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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Prophets, Priests and Kings

THE history of religion includes, of necessity, the history of the criticism of religion—prior to the modern scientific age, there was, of course, no such thing as a science of “comparative religion”: contrarily, there were only “true” religions—in the case of Christianity, “the one true church”—and false: true prophets and false prophets. Nor, it must be conceded, was the earliest form or religious criticism actually much more scientific: that criticism which “the Age of Reason” summarised with magnificent self-complacency in the famous phrase of Gibbon: “to the philosopher all religions are equally false, to the believer all are equally true, to the politician all are equally useful”: a statement which, despite its colossal assurance, contains as many errors as it does words!

Actually, of course, one cannot simply dismiss the long and complex religious history of mankind in this cavalier manner. All religions may be false but, certainly, they are not all “equally false”: a person who could, for example, equate an ethical religionist like, say, the author of *Job* or Swedenborg with an Aztec cannibal offering up human sacrifices to his grisly war-god, would, obviously, be beyond or beneath the use of critical reason. Similarly, “believers” do not accept all religions as “equally true”: if they did so, the world would have been spared many pages of blood-stained intolerance. Nor do politicians regard all religions as “equally useful”: ask the Jews who have survived Hitler’s concentration camps. It is really astonishing that one of the greatest of historians should have penned this sublime denial of history!

The science of what we may, perhaps, term the criticism of religion began when it was first recognised that religion, at all times and in all places, is merely one of a number of instruments devised by mankind to assist it in its hitherto perennial “struggle for existence,” and that the innumerable forms which religion has assumed reflect the various phases of that struggle. In other words, religion is a *social* question, a product of organised society and, as such, it falls within the province of sociology, of social science. The old explanation put forward by the age of Voltaire and Gibbon that religion was created by priests raises the inevitable further query: who, or what then created the priests? Similarly, the other chestnut beloved by early anti-clericals, that all priests are human monsters and conscious imposters, oversimplified matters—with a vengeance! The average priest was and, for that matter, still usually is neither the human monster imagined by his cruder critics, nor the super-human angel admired by the more credulous members of his flock. Usually, he is a very ordinary human being who tries, with varying degrees of success, to adapt himself within the complex and ever-changing pattern of contemporary human society. The innumerable forms taken by Christianity, despite its supposedly unalterable

“revelation,” are merely so many examples of this process of adaptation which is as unending as life and its evolution themselves!

In the actual, as distinct from the fictitious history of religion we find, what we may, perhaps, term a sociological trinity at work in its formation, which is vastly more influential than the metaphysical Trinity of the theologians, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: this sociological trinity consists of prophets, priests, and kings: each of whom has a necessary and indispensable role to play in the evolution of religion—and of particular religions.

Religions are, almost invariably, founded by prophets. The prophet is the founder and, if his movement fits in with current history and eventually “arrives,” becomes the inspired figure-head, the god, or prophet of god of the new creed: its Buddha, Jesus, Muhammed; the god—and godfather of the new religion. The prophet is the originator, the reformer, the religious genius, the saint, par excellence, of the new creed. He is an “original,” usually abnormal, nearly always fanatical and without humour or self-criticism, always courageous, since to found anything new one must begin by attacking vested interests, which is usually a dangerous pastime—particularly, one can add, in the sphere of religion, as many would-be religious founders have discovered to their personal cost. Also, the prophet is, at any rate, to start with, usually honest, since “pioneering doesn’t pay” and it is not usually the Founders of religions who “cash in” on the subsequent victory of their reforming movements. Further, despite their fanaticism, prophets usually display an iconoclastic strain of anti-clericalism. For their role as reformers and innovators compels them, at least to begin by attacking the current creed. We have often thought that a useful anti-clerical pamphlet could be compiled from the fierce and, no doubt, accurate denunciations of the Pharisees and Sadducees—that is, of his contemporary Jewish clergy—by Jesus in the Gospels!

Prophets, accordingly, found religions, but it is priests who organise them. The priest is the permanent backbone of religion, the man who makes the wheels go round. Without priests, religions do not evolve beyond diminutive sects and seldom last long. For prophets and their immediate followers, the “apostles” of the new creed, are invariably abnormal men and religious organisations, if they are to endure, must be able to attract and to hold the ordinary men and women who make up the great bulk of mankind. If religions were left to the prophet, they would die out with his last disciple. It is the priests who run religion and, without them, no religion could last for long, at any rate as more than a diminutive sect. For priests are ordinary men and they boil down the inspired frenzies of the original founders to the comprehension of ordinary people, of the man (and woman) in the street.

Priests—of all religions!—are of fundamentally the same type; conventional, conservative, distrustful of ideas, particularly of new ideas. They have what, in other

spheres is usually described as a strongly "trade union" outlook: anyone who has had much personal contact with the clergy knows how largely they are preoccupied with conventional ecclesiastical routine and how rarely they discuss speculative questions, even about theology. Without priests, whether called rabbis, mullahs, brahmins, or what have you, no religion travels far in either space or time.

Prophets, then, found religions, whilst priests actually run them when they become "going concerns." However, to become monopolies and to mould society into their approved pattern, religions require "Kings," that is, the secular power of the State. When the Church can ally itself with or, better still, get control of the State-power, then it can really mould society into the image of an "Age of Faith." All vital religion is totalitarian in its ultimate ambitions. When religion disclaims any interest in the political field, then, inevitably it acknowledges its own decay: throne and altar form their "Holy Alliance."

Prophets, Priests, and Kings! In this trinity the sociologist will find the motive-springs behind religion as and when viewed as an historical factor in the social evolution of our species.

F. A. RIDLEY.

DR. TOYNBEE'S SURVEY OF WORLD'S AFFAIRS

ARNOLD TOYNBEE'S historical reflections are both instructive and suggestive however controversial they appear. His interesting essay *Civilization on Trial* (Oxford University Press, 12s. 6d.) surveys mankind's past and present while tentatively forecasting its possible future. He is fully alive to the exasperating complexity of the problems involved and stresses the precarious nature of all one's predictions. For the difficulties and dangers which confront us vary from day to day while paradoxes constantly bewilder us. As our historian states: "Our world has risen to an unprecedented degree of humanitarian feeling. There is now a recognition of the human rights of people of all classes, nations and races, yet at the same time we have perhaps sunk to unheard-of depths of class warfare, nationalism and racialism. These bad passions find vent in cold-blooded, scientifically planned cruelties and the two incompatible states of mind and standards of conduct are to be seen to-day, side by side, not merely in the same world, but sometimes in the same country and even in the same soul."

Toynbee is a pronounced Theist but he unreservedly accepts the discoveries and conclusions of modern evolutionary science and philosophy. But he urges that, despite the triumphs of technology, we still witness alternations of relative prosperity and deep depression with pitiful misery, if not famine itself, in many parts of the globe. Also, he submits that despite the worldwide discoveries of archaeologists and geologists which reveal the close kinship of human kind, man's outlook remains parochial. Yet, as a matter of fact: "Western Christendom is merely one of five civilizations that survive in the world to-day; and these are merely five out of about nineteen that one can identify as having come into existence since the first appearance of this species of society about 6,000 years ago."

While Christianity is the more or less accepted cult in the Western world, Islam extends from India to West Africa and both creeds arose in the East. There are some 400 million Hindus and some 500 million Buddhists and kindred cults in China, Burma and Japan. Toynbee, characteristically enough, selects as the permanent benefactors of humanity: Confucius, Lao-tse, the Buddha, the

Hebrew Prophets, Zoroaster, Jesus and Muhammad. But not one of these is chosen as a member of any surviving culture, although they still influence the present world.

Toynbee deems the study of the legacies of departed civilizations as indispensable to any real historian. Their encounters and blendings are of paramount importance. From these the higher religions have arisen, the worship, he avers: "perhaps originally Sumerian of the Great Mother and her Son who suffers and dies and rises again; Judaism and Zoroastrianism which sprang from an encounter between the Syrian and Babylonian civilizations; Christianity and Islam, which sprang from an encounter between the Syrian and Greek civilizations; the Mayayana form of Buddhism and Hinduism which sprang from an encounter between the Indian and Greek civilizations." Again, Toynbee urges that if we are to enjoy a future the ethical teachings of these antique cults must be restored and sustained.

Our author naturally hopes that the civilized peoples will not commit social suicide in a Third World War. Yet there remains the tragic possibility of its occurrence, and, if so, the previous conflicts "may be merely overtures to some supreme catastrophe that we are going to bring on ourselves."

Toynbee thinks that if another world conflict emerges the Chinese will become a potent people in the Old World while whatever prove the fate of North America, he feels "pretty confident that the French-speaking Canadians at any rate, will be there at the end of the story."

In pre-atomic days Toynbee thought the Tibetans and Eskimos the safest populations but now their danger is great. Ever since the Middle Stone Ages men have possessed sufficient practical control over their surroundings but now they are in constant danger of life and limb whenever armed hostilities occur. Indeed, with bombers loaded with atomic weapons no place, however secluded, is likely to prove immune in the event of war between major powers.

Toynbee suggests that in a future atomic struggle the native tribes of Central Africa might survive but that their kindred in the Malay archipelago might be driven to the point of extinction. He piously trusts that the African Negritos, if spared, will preserve religious beliefs should the culture of the civilized races some 6,000 or 10,000 years old perish, for upon this is founded the most important achievements of recent centuries. Worse still our historian fears a conflict that might conceivably extinguish the entire human race.

In surveying the geological record Toynbee notes the brevity of human life on our planet when it is compared with the prolonged existence of extinct animals that flourished for many millions of years and then perished. He recalls the fact that: "There was a reign of giant armoured reptiles which may have lasted 80 million years. . . . But the reptiles' reign came to an end. Long before that, perhaps 300 million years ago—there was a reign of giant armoured fishes—creatures that had already accomplished the tremendous achievement of developing a movable lower jaw. But the reign of the fishes came to an end." Ants and bees may have a great future. Still, let us trust that man's dethronement may be very remotely distant in time.

T. F. PALMER.

Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural fear in children is increased with tales, so is the other.—
BACON.

IN 1988

IN the year 1988 the People's Party gained control of the Government with a majority which gave them pre-eminent power and they intended to use it.

At his great desk in his large room overlooking Whitehall the Minister of Education sat considering his Plan for Education. He had worked it out during the years of struggle to achieve dominance. Now all that remained was to implement it vigorously.

A telephone on his desk buzzed. He picked it up, to hear his Chief Secretary say "Comrade Tressick. The Archbishop of Canterbury wishes to see you."

"The Archbishop of Canterbury!" repeated Thomas Tressick in tones of mingled surprise and irritation.

"Yes, Comrade Tressick. He says he has written twice to make an appointment but had no reply."

"Quite so. His position now is that of any other citizen."

"I'm afraid he doesn't appreciate that yet."

"He'll soon have to."

"Yes. But at present his ideas're still back in the past when he was an influential secret adviser of the Government."

The Minister of Education laughed shortly, saying "Tell him . . . No. I'll tell him. Let him wait a few minutes, then I'll call you to send him up."

"Very good, Comrade Minister."

Leaning back in his chair, Thomas Tressick went thoughtful.

Nearly half-an-hour later he took up the telephone and called to his Chief Secretary "Send the Archbishop up now."

"Yes, Comrade Tressick."

A minute afterward the door opened to admit a tall but stout elderly man wearing black clerical clothes and gaiters.

Thomas Tressick motioned him to a chair, upon which the Primate sat upright, indignation struggling with attempt at dignity.

He protested: "This is an unusual reception for my person and office. I expected . . ."

"Expect nothing" interrupted the Minister of Education. "Your person's of no greater importance than any other man's. And your office is no longer recognised as having special status."

The Archbishop stared, trying to comprehend the import of this message.

"Let me explain" went on Thomas Tressick. "Though there's no reason why I should, so it'll be brief. In the People's State every man and woman will have to do something useful, be productive according to his or her ability, to receive the necessities of life. Parsons, priests, ministers—and bishops—all paid officers of churches do not come within the list of essential occupations. So they will surrender their wealth to the State and will have to work for their livings as do all other people instead of living apart from the community."

"The people will not tolerate it" declared the Archbishop warmly.

The Minister of Education smiled, saying "You religious people have been an ever dwindling minority. The community has elected us to organise it, and the abolition of subsidised religion and its privileges was one of the items approved in our programme. If groups of religious people like to continue voluntarily they may do so, but no propaganda will be allowed; no public or private money may be given to religion or spent on it."

"This is the death of religion, of everything sacred, of Christianity itself" said the Archbishop, stirred.

"As you know them" countered Thomas Tressick. "The small number to whom religion's real and vital may find it a richer experience. But henceforth no one's to live in idle luxury, so paid professors of religion will have to go to work."

"You're determined on persecution" said the Archbishop slowly.

"No. On freedom of body and mind. For that reason as Minister of Education I'm issuing orders that religion's no longer to be taught in schools, colleges and universities. Public prayers and worship and all other religious observances are forbidden. Education's to be real. Linked with physical well-being of children will primarily be study of science and technology, mathematics and economics, with art, music, drama and literature for the satisfaction of taste, the occupation of leisure and the craving for beauty. Religion will be considered only by historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and such-like specialists."

"God forgive you" pronounced the Archbishop solemnly.

Blithely retorted Thomas Tressick, "That he will do, because he doesn't exist. People will find they do better without him. For the sake of world-wide peace and human happiness we realise the need for abolition of God and religion. The evil they've done in past centuries has been so great we dare not retain them."

He stood up, saying "I don't know why I'm telling you all this because you no longer have any privileged position, are only a private citizen. So, like all others, you'll hear in due course—and soon—the decree promulgated abolishing religion in schools and public places."

Opening the door he remained silent as his visitor departed with bowed head. Returning to his desk he plunged into the business he had outlined to the Archbishop.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

BEYOND

Is there another land beyond life's ocean deep
Where we shall rest?
When dimmed and tired eyes have closed with sleep
With death impressed?

Is there a sunny land where we shall meet
Those gone before?
The ones we loved, with eager joy to greet
On that bright shore?

Is there a happy land where death is not
The end of life?
No sorrow there, but joy to be our lot
And no more strife?

We do not know what lies beyond the grave
When we depart.
Man to mute skies in vain has cried with brave
And longing heart.

If nature has ordained eternal life
In her great plan,
All will participate. No favoured few
Twixt man and man.

F. D.

Humanity alone founds charitable institutions; religion only adds a chapel and a priest—that is to say, an additional expense.—RIVAROL.

ACID DROPS

Our Catholic contemporary, the *Universe*, reports an appeal by Mexican Catholics against the present "Socialistic law," which forbids religious teaching in schools upon the ground that it violates the "declaration of human rights" drawn up by the United Nations Organisation, of which the Mexican Republic is a member. We would like to ask the *Universe* as a matter of historical fact, how much religious freedom and how many "human rights" there were in Mexico whilst the Catholic Church was all-powerful in Mexico for over 300 years during which time the whole population was subject to the jurisdiction of the Inquisition and "heresy" was a capital offence the frequently inflicted penalty for which was death by fire.

"Discrimination against Catholics begins at 14," declares the *Universe* in relation to East European lands behind the "Iron Curtain." But what about a Catholic country like Spain, where all children born of Christian parents of all denominations have to be baptised in Catholic Churches; surely there, discrimination against Protestants begins at birth. Are not the Communists apt pupils of "Holy Church" in this as in other matters?

In "Our Note Book" in the *Illustrated London News*, Mr. Arthur Bryant, the eminent historian, takes up the role of theologian, and plunges straight into the fray with the statement that Jesus of Nazareth is "the greatest and most germinating teacher the world has ever known." In ordinary secular history, he would expect "evidence" for wild statements but, as a theologian, he is not concerned much with evidence. To call Jesus the greatest of all "teachers" makes him welcome everywhere, and evidence can go by the board.

Mr. Bryant has all the pet religious clichés off by heart. "God is love," and the sole way to God is "through loving and serving others." The Kingdom of Heaven "was made out of love expressed by service." Jesus' disciples "could never understand him," their minds were "earth-bound." Before a man can enter the Kingdom of Heaven "he must be reborn." "Man's body, born of woman, made of dust"—all the familiar clichés are there most of them sheer twaddle, expressing nothing of any use whatever in this work-a-day world—except to minds befuddled with religion. And Mr. Bryant is an eminent historian!

In the "Methodist Recorder," a lady recently tried to answer the question of religious persecution—which, needless to say, is supposed to be practised only by the Roman Church according to some of her correspondents. She herself, as a good Methodist, "dislikes, disbelieves, and in some way abominates what Roman Catholicism stands for," but she was fair enough to admit that the other Churches have also taken part in religious persecution, and bunches with them Communism, Fascism, and "certain individuals." To put it all bluntly, Miss Harwood fully admits religious persecution, but hasn't the ghost of an idea what to do about it. Or perhaps even wants to.

Our contemporary, "The People," has discovered a parson "you can't shock." He is Canon R. W. Parsons, and his "place of business" is Moor Park College which, he contends, is going to make "Christianity matter in our lives." This is particularly interesting to Freethinkers

especially as he thinks that the Church *must* help people "find answers to *all* questions that are troubling them." Moor Park is ready to meet anything and everybody against religion, and everybody is answered "shorn of all sermonising." The writer of the article is "convinced that this remarkable college is succeeding."

One can only wonder what he has read in the way of Freethought propaganda? For if there is one thing that emerges from all religious controversy it is that the sceptic wins all along the line with the religious believers in head-long flight. However, there is one teenie weenie reservation. It is that Moor Park must be fully financed to meet the enemy. The pitiful sum required is only £100,000, and it will, in addition, keep up the high standard of living necessary properly to meet such a wealthy, highly-organised, though intellectually poverty-stricken movement as modern Freethought.

That bright but often horribly Nonconformist journal, *News Chronicle*, must be solemnly warned. It must not publish any "news" destined to remind its very religious readers that there is such a thing as "the growth of secularism"; for like "blatant" materialism, it ought to have died out generations ago. It was the Bishop of Winchester who is reported by the *News Chronicle* to have said that "the growth of secularism" was the "most significant change" during the past 100 years though, it is true, he added, "for the worse." That is, however, a matter of opinion; and nowhere in the rest of his speech was there any suggestion that he had the antidote—except more Christianity; an antidote which already had, on his own admission, utterly failed.

We were delighted to find that *Picture Post*, unlike most journals, was not afraid to publish replies to some religious nobody who insisted that the Resurrection must have happened because Mr. Justice Darling believed it. The replies went even so far as to deny not only the Resurrection, but the existence of Jesus himself—which probably hurt our reverent Rationalists as much as Christians. It is all to the good that readers of *Picture Post* can learn the widespread scepticism which prevails everywhere and is spreading. Our congratulations to an enlightened Editor.

Our contemporary, the *Daily Express*, reports that an Argentinian aeronautical society has just been formed with the object of making a trip to the moon in the near future. As the Virgin Mary is already a colonel—on full pay—in Senor Peron's army, we assume that the prospective expedition will be under her celestial patronage. Perhaps the South American aeronauts will be divinely guided along the self-same route which Our Lady followed during her bodily "Assumption" into Heaven?

In a travel book just published by Mr. Norman Lewis, the author describes a new religion in Indo-China. We learn with much astonishment that this creed, which was founded in 1926, has a most peculiar calendar of saints which includes "The Jade Emperor" whoever he may be—La Rochefoucauld, and Victor Hugo. We can understand "The Jade Emperor" functioning in this role, but the cynical French moralist, La Rochefoucauld, seems rather out of place in a halo. Whilst as for the inclusion of the great anti-clerical poet and novelist, Victor Hugo, the only words that can describe our astonishment are those quoted by another great French playwright, Molière: "What the devil is he doing in that set-up?"

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

G. WARREN.—Thanks for kind wishes. We wish you a speedy recovery.

F. CROWLAND.—Your suggestions for "improving" *The Freethinker* duly noted and will be considered.

We have received many replies with reference to Mr. P. C. King's letter in a recent issue and hope to publish them in due course.

A. D. CORRICK.—Sorry, we cannot trace letter referred to. Your other letter will appear.

Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "*The Freethinker*" to: "*The Editor*," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.

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

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SUGAR PLUMS

Readers who have followed the controversy which has developed in the last year or so around our former regular contributor, Mr. John Rowland, will probably not be surprised to learn that at the Annual Meeting of Mill Hill Chapel (one of the principal Unitarian Churches in the North of England—situated at City Square, Leeds), Mr. Rowland was elected to the Chapel Committee there.

"The Biggest Thief in Town" now playing at The New Boltons Theatre Club, is a play that every Freethinker ought to see. A screaming comedy, full of 100 per cent. Freethought. No West End theatre would dare to stage it. The critics mostly condemn its irreligious aspect but have to admit that the play is a scream. Nowadays, when the Church is putting across religion, both on stage and cinema, it is a relief to find a man who dares to produce a play that shocks the godly.

ROUSSEAU AND MODERN MARXISM

(Concluded from page 271)

The topic becomes of supreme importance to Freethinkers at a time when the Churches pretend that we are faced with a simple alternative: either to accept a political doctrine which they describe (in non-political terms) as "atheistic materialism," or to follow a Christian way of life, which, when they explain what they mean, turns out to be the secular ethic gained through the long struggle against dogmatic religion. We are warned by Christian spokesmen that "the acceptance of materialistic and evolutionist theories leads to the establishment of tyranny and the totalitarian State"—as if Hitler was not a Catholic who believed he was sent by God for the good of the German people. The argument goes on to make civilisation itself derive solely from Christianity—as if the anchorites were pagans; as if the peoples that flourished B.C. lived in a state of savagery, with Athens a jungle, Mencius a cannibal, and the Babylonians lawless. The argument is an insolent attempt to terrorise Freethinkers

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is now open

into approving Christianity as the only custodian of a civilisation that was in fact constructed in the fight against it.

The political doctrine the Churchmen have in mind when they speak of "atheistic materialism" is simply certain features of contemporary Marxism (more accurately called Stalinism, so far has it evolved from Marx's ideas), and the economy of their method consists in serving an affiliation order on Freethought for politics that have nothing to do with it. Marx, the atheist founder of "scientific Socialism," can no more be held responsible for the "fideism" of his followers than Rousseau can be blamed for the excesses of the Jacobins. The deterioration of Marxism into a dogmatic system has been proceeding for a quarter of a century; and that it no longer presents even a semi-rational doctrine is placed beyond dispute by Mr. Siroky's announcement: "For a Communist, there is one rule that must always be observed: unreserved confidence in the Soviet Union."

Unreserved confidence in anybody or anything is subject neither to governmental decrees nor to the individual will. A degree of confidence may be attained after considering the evidence in favour of having it, but the confidence itself remains a mental act of a peculiarly private character. To be unreserved in would have to be independent of reason and evidence, of time and place, of every factor that makes confidence anything more than an act of faith. Unreserved confidence implies a supernatural immutability in the object in which we are to have confidence; it precludes any revision of our judgment; it obviates any need to understand why we have confidence in it at all; it is, in short, unreserved. The phrase takes one's breath away. The Pope has not asked more from the faithful; and when a Catholic priest informs us that "what the world needs to-day is more childlike faith" (presumably in the Catholic Church), he is asking for the same mental attitude as Mr. Siroky.

It will not do to reply that the Soviet Union is more deserving of confidence than the Catholic Church; in both cases the confidence demanded is not to be allotted according to the merits of the institution; it is to be unreserved. The measure of how far the scholiasts have departed from their original texts may be gauged from the following words by Engels (*Anti-Dühring*, p. 18): "In the eyes of dialectic philosophy, nothing is established for all time, nothing is absolute or sacred. On everything and in everything it sees the stamp of inevitable decline." That is, nothing can ever, far less always, claim unreserved confidence. Mr. Siroky amends the text slightly; he adds, "except the Soviet Union." Just four little words, but enough to "negate the negation."

By issuing such a dictum, contemporary Marxism stands revealed as "but old priest writ large"; and far from being the child of Atheism and Materialism it proceeds from Rousseau's Deism and his irrational desire for uniformity of belief. Its doctrine of the monolithic party

with absolute power over its members, which "by virtue of what it is, is always what it should be"; its doctrine of an infallible Leader who is "the sole judge of what is good for the community" and gives it a Constitution; its doctrine of treason as consisting in a mental reservation that the Leader may once have erred (as Siroky accused Clementis, for thinking Stalin may have erred in 1940)—all these are akin to Rousseau's doctrines of the indivisibility of sovereignty, the inerrancy of the general will, and the death-penalty for a loss of faith. Not that way will politicians solve the vital modern question of how to achieve the union of collective energy with the encouragement of individual freedom; and not in Mr. Siroky's rule of life will Freethinkers, whatever their politics, find any improvement on the outlook they have been attacking for centuries. Freethought, if it is to survive, is now compelled to fight on two fronts: against dogmatic Christianity, and against dogmatic Stalinism.

THOMAS BUCHANAN.

PIONEERS OF FREETHOUGHT

To speak the praises of the brave and thoughtful dead is to me a labour of gratitude and love.—INGERSOLL.

PREVIOUS to 1866—the year in which the National Secular Society was formed, there had been many Freethinkers but no organisation. Charles Bradlaugh became actually its first President, and from his youth until his death in January, 1891, was ever a soldier in the army of progress, fighting for the rights of man. The Presidency in those days was no easy job, and it may be truly said that war had been declared against that superstition—especially in England—known as Christianity.

Prejudice, calumny, and malice against Freethinkers was rampant, and it required great courage to attack the enemy, Christianity and the Bible. "Iconoclast" the Redoubtable was the very man. By perseverance, people of intellect gathered around him such as Holyoake, Robert Cooper, Charles Watts, Mrs. Harriet Law, Joseph Barker, Joseph Symes, Robert Forder, George and Sam Standring, Arthur B. Moss, Annie Besant, William Heaford, Dr. Aveling, George W. Foote, F. C. Gould, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton Smith, J. M. Robertson, Joseph McCabe, J. P. Gilmour, Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, J. W. Gott, Ernest Pack, Wallace Nelson (who emigrated to New Zealand) and W. W. Collins, a well informed lecturer who later went to Australia and became Editor of *The Examiner*.

The National Reformer in the 60s and early 70s was the party paper and was prosecuted by the Government "for not paying the 'tax on knowledge,' £800." Bradlaugh defended himself against the very best lawyers of England and beat them to a frazzle. Result: Free Press of England and newspapers reduced to one penny instead of sixpence as heretofore. A splendid victory (1869). By the year 1880 lectures and debates, books and pamphlets were sold by thousands which made people think. In fact, 1880-90 were 10 years of activity in the Freethought ranks and, let me say here, had it not been for those valiant and courageous Freethinkers, the works of Prof. Huxley, Tyndall, Spencer and Darwin might not have been published. *The Freethinker* (1881), edited by G. W. Foote (sub-editor, J. M. Wheeler) became a mighty force and is still in existence. There has only been four Presidents since the N.S.S. was established which shows it is a healthy occupation. Bradlaugh was a mighty man. Foote was a very fine speaker and scholar. Chapman

Cohen as editor of *The Freethinker*, who has recently retired, is a man of marked ability. When you find a young man reading such books as Spinoza, Prof. Bain, Locke, Herbert Spencer, you may depend upon it that he is framing for making his mark in the world, and great honour and credit must be given to the recent retired President, Chapman Cohen of the N.S.S. There have been Secretaries since 1866, some who to-day are unknown but who rendered great service to the "best of Causes." Robert Forder was the first and a great favourite of Mr. Bradlaugh. Second was Stanley Jones, third, Miss Edith Vance; and Miss Kathleen Keough, after Miss Vance turned blind, acted as her assistant, then R. H. Rosetti who now is President. May he live long to follow in the steps and prove worthy of his great office is my sincere wish. Our new Secretary, Mr. Seibert and new Editor of *The Freethinker*, Francis A. Ridley, we must support and give them all encouragement.

When I was 13 years of age, my father, who was a great admirer of Charles Bradlaugh, Mrs. Annie Besant, Mrs. Harriet Law, and Charles Watts, took me to hear Mr. Joseph Symes lecture on Sunday evening at Crook, Co. Durham. Mr. Symes had recently joined the N.S.S.; formerly he had been a Minister of the Wesleyan body at Leeds. He stayed a week at Crook, and a debate with Rev. W. W. Howard took place which caused quite a furore in all the mining districts. Mr. Symes was an Elocutionist and taught it; likewise, he was well up in scholarship, and the Rev. gentleman was no match for Mr. Symes. It is many years since they passed away "and a generation of Freethinkers hath arisen that knows not Joseph."

In the years 1881-2, Ingersoll's pamphlets began to be read in England. About that time I had a volume containing 44 lectures sent from America as a birthday present. I read several and was greatly interested in such fine language. I committed to memory many selections such as "At Napoleon's Grave." In reply to Talmage anent George Eliot and others, I purchased *Myth and Miracle* and was fascinated. I learnt almost the whole of it but what took my fancy was "The imagination of Shakespeare," "Science, the Great Magician" and "O Liberty, thou art the god of my idolatry." The language of these pieces is superb. I became a disciple of Ingersoll. I have been one ever since, and can repeat to-day those selections (although I am 85 years of age) as well as if I had learnt them last week. Even this article I have written from memory without consulting any book.

What a difference between Bradlaugh and Ingersoll in style. The debates in theology by Bradlaugh are more like problems of Euclid whilst Ingersoll plays upon the passions of human nature like Paganini played on the violin. Both were blessed with a remarkable physique, a fine intellect and humanitarianism throughout their lives. After a busy life at the age of 58 (Bradlaugh) and 66 (Ingersoll) death touched their tired hearts.

They died in the land their genius defended under the quiet stars.

Slander cannot touch them now, hate will not reach them more. A few more years, a few more brave men and mankind will venerate the men who agreed with that great Humanitarian, Thomas Paine who said:—

"The world is my Country
and
To do Good is my Religion."

JOSEPH CLOSE.

FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS

The Philosophy of Secularism

(1) PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS OF THE "NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY"

"Secularism affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge, and that human life should be wholly directed towards its improvement; it asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

"Secularism affirms that progress is only possible on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; it affirms that liberty belongs of right to all, and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised state.

"Secularism affirms that morality is social in origin and application, and aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.

"Secularism demands the complete secularisation of the State, and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations; it seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of peoples as a means of advancing international peace, to further common cultural interests, and to develop the freedom and dignity of man.

"The 'National Secular Society' is an organisation which aims at providing a rational ground for ethical and social action, and to secure the fullest possible freedom of speech and publication.

"It has branches all over the United Kingdom, and members in all parts of the world.

"It is ready to advise Freethinkers as to their legal rights with regard to the right of affirmation, withdrawal of children from religious instruction in schools, secular funerals, civil marriage, position in the Army and Navy, etc."

F. A. R.

CORRESPONDENCE

ST. INGERSOLL?

SIR,—When I was a member of the Rationalist and Freethought Movements I always thought that there was far too great an emphasis on the outstanding figures of the past. But now that I can look at these things from the other side of the theological fence I see an ever greater absurdity than I previously guessed. You are always inclined to throw contempt on those who find the life and sayings of Jesus a matter for either reverence or deep thought, and those who regard the saints as worthy of any attention are laughed at as hopelessly out of date. Yet the issue of *The Freethinker* dated July 22 contains three articles on Ingersoll, and a reference to that great man in the editorial—and all, not because of a centenary or similar noteworthy anniversary, but because Ingersoll died fifty-two years ago. If this goes on, we shall have birthday numbers on the anniversaries of Bradlaugh, Herbert Spencer, J. M. Robertson, F. J. Gould, and so on. In fact, we may be witnessing the gradual growth of a calendar of Freethought saints! But does this not bear out what I have suggested so often—that most men need something of the kind of philosophical background which the Churches supply? It appears that it is not only in the Fascist and Communist Movements that a religious "set-up" has to be constructed.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN ROWLAND.

Leeds.
[Mr. Rowland substitutes words for things like a true theologian. There is nothing peculiar to religion in a movement occasionally commemorating its eminent protagonists. Movements of all kinds do so. His suggestions re special numbers on Spencer and others strikes us as quite good and will be given careful consideration.—EDITOR.]

"ACID DROPS"

SIR,—I entirely agree with your correspondent P. C. King in his criticism of "Acid Drops" and "Sugar Plums."—Yours, etc.,

E. TAYLOR.

SIR,—If Mr. P. C. King moved amongst the population up here in the North-West he would not suggest altering "Acid Drops" and "Sugar Plums." Lots of my "clients" are shocked to start with but welcome later on the "Acid Drops." It would be nice if we could all grow up mentally quickly, but as Mr. King should know, it is a slow process.—Yours, etc.,

EDWARD HENDERSON.

SIR,—This feature *must* be retained; it has been the means of capturing hundreds of new readers. If some of the "drops" are not sufficiently, or over acidulated, that is no reason for cutting out a distinctive page. Don't ever use such a tame heading as the suggested "Current Topics." Lampoon foolery always.—Yours, etc.,

J. EFFEL.

SIR,—I should like to support Mr. P. C. King's criticism of the "Acid Drop" and "Sugar Plum" features. I have often wondered why your readers have not rebelled against the puerile "witticisms" which are churned out week after week—apparently by some humourless hack.

"Sugar Plums" are clearly an anomalous 19th-century survival and should be re-titled quite simply "News" or "Current Activities." "Acid Drops" are, I think, a different proposition. This is quite a novel feature and has real possibilities, given enough wit, imagination, sarcasm and irony. The trouble arises, in my opinion, because the "Acid Drops" emanate for the most part from the same writer and it is clear that—whatever this gentleman is—humour and wit are not his strong points.

Finally, may I suggest that the "Letters" feature—which is the most popular feature in most journals—be extended. Perhaps space could be found by curtailing the tedious private debates of Messrs. Vernon Carter and Yates, and the fruitless Shakespeare—Bacon controversy.

"Facts for Freethinkers" and theatre criticisms are, I think, welcome improvements.—Yours, etc.,

C. R. ENGLISH.

[Where can we find this marvellous combination of "wit, satire, imagination, sarcasm and irony"?—EDITOR.]

OBITUARY

I regret to report the death of Alan W. Readman, of Seaham Harbour at the age of 62. For years he has been an atheist, and Freethinker, and has loyally supported our cause on all occasions. During the days when things were difficult in his locality, and I was fighting hard for our movement, he was one of the first to give his help and hospitality. He was an industrious, kindly man, and many will miss him for his concern and active help to friends in need. He defended his principles, even though it cost him some of his so-called "friends." The movement is poorer by his death, particularly in North East England.

Our sympathy goes out to his wife and family in their sad loss. A service was conducted at Newcastle Crematorium by John T. Brighton.

J.T.B.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Market Place.—Sunday, August 5, 3 and 7 p.m.: JACK CLAYTON.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

J. CLAYTON'S Lecture Engagements: Crawshawbooth, Friday, August 3, 7-30 p.m.; Great Harwood, Saturday, August 4, 6 p.m.; Blackburn Market, Sunday, August 5, Debate: "That Christianity has been an Influence for Good on Mankind," aff. Rev. R. J. Billington, neg. J. Clayton, N.S.S., 3 p.m. and 7-45 p.m.; a Lecture, J. Clayton, 6-45 p.m.; Clitheroe, Tuesday, August 7, 7-45 p.m.: J. Clayton.

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK.

Also Lectures at Platt Fields, Sunday, 3 p.m.; Alexandra Park Gates, Wednesday, 8 p.m.; St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site, Sunday, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S., on the Blitzed Site, Hanover Street, Liverpool.—Sunday, August 5, 7-30 p.m.: G. COLEBROOKE.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: F. A. RIDLEY and W. G. FRASER. Sunday Evening, 7-30 p.m. (Highbury Corner): F. A. RIDLEY and J. CALVERLEY. Friday Evening, August 10, 8 p.m. (South Hill Park): J. M. ALEXANDER and W. G. FRASER.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, August 11, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A. SAMMS.

South London and Lewisham Branch (Brockwell Park).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: C. E. WOOD.

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