

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWES AND OPINIONS

### Freethought and War

IN the present rather peculiarly named "year of grace" 1950, when a state of permanent war appears to have become a normal social institution, and when what is peculiarly described as "civilisation" appears to depend for its economic prosperity upon continuous "re-armament," we think it not an inappropriate time to raise the whole question of war in relation to Freethought. This is particularly so when, as undoubtedly at present, "the defence of Christian civilisation" is already beginning to figure rather prominently in the press and upon the B.B.C., as one of the major issues at stake in any future general war.

From the standpoint of sociology the institution, perhaps we ought rather to describe it as the habit of war, appears to have been virtually coterminous with the growth of civilisation: the relationship between the two institutions, indeed, seems to have been so close, indeed inseparable as to resemble substance and shadow. It may indeed, be that, as far as R. L. Worrall has persuasively urged, there was "once upon a time," a golden age, at least, a warless age in which human society, then in its primitive stage, did not periodically decimate itself in recurring holocausts.\*

However, granting the remote—very remote!—existence of such a warless age, it seems to have been probably due to the extremely primitive nature of such an early problematical social order. If wars were once unknown, might not this have been due to the fact that in a society so primitive, there was nothing worth fighting over, either in the way of material goods or of ideas? For example, we are often told that the modern Eskimaux, denizens of the Arctic, have no word for war in their language and that, accordingly, it may be presumed that no such institution is known among these happy dwellers in the frozen wilderness. But if we grant that this is so, such aboriginal pacifism may be due to lack of anything to fight about rather than to any superior moral sense.

In the more "civilised" communities there have been plenty of things to fight about as regards ideas and material goods. In general, the critical study of world history appears to indicate that wars have usually been fought for economic or for ideological reasons as their primary cause. In former ages, during which the role of the economic factor of the material "struggle for existence," tended to be overlooked, the actual influence exercised upon social antagonisms and therefore upon the causes of war by economic factors, was unduly minimised in favour of purely ideological explanations.

To-day, under the influence of Marxism, which, at least in the hands of its more extreme proponents, appears virtually to ignore all motivating causes except the economic ones, the pendulum seems to have swung too far in the opposite direction and the role of ideas as a

war-making factor has sunk into undeserved obscurity; for example, the present writer has, in another connection, made a fairly profound study of the era of the Reformation and we should not like to have to defend the one-sided proposition that, say, the Thirty Years War (1618-48)—all things considered still the most destructive in both life and human culture of all recorded military struggles—was due entirely, or even primarily to economic causes, either conscious or unconscious.

The present writer is not a pacifist in the doctrinaire absolutist sense of the word. We would, again, not like to have to defend the historical proposition that *all* wars have been evil in their effects and have set back human progress. For example, it is difficult to conceive of scientific culture, which, we assume, all Freethinkers regard as a good thing in itself, however abused for political purposes, without taking into account the scientific work of the ancient Greeks. Historically, it is quite certain that, without the military campaigns of Alexander the Great (333-323 B.C.), the scientific renaissance in Alexandria (founded by and named after Alexander) would not have developed; for none of the petty Greek states of the age could have supported that gigantic enterprise of co-operative research, the first of its kind in recorded history.

Similarly, the great Arabic-Moorish civilisation whose brilliant efflorescence contrasted so strikingly with the Europe of the Christian "Dark Ages" was due immediately to the military expansion of Islam. Even in modern times, there have been occasions when, we imagine, progressively-minded people would hold that resistance was justified as an alternative to something even worse than war. The English seamen who stood up to the Spanish Armada rather than submit to "the Inquisition and the devildoms of Spain" were, we think, justified in their attitude. At least, if English liberty and English science mean anything to mankind it would be difficult to deny this. In our own time, we imagine that most Freethinkers would hold that it was morally permissible to resist by force the return of Europe to the dark age of Fascist barbarism.

The above instances indicate that our problem is a complex one, now more than ever; for the prostitution of modern science to purposes of destruction, which culminates to-day in the A- and H-bombs and others possibly even more deadly, though less publicised horrors of "scientific" warfare, has complicated the problem of the ethics of war still further. For every war nowadays may lead to unimaginable horrors and to, at least, a serious risk of the proximate collapse of civilisation, if not of the physical disintegration of the globe itself.

Under such circumstances, can there be such a thing at all as a just war, or even an expedient one?

One cannot call the question closed, even at this time of day and even in view of the above facts, when we find so eminent a Rationalist as Bertrand Russell declaring openly that he would rather choose an Atomic War than the world-wide diffusion of Communism. Had

\* Cf. R. L. Worrall, "Footsteps of Warfare."



the eminent mathematician said "Fascism" instead of Communism, we fancy that many people—including many Communists—would have agreed with him, even to-day!

Surely, however, it is to despair of reason to pose such an alternative at all. Must human reason abdicate altogether at this critical juncture in human history? Rationalists, by definition, admit the supremacy of reason and Secularists, also by definition, aim at a wholly secular society in this world and not, presumably, in its atomised ruins.

We would conclude by suggesting that, firstly, the solution of the problem of war is now one of the most important of all for Freethinkers to tackle, and that even the anti-religious polemic is of secondary importance at the moment as and when compared with the desperate urgency of this problem. Secondly, that the general direction of any feasible solution lies in the direction of world government, of which Thomas Paine, a pioneer of English Rationalism, was also the first outspoken advocate.

For Secularists, surely the problem of secular survival is the most urgent of all, and to assist in the solution of this problem is their most pressing duty in our contemporary world.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### BRINGING CHRISTIANITY UP-TO-DATE

ECCLESIASTICAL persons frequently tell us that it is necessary to bring religion up to date. But religion is traditional and conservative, and therefore modernity offends some religionists. However, nothing in this world is insusceptible to the law of change; and religion changes like anything else.

One instance of modernism is the decision of the Church of England to appoint a Public Relations Officer at a salary far above curates' stipends. High-powered publicity is felt to be required, and if the people will not go to church, the church must go to them, after the style of Mahomet and the mountain. It is true that Jesus Christ employed no Press Agent. Nor did that modern Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi. But they needed none. What they had to say was so sensational that publicity followed themselves and their talk, perforce.

The Church of England is in different case. It is genteel, inoffensive, and the acme of good manners, respectability and propriety, taking very good care not to offend Mammon, nor the Prince of Darkness, nor the Prince of this world, nor indeed anyone else, if it can help it. Having nothing to say, it must take care to say that nothing as well as possible lest its inherent nothingness should be plain. If the Archbishop of Canterbury talked like Jesus Christ, which Heaven forbid! and told Englishmen to desert their wives at once for the Kingdom of God, or called on trade-unionists to leave off producing for export and to follow him about, he would need no press-agent to publicise these utterances. The angry Government and the astonished Press would do that for him—and all the rest of us would lend a helping tongue.

But while we cannot expect the Church to go to extremes like Jesus, whose speeches were almost always most intemperate, aggressive and provocative, quite Communistic in fact, they might continue their endeavours to be up-to-date. This is the Age of Women, as every pressman knows. The admission of women to the priesthood, and the episcopal Bench, is long overdue. If women have souls and if a woman can be the Mother of God, of whom no mere man was worthy to be the

father, may she not be the Lady Archbishop of Canterbury, our Right Reverend Mother in God, and Primate of All England? Church women should assert themselves and insist on ordination to higher ranks than the diaconate, at the rate-for-the-job.

This is, of course, elementary. But although women have climbed onto the judicial Bench they do not yet sit on the episcopal Bench.

Next, this is the Age of Democracy. The democratisation of religion is much overdue. Here we must begin with Almighty God, who, as depicted, is too much the All-powerful Despot, the extremely Absolute and Un-constitutional Monarch. He is really rather like the late Adolph Hitler as seen by an English newspaper reader in war-time, a divine Nero fiddling while the world is burning. Or a sort of Stalin. Why not see the Deity as a more republican President of the Immortals, elected by a Parliament of Talking-Shop of Angels (Lower House) and Archangels (Upper House)? Let angelic hymns be chosen by vote, and let us go to heaven or hell by vote instead of by the Judgment of One, for a single-judge system is a great evil and thoroughly undemocratic. The average Englishman worships his Government, and if only Heaven were democratised he would readily worship that. Satan and his devils should be democratised too, and Hell properly run in the democratic fashion as an Opposition, so that Hell may resemble England instead of England resembling Hell, as at present.

Instead of offering up prayers to a democratic Deity, one would naturally pass Resolutions and forward these to the Heavenly Parliament. Paternalism would be replaced by Fraternity: the Deity instead of being Our Father and the King of Heaven, would be a Comrade and a Brother. God, though our Hereditary rather than an Elected Monarch, would be, like His Britannic Majesty, ready to be on friendly and gracious terms with the humblest of us, and a nice mixture of snobbery and equalitarianism would be appropriate, as in Anglican circles. Angelic choirs would have wider programmes than mere hymns and praises; more objective music of the opera, and even of the light-opera, variety might very the eternal orchestration of the heavenly hosts.

One cannot help thinking that by the democratisation of the Deity, the government of the Universe would be much more successful than it is at present. Socialistic planning of such things as the weather; the over-fertility of vegetables, animals and mankind; the temperamental behaviour of volcanoes, oceans, and other incalculables is badly required. The substitution of "planning" by English politicians and Civil Servants in place of Divine caprice, would be of great benefit to men and angels without doubt.

Obviously the task of bringing religion in general, and Christianity and the English Church in particular, really up-to-date ought to begin at once. Further, it would give the Publicity Officer something new to write about, the gospel of Jesus being 1,900 odd years old and having entirely failed to catch on with the majority of mankind. And without the support of a majority of votes, what have you. For everyone knows that only majorities matter and only majorities are right.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

The wise, the really honest and intelligent, are not swayed or governed by numbers—by majorities. They accept what they really believe to be true. They care nothing for the opinions of ancestors, nothing for creeds, assertions, theories, unless they satisfy the reason. In all directions they seek for truth, and when found, accept it with joy—accept it in spite of preconceived opinions—in spite of prejudice and hatred.—Ingersoll.



## STEPS TO SANITY

## II.

THERE is no doubt as to what the result of a plebiscite would be on the simple question, "War or Peace?"

Mr. Raymond Blackburn said recently in the House of Commons that he thought a plebiscite in this country would show at least 90 per cent. of the people in favour of some new approach on weapons of mass-destruction.

Whilst another M.P., Mr. E. Roberts, said: "In spite of armaments and in spite of enmity of each other expressed by statesmen, between the common people in every country, there is only a deep yearning for peace." (*Manchester Guardian*, March 29, 1950.)

Indeed, the difficulty of forming, even in peacetime, an army of "satisfactory" size without resorting to conscription, the fact of 200 deserters per month from the services, together with the 8,000 still "on the run" from the last war, point to a natural reluctance on the part of normal humans to be processed and regimented in preparation for gory "Glory."

The Defence Minister, Mr. Shinwell, is in fact reported to have been "disturbed" by the number of desertions from the Forces. But now that Mr. Winston Churchill, in a memorable speech in the House of Commons, has effectively exposed the "nobility" of the causes for which men, women and children were required to revert to a condition of sub-normality, it will not be surprising if desertions increase.

For Mr. Churchill said: "The penalties of war had grown to an extent undreamed of and many of the old incentives which were the cause of the beginnings of so many wars, had lost their significance.

"The desire for glory, booty, territory, dynastic and national aggrandisement, hopes of a speedy and splendid victory, with all its excitement, the thunder of cannonade—temptations from which even those who only fight in righteous causes are not always exempt—are now superseded by a preliminary stage of immeasurable agony from which neither side could protect itself." (*Manchester Guardian*, March 29, 1950.)

Well . . . Mr. Churchill should know. Indeed, "immeasurable agony" is far too high a price to pay for "glory."

And one can perhaps have a little too much of the musical "thunder of cannonade" . . . when it is intermingled with the death-cries of one's dear ones.

And when "dynastic and national aggrandisement" are found to consist of rubble heaps, crippled bodies and warped minds, together with the expenditure of £780 millions per annum on armaments in preparation for the next bloody spree, one is inclined to cry perhaps: *to hell with glory, to hell with war.*

One cannot, of course, complain about the £780 millions. True, it comprises about a fifth of the total national revenue. But the "Defence Minister" (says the *Daily Herald* of March 17) "pledges value for defence money." Can we, however, trust this statement? Will the pledge be honoured? We did not get full value for our money in the last war.

According to *The Official History of the Second World War* (obtainable from H.M. Stationery Office), the experts were expecting 60,000 killed and 1,200,000 wounded from aerial bombardment, in a period of 60 days. And we did not get them. Another panel of experts expected up to 4,000,000 cases of acute terror-collapse, in six months. And we did not get them. The book naively comments, "There was no indication of an increase in insanity."

But perhaps as we failed to obtain full value for our

money in the last war, we shall receive extra value in the next. The enemy at least will not stint us, so Mr. Churchill believes.

Referring to the "fearful agencies of atomic destruction," he said that if the United States had a stock-pile of 1,000 bombs, and Russia had 50, we should get those 50. He could not find it in his heart apparently to remind us that Russia would get the thousand; nor did he mention that this unleashing of atomic horror would, by Professor Philip Morrison's calculations, result in a grand total of 105,000,000 deaths at the rate of 100,000 deaths per bomb. Deaths, mind you. Not "cases of acute terror-collapse." Just deaths.

But Mr. Churchill's figures were hypothetical. And because no one can now remain unconvinced of his great desire for peace or of his humanitarian instincts, it would be uncharitable to suppose that the wish was father to the thought in allocating to the Soviet Union the smaller number of bombs.

No. There is not much doubt as to the verdict of "the common people" if the issue of Peace or War were left to them to decide. But what of the statesmen?

M. Molotov, Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, has recently declared the Soviet's belief "in the peaceful co-existence of two systems and their peaceful economic competition."

M. Melnikov, another Soviet leader has said that "the Soviet Union would not abandon further efforts at ensuring peace and is ready to be an active participant in all honest plans, measures and activities, to avert war and preserve the peace of the whole world."

But our Prime Minister says, "The will to peace is lacking."

Mr. Churchill says: "Moralists may find it a melancholy thought, that peace can find no nobler foundation than mutual terror."

While the American Secretary of State, Mr. Acheson, argues that the Soviet Government will respond only to situations in which it is opposed by strength. Fresh talks with the Russians are regarded by Mr. Acheson "without enthusiasm."

Acheson, "Yes," then Molotov, "No." Molotov, "Yes," then Acheson, "No." This ridiculous and dangerous game of atomic table tennis has proceeded long enough, with Britain as the ball boy and the hope of peace receding as the hate score mounts.

Britain, by her acceptance of the leadership, for which history has prepared her and for which nature has equipped her, can steer the game to a universally peaceful and lasting conclusion. She should proceed to destroy, without awaiting the international agreement, every single weapon of war she now possesses.

Why not? In the name of sanity. Why not?

C. E. PALMER.

## PAMPHLETS for the PEOPLE

By CHAPMAN COHEN

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## ACID DROPS

**Commenting on the Vicar** who refused to baptise a child because the family do not go to church, the *Star* is of the opinion that if the Vicar analyses intentions too much they may have to ask churchgoers whether they are sincere worshippers, or attend out of curiosity, or because they like the music. We hope the Vicar will take the *Star's* advice and the few churchgoers will be fewer still; for we are almost certain that most people go to church only because it "is the thing to do."

**A writer** to the *Baptist Times* complains that the Communion service is spoiled by the organist who plays music whilst the bread and wine are being distributed. The writer wants to "meditate on our Lord," and not puzzle his head as to what are the title and the words of the music.

**The "Catholic Times,"** with a restraint that must have been painful, has nevertheless some trenchant remarks to make regarding the decline of church attendances—in non-Catholic circles. Quoting from the Anglican Electoral Roll that there are 3,186,097 Church of England adherents the "C.T." points out that it would be extremely difficult to assess the number of practising Anglicans, whereas the official figure for practising Roman Catholics is 2,754,249. The Free Church approximate figure is about 2 million and their attendance is declining year by year. The *Catholic Times* has it that it is going to be extremely difficult for non-Catholic churches to stop the decline and that the Catholic Church alone is capable of filling the vacuum. But who says that practising Catholics number exactly 2,754,249? Why, the *Catholic Times*!

**The atom scientist,** Prof. M. L. Oliphant, thinks that the "West" should not use the atom bomb because "it's a dirty rotten way to kill people." Of course, a bayonet in the belly, or a whiff of poison gas, or even death by "doodle bugs" is so much nicer! Anyway, it is certainly less expensive.

**The campaign** to brighten religion, particularly more rousing tunes to hymns, will give the wags an opportunity for a laugh. In Needham Church, the hymn "Rest of the Weary" will be sung to the signature tune of Henry Hall, "Here's to the Next Time," and "Jesus I have Promised" to the tune of the B.B.C.'s *Country Magazine*. A little behind the times, for General Booth in jazzing his hymns said: "There is no reason why the Devn should have all the bright tunes." We doubt, however, that even if "There is a fountain filled with blood" were sung in "bebop" time it will make much difference.

**The 6.0 p.m. Time Signal** on the Irish Radio is to be the Angelus. It is a pity that more religious countries do not follow such a pious example. Israeli should try what a ram's horn would sound like, Tibet should broadcast the swish of its Buddhist praying wheel, Egypt its muezzin calling the faithful to prayer, and so on. Apart from any utilitarian motive, what an uplift all this would give to religion!

**Most people imagine** that when, thirty years ago, Pilsudski and Sigorski (with a little help from the French) routed the Soviet army in its attempt to conquer Poland, that it was due to the indomitable spirit and fighting

qualities of the Poles. Not so, of course, our Catholics. The Russian army was beaten to a frazzle on the Feast of Assumption, and therefore it was "our Lady" that defeated the Soviet. And this is the kind of divine bludge put out or swallowed whole by our distinguished converts.

**When a bus going to Rome** with 35 pilgrims to celebrate Holy Year got out of control, a Frenchman was killed and four people injured. We could understand such an accident taking place in a bus going to a secular football match—especially on a Sunday—but we simply cannot make out why Almighty God does such things to his own pet brand of believers. But there—it is only one of the many mysteries surrounding religion.

**There is going to be** a Pageant of Faith organised by the Vatican for England to take place at Wembley, to commemorate the restoration of Roman Catholicism here in 1850. Every Catholic will wear a badge, and there will be all sorts of "swiftly moving episodes" shown together with the usual High Mass, and other religious services and processions. There will also be plenty of free advertisements in the Press all over the country, complete references to it by the B.B.C., and "documentaries" shown everywhere by our cinemas. Any active opposition to this orgy of sheer superstition will be rigorously suppressed. And what can Freethought do? Anything?

**A correspondent** to the *Church Times* wants to know what the Anglican Church is doing in Hyde Park equal to the efforts of so many brilliant advocates of Popery, Communism, Irishism, Mormonism, and all the other isms which the Park attracts so abundantly? And the answer is nothing at all. Opposition to Rome is left in the hands of a few Protestant cranks and, very mildly, to the Christian Evidence Society which can only briefly and shrilly protest that Materialism is dead. The correspondent admits that the Rev. Donald Soper—who is not an Anglican—is a tower of strength but forgets to point out the quality of his opposition.

**We are told** that in the Park religion is the only thing worth talking about, and that even Atheists and Agnostics cannot leave it alone. But surely, for most people however earnest the speakers on the platform are, the **Speakers' Forum** in Hyde Park is just entertainment. The "heckling" is mostly fun, and in general quite devoid of brains. If the *Church Times* or the Rev. Donald Soper wants a genuine discussion with a fully equipped Freethought speaker, it could be arranged. But the result might disappoint and even dishearten both Christian parties.

**Dr. Inge, like Dr. Barnes,** has the courage of his convictions; and though he waited till he was 91, it is good to record that he is not afraid to call those parts of God's Divine Word he doesn't like, "gibberish." At the Modern Churchmen's Conference, he declared: "We may be thankful that the hideous hell-fire theology we heard no longer in our churches." Yes, but no thanks are due to the Churches. It was Freethinkers who put the fires of Hell out, and they were hated, ostracised, imprisoned, tortured or burnt at the stake by Dr. Inge's fellow Christians.

## THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

How is the Pope going to reply to the Archbishop of Canterbury's emphatic repudiation of the Assumption of Mary?



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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

GEORGE.—Address, 69, Warrender Park Rd., Edinburgh. Rosie. When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, John Seibert, 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).

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.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

## SUGAR PLUMS

The National Secular Society Executive's Annual Report for 1950 has now been despatched for members of the Society. Branch members should get their copies, together with a report of the last Annual Conference, from their local branch secretaries. Non-members can obtain a copy from the Society's offices at the cost of twopence, which includes postage.

The Hackney Gazette, in a series of "Echoes of the Past," notes the debate held between the Rev. Brewin Grant and Charles Bradlaugh in 1874, but it is a pity that a modern note should have been added on Bradlaugh—nothing on Grant, by the way—which is not quite accurate. The note says that Bradlaugh showed a reluctance to take the oath when he entered Parliament. Bradlaugh asked to be allowed to affirm, but was ready to take the oath on this being refused, provided that it was understood he took it as an affirmation and not as a religious oath. This was also rejected, and Parliament never sunk so low as it did when it refused him both to take the oath and his seat. Under a Tory Government, he took both, and then proceeded to bring in the Oaths Act by which everybody is allowed to affirm if they wish to. The Hackney Gazette is quite wrong in saying that he was allowed to take his seat "by making affirmation."

Mr. Frank Powell, the Clerkenwell Magistrate, is also a lay preacher, and so long as he does not mix the two that is all right. Unfortunately, however, he introduced the irresponsibilities of the pulpit into his public duties as a magistrate when a 13 year old girl witness said she did not go to Sunday School, and that her parents did not go to church. He is reported to have said that she was "just a modern pagan," and of Londoners to-day, "They are just materialists. That is why we have so much crime." From a pulpit inaccurate statements are permissible, but from a magistrate's bench accuracy should be a primary principle; we suggest that Mr. F. Powell acquaints himself with the percentage of religious criminals compared with the non-religious, and with the meaning of materialism, and its influence upon the social conduct of materialists.

## KOREA, 1950

There in the paddy field he lay,  
His shattered rifle in his hand;  
Poor beggar, he has had his day,  
But added "glory" to his land.  
The young green rice grows all around,  
Stirred by a wayward, gentle wind;  
He hears no more that soothing sound,  
And crash of H.E. does not mind.  
"Speak you of whom? Who is this dead?  
What is the young man's nation?"  
It matters not to him who bled;  
Such queries are vexation.  
They drilled him, trained him, and he had to go;  
His Colonel said, "It was a damned good show."  
God bless the Colonel for his timely word!  
"Damned" it was certainly; but "good"—Absurd!  
BAYARD SIMMONS.

## FREETHOUGHT AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

WHEN I first read Mr. King's previous article two things struck me at once.

Just as the gay Mrs. Eddy's "Christian Science" was neither Christian nor Science, so I felt that Mr. King's "peasant reformer" was neither a peasant nor a reformer. If he has any positive evidence that Jesus Christ was a peasant, I should like to have it. And I should like to have evidence also about his "reforms."

What was it that Jesus reformed? For example, in "the crudities of Hebrew myth," as Mr. King would say, I find that the crude Hebrews were commanded to honour their parents. The peasant reformer "reformed" this by commanding his followers to hate their parents. His own example is so beautiful, that I think Jesus is the only reformer among our gods who positively treated his mother with undisguised contempt. If Mr. King can produce one example of his peasant reformer treating his mother with the love and courtesy of a gentleman, I should like to see it. What I want is not what Jesus says to someone else, but what he said to his own mother.

Then the peasant reformer reformed marriage—or did he? He made marriage "for ever." No divorce from a confirmed lunatic or a murderer, no divorce from a criminal, a child torturer, or a drunken wife beater. Not that Jesus was in favour of marriage—his own celibacy proves that. And in addition, for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake, the peasant reformer actually condoned the worst possible physical mutilation which would make marriage an impossibility.

Did the peasant reformer reform slavery? Mr. King might give me any texts he knows on the subject.

But look at that marvellous piece of reform: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow." Speaking as an ordinary man and certainly not as a peasant reformer, I can fancy nothing so utterly silly. Millions of people have to thank the pioneers of insurance (whether they ultimately became private companies or were taken up by the State). If the wonderful teaching of the peasant reformer were put into practice, there would be an end to all insurance, and possibly an end even to civilisation.

"Be not afraid," heroically cried the peasant reformer, "of them that kill the body," and to prove how wonderful this teaching is, Jesus promptly "would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him."

And the peasant reformer (no doubt with Mr. King's full sympathy) uttered the lovely advice: "Men ought always to pray." And how remarkably the peasant reformer reformed mankind's hearty laughter: "Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep."



I could fill columns from the New Testament with this kind of sheer twaddle from our peasant reformer.

Mr. King thinks it "an interesting, if highly hypothetical, speculation what modern society would be like if the Nazarene's philosophy had been taken seriously." We can discard the "if." For almost everything Mr. King writes proves that he is entirely in favour of the Nazarene's "philosophy." Reading it, I remembered Chesterton's protest to (I think it was) Robert Blatchford, that Christianity had never been tried. He had not been converted then, for of course he could not as a good Catholic say it had not been tried. Ah, if only we Freethinkers had put the wonderful teachings of the peasant reformer (or the Nazarene) into practice! Why, we might have had a wonderful world.

You get the same kind of incredible drivel from a gentleman called Jellicoe, who uses it to back up contraceptive slot machines: "Through the Golden Rule and through it alone, we might have had the Unity of Man, the Fraternity of all nations, and Peace on Earth and Goodwill to all mankind." And who stood in the way? Why the crude Hebrews (as Mr. King would say), or as Mr. Jellicoe says, "The Pharisees stood in the way and were cursed [by the peasant reformer of course] and likened to the generation of vipers." I can excuse Mr. Jellicoe perhaps for such appalling balderdash because he is the son of an ecclesiastic (though I certainly do not excuse the unmitigated twaddle he churned out on sex and free love).

Mr. King was literally horrified when some time ago he found that there were *Christian* bishops in favour of capital punishment (as I am). It was not the bishop but the *Christian* which almost made him see red. How anyone professing such a great and noble and beautiful religion as Christianity could favour capital punishment, anguished his very soul. Mr. King believes in giving the other cheek every time—though when I personally asked him if, after having one eye struck out, he would gladly give the other, he hastily protested that this heavenly teaching did not apply to him personally. I should think not indeed.

As Lord Amberly (the father of Bertrand Russell) said: "A doctrine more convenient for the purposes of tyrants and malefactors of every description, it would be difficult to invent." Amberly wrote this before 1876, and it was a remarkable criticism; for it is a fact that our Hitlers, Mussolinis, and Stalins, are enthusiastically in favour of (other people) turning the other cheek and, as Luke records, "Of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again." No finer motto could be devised for totalitarians than "give the other cheek." They loathe getting hit back.

Mr. King objects to the hypocrisy of Christians professing one thing and practising something else—but if he means that they cannot put into practice the divine ethics of the peasant reformer, I think we should applaud them. They are coming on the side of Freethought at last. So long as, like Mr. King, they believe that there is something in the "philosophy" of the Nazarene, so long will Christianity maintain its footing.

But let me quote a great Christian bishop whose weighty words are quite forgotten these days, of course, and no doubt would be obliterated if Mr. King and other reverent Rationalists had their way.

He is Bishop Magee, who became Archbishop of York in 1891. In the *Fortnightly Review*, January, 1890, he said, "It is impossible for the State to carry out in all its relations, literally all the precepts of Christ; and a State which attempted this would not exist for a week.

If it were possible to do this the result would be a perfect intolerable tyranny. . . . If there really be any person who maintains this, I cannot argue with him. His proper place is in a lunatic asylum, and the only person called on to discuss this question with him would be his medical attendant." It would only be natural for Mr. King intensely to dislike such Christians as Dr. Magee.

And what is the moral of it all? Simply this—the work of Freethought, far from being almost finished, has never been more necessary than now. The "Rationalists" Magee would call them by another name—who, giving up the miracles, the devils, and the angels of Christianity, pathetically are moving heaven and earth in the Freethought Movement to bring back the pious teachings of the Nazarene (or the peasant reformer) and who are shocked beyond words at someone like myself trying to infuse a little sanity into ethics, can throw back Freethought a hundred years.

In the face of a third world war (as Mr. Ridley so eloquently points out), to try and bring back the infantile bilge of primitive gospel writers, as the only way in which we can meet the most terrible forces for evil the world has so far known, proves beyond question how little we have educated some types of mind. But it is a disheartening confession to make.

H. CUTNER.

### WHAT IS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?

(An Open Letter to The Very Rev. Dr. Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury).

VERY REV. SIR,

In the issue of the *Daily Worker* of April 8, 1950, in your article, "The False Cry of Religious Persecution," occurs a paragraph which, on reading, caused me considerable uneasiness and indignation, although I am bound to admit little surprise having regard to what has been evident as a tendency for some considerable time past. The paragraph I refer to is as follows: "In every country I visited, freedom of worship was the law and the practice. Churches were open and functioning. Blitzed churches were being rebuilt with Government aid." It continued as follows, of the meaning of which I should like to be certain, as it has been suggested, that I may have put a harsher construction than was intended by yourself: "No anti-God campaign was countenanced by the Government. No hindrance barred worshippers from Divine Service."

I fully recognise that in the haste of writing, one may easily express one's meaning unclearly, nevertheless, I must confess that reading the above I can understand it in no other sense than that while Church building is financed by public funds to which atheists must contribute, the propaganda of their own views is suppressed by the Government who puts "No Hindrance" in the way of superstition. In view of your article and other evidence to which I will refer later, I ask you, as a matter of clarification, what do you and other Christians mean by the expression, "Religious Persecution?" Is it used only in the restricted sense of injustice done to believers in Supernaturalism? If so, do the "Religious" claim the power? I will not profane the word "right" by using it in this connection of suppressing their opponents whether as individuals or organisations. I am constrained to write this not merely because of your article, which had it stood alone, I might feel I had misconstrued, but I would draw your attention to the following, while I must, owing to limitation of space, omit others:—

At Rome on September 9 to 13, 1949, was held the International Congress of the World Union of Free-



thinkers, and at this, although more countries were represented than at previous ones, Russia was absent for the first time. On learning this, I naturally made inquiries as to why this was so, and received the following reply from Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, President of the World Union of Freethinkers. "Our letters to the Russian Union of Militant Atheists have been returned to us unopened for the past two years; before that, we had complaints that they were not receiving anything from us, although we, including the British Societies, were sending regularly. This applies to all correspondence from Western Europe. We hear, through Prague, that the U.M.A. still exists." I will say in conclusion that the unfettered human mind has been, and ever must be, the only instrument by which the progress of man has been achieved. Socialism, whose growing triumph in the world to-day, we both alike rejoice in, is possible only on a scientific, that is a materialist basis. You will, of course, answer this in the columns of the *Daily Worker*, where you will send this criticism, while you will rest assured that I will use my utmost endeavour to give the widest publicity in our Rationalist Freethought organs to any reply you may care to give together with this open letter.

Yours sincerely,

In the Cause of Freedom and Progress,

JAMES H. MATSON.

6, Primrose Road, Dover.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### DID THE SUN STAND STILL?

Sir,—Like Mr. H. Cutner, I wondered at the "Reader's Digest" article regarding the versatile Dr. Velikovsky. I considered Joshua's arrest of the sun, and the sun's going back ten degrees for Hezekiah as poetical figures of speech for time of intensive fighting. Mr. K. Snowden ("U and L," page 147), says the arrest of the sun is not unique, and Dr. Frazer, in "Golden Bough," gives a selection of modern instances among savages. Prescott, in his "History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella," mentions Cardinal Ximenes, victor of Oran, 1509, as hailed as another Joshua for whom the sun stood still for "four, or several" hours. There is no miracle in the whole Roman Catholic budget better vouched than this, recorded by four eye-witnesses, men of learning and character. It is attested, moreover, by a crowd of witnesses," etc. (page 654, note, chapter 21.)

[F. C. Conybeare ("History of Christ," page 17) disagreed strongly from the sun-god-Joshua hypothesis.]—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE ROSS.

### POLITICS AND RELIGION

Sir,—Is an Atheist which, rightly or wrongly, I presume Mr. W. E. Nicholson to be, and as such I suppose he desires to be able to express his views on Atheism without let or hindrance.

If so, it is difficult to conceive why he thinks that he will have more freedom to do this in a Roman Catholic dominated State than in a Communist one.

Therefore, it would appear that he has some other interests which he thinks will be better protected by the Vatican than, say, Moscow. That is, he is prepared to sacrifice his freedom to be an Atheist to secure some other freedom, upon which he places a greater value.

The last organisation I would ask to help me to fight my politico-economic battles would be the Vatican. I have not a spoon long enough to make supping with the Pope a safe operation.

As a number of French, Belgian and English Catholics deny that the Pope has a right to dictate their politics, so surely Mr. Nicholson will allow Freethinkers to dissent from Bradlaugh, Foote and Robertson on the same subject?

In the past, in discussion in the local press with Catholic apologists, I have found them fond of quoting Bradlaugh against me. They seem to think that present day Freethinkers are bound, willy nilly, by what Bradlaugh said a century ago. It is news to me if Freethinkers accept as dogma that the gentlemen named were infallible.

No, Sir, I do not think that the equivalent of "papal infallibility" has yet been accepted in the "Freethought" Movement.—Yours, etc.,

ALBERT R. THORNEWELL.

## RELIGION AND MORALS

Sir,—I cannot help thinking that W. O. Bower's views regarding morality owe more to religion than he is prepared to admit. His appeal to personal reactions with regard to "free-love," for instance, is grounded in the irrationality characteristic of christian apologetics.

At the present time, I admit, it is rather difficult to visualise drastic alterations in our conception of the family. Under present conditions probably little more freedom could usefully be granted to people. History, however, teaches us that we must not take even the most "venerable" institutions too seriously.

For all things have a history, are subject to changing circumstances. Under a different society, a more rational society, that is, I do not see why the acute limitations of present life, with its privations and frustration, should not be done completely away with.

One of the basic wrongs of present society—a wrong apparently condoned by Mr. Bower—is the inferior, secondary position of women. No man can call himself rational who accepts such a *status quo*, such an obviously religious *status quo*.—Yours, etc.,

RICHARD KEAN.

## ON PROPHECY

Sir,—I sent a letter to a prominent London daily paper, which read:—

"Is Prophecy true? If so, how can we be free or able to think or act otherwise than the Prophets knew we would?"

Reply comes:—

"Dear Mr. Ratcliffe. To our minds Prophecy is poppy-cock. Kind regards. The Editors."

We are getting on. The said Editors dare not publish what they think. I thought you might come to their aid.

We are getting on.

I sent a somewhat similar letter to a popular magazine, re Predestination v. Freewill. It was published. They sent me a guinea.—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Debate on, "Is the belief in the Bible God reasonable?" Aff., Mr. R. J. BILLINGHAM (Wesleyan Methodist); Neg., Mr. J. CLAYTON (N.S.S.). 3 p.m.: Mr. ROTHWELL, a Lecture.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
- Darlington (Market Steps).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—7-45 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. CALVERLEY; (Highbury Corner), 7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, August 26, 6-30 p.m.: Messrs. A. ELSMERE and T. M. MOSLEY.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

### INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe 40, Cannon Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Christian Ethics and Modern Problems," Mr. T. M. MOSLEY (Notts.).
- West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Loco. Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford, E. 15).—A meeting.



## AT BRUNO'S STATUE IN ROME

DROWSY heat spread over Rome, and the traffic rumbled over the wide, magnificent streets past innumerable temples, modern palaces and churches. In contradistinction, there is a district that lies in the bend of the Tiber, a neighbourhood of narrow alleys and squalid buildings, in the midst of which stands a square, the Campo dei Fiori (The Flower Market). In this wonderful city, it is scarcely worth a second glance, and yet, despite its charming name, it was the scene of the most infamous crime that mankind has ever perpetrated.

It was here, 2,000 years after the death of Socrates and 1,600 years after the alleged birth of Christ, that that most daring Italian thinker, Giordano Bruno, was burnt alive.

He had taught that the earth circled the sun, that the sun was but a star among many, that God was one with Nature. And for this "crime" he fell into the hands of the Inquisition. He did not try to save himself by recanting, as did later, Galileo, and despite his seven years incarceration in the Inquisition dungeons, he remained true to his convictions.

In this Square flamed his funeral pile; some of the old buildings surrounding may have witnessed this crime against the intellect. Since 1889 there stands on this spot a monument; a man in monkish habit gazing earnestly into eternity . . .

Children play around Bruno's statue, women gossip before their doors, when suddenly, the scene springs to life. Banners wave as a crowd of people, among whom are noticeably many foreigners, appear. A speaker mounts the steps of the monument. The 29th International Congress of Freethinkers, gathering in Rome, are paying homage to the martyr for freethought. In many languages the glory of his austere life depicted on the three reliefs on the monument, rings over the Square. There he stands at his desk proclaiming his unorthodox views, on another relief he is depicted as crying out to his judges, "It is with more fear than you pass judgement than I receive it." And there he suffers heroically his terrible death surrounded by callous priests and ignorant people.

By now, people are gazing curiously from their windows. Black-eyed children slip in and out of the assembled crowd but lose interest at last; after all, there is little to see, and nothing to earn from this crowd of "Americani." The women have hardly paused in their gossip about the prices of bread and oil.

Another last long look, and the President of the World Union of Freethinkers, Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, gives the sign to disperse. The flag of the Associazione del Libero Pensiero, the Italian Freethought Association Giordano Bruno, fluttered in the soft breeze and soon was lost in the labyrinth of the city.

Quietness, as before, settled over the Campo dei Fiori, the passers-by who were for a moment held by the unusual events, scattered, the urchins took up their games once more. Forlorn stood the monument to the great that shortly before was among friends . . .

The atmosphere is heavy as before a thunderstorm, and Brother Giordano's eyes look into the distance. Does he see the clouds gathering that are again threatening the happiness of mankind? Does he see, in this 20th century, a generation of dupes bound by dogmas of many kinds? Does he feel the danger in which stands freedom of thought to-day?

The salvation of Man lies entirely in the free play of ideas, in the development of thought, in the study of

natural law, and the courageous acceptance of discoveries. It was for this "gospel" that the Nolaner died.

Mankind's weapon against superstition is free thought; if he will only use this to fight the supernatural, prejudice and ignorance and apathy, if he will only use it immediately before all freedom of thought is annihilated, only then will he be successful in living in kindness and harmony with his own kind.

It is a long time since I was on the other side of the Alps, but as often as I think of Rome, I see Bruno's heroic statue standing over the colourful throng of the market, and in the still watches of the night, I share his solitude in the midst of the crowds of Holy Year pilgrims, in the midst of a puzzled world, and I hear the question which he directs at every one of us . . .

PROF. DR. G. VON FRANKENBERG (Germany).  
(Translated by J.S.)

## DICK TURPIN AT CHURCH STREET, KENSINGTON

NEXT to the "Old George" public house in Church Street, there is a spacious yard over the entrance to which a painted board was fixed to inform the public that the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, and his "bonnie mare Black Bess" occupied this yard.

There was a wooden staircase up to a verandah leading to Dick's abode which, at the time of my visit, was occupied by a general dealer in antiques, etc., and among a miscellaneous lot of furniture, pictures, books and some other nondescript things from upstairs, there was a musty leather wallet containing ballad writing that was scarcely legible, with a date apparently intended for X Jan., 1731. This curious paper took some time to decipher, and the purport being an amusing episode in doggerel verse-verse will recall an incident of the *good old days*.

When bold Dick Turpin on Hounslow Heath, with bonnie Black Bess bestrode, he saw a Bishop's coach and four coming up the road.

Galloping to the carriage door, Dick thrust his face within, when the Chaplain moaned, "O lor, O lor, it is that rogue Turpin."

Said Dick, "You shall eat those words with sauce of leaden bullet," and thrust the pistol in his mouth and filled the Chaplain's gullet.

The Bishop fell upon his knees, but Turpin made him stand and give his watch, a bag of gold and three rings from his hand.

Shaking with laughter, Dick pulled the wig from the Bishop's head and popped it on the Chaplain's poll, as he in the corner sat, dead.

Dick whispered in dear Bessie's ear, "It's lucky you're not fagged, so gallop fast and far, d'yer hear, or else we shall get scragged."

He drew not rein, nor stopped to bait, but rode up hill and down, until he came to Gloucester Gate, which is the assizes town.

Full eighty miles in that dark night, he made his swift mare fly, and strolled into the Court at nine to prove an alibi.

A hue and cry the people raised, all led by Sheriff Foster who stared and saw that Turpin was by nine o'clock in Glo'ster.

They all agreed the alibi, so Turpin saved his bacon, because the Chaplain and the Coachman's dead and the Bishop was mistaken.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.