best day, something to look forward to for relaxation. What can be done to break this unbearable and arrogant interference by the church extremists with our private right of Sunday freedom?

It wants a Constitutional change, a change of the law which maintains that this country is a Christian country. Laws are no rigid Procrustean bed in which men have to fit eternally, but, being man-made, they have to be adapted and altered when times have changed.

Every progressivist ought to make it his duty to attend Election meetings and pledge the prospective candidates to do their utmost with regard to restoring our Sunday freedom. It has been apathy and docility only that has allowed the clergy to climb on to a pedestal that is fantastic and outdated.—Yours, etc.,

P. G. ROY.

[But is it not a fact that the Communist State of Czechoslovakia is censoring and destroying all books published before 1945? What is the difference between this and the Roman Catholic Index?—EDITOR.]

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OBITUARIES

HENRY BOLL

We are sorry to have to announce the death of Henry Boll, aged 65, of New Herrington. A quiet and kindly man, he was as firm as a rock where his Freethought opinions were concerned. The loyalty to his ideals made him respected by all with whom he came in contact. He rendered valuable assistance to Mr. Chapman Cohen when, over 40 years ago, the latter made his great attack on superstition in N.E. England, and his efforts were continued by Mr. Boll and had a remarkable influence on public opinion. Henry Boll was also a musician of no mean ability. To his widow, seven daughters and two sons, we extend our deepest sympathy. A secular service was conducted by Mr. J. T. Brighton before a large assembly of relatives and friends.

J. T. B.

THOMAS ROBSON

It is with deep regret that we have to report the death of Thomas Robson, aged 81, of Cramlington. His death, so soon after that of Thomas Dixon, robs the North-East Area of two of its most loyal and reliable stalwarts. Both were active in the days when Charles Bradlaugh struggled to establish Secularism in this area. Mr. Robson's position in local society gave him full opportunity for his combativeness, and he was at all times ready and anxious to defend his Freethought opinions. He was a well-known figure in connection with the N.S.S., and we shall not forget his kindly concern and help. A secular service was conducted at the Crematorium by Mr. J. T. Brighton before friends and relatives to whom we tender our deepest sympathy and condolences.

J. T. B.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: “Britain's Coal,” Mr. LEN CROMPTON.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 21, 7 p.m.: “The Mind-Body Problem,” Dr. C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—No meeting.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: “Can Europe be Saved?” Mr. JOHN McNAIR (Secretary, I.L.P.).

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

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: “Who Persecutes Christianity?” Rev. STANLEY EVANS.

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (The Socialist Hall, Royal Arcade, Pilgrim Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: “An Evening with the Gods,” Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (President, N.S.S.).

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: “Half a Century of International Relations,” Prof. G. W. KIBERTON, M.A., LL.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: “Freedom of Thought and the Freethinker,” Mr. P. COOPER-KING.

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. SAMMS.

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