

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### An Irish "Canossa"

IN the year 1077 of our era occurred the humiliating episode of Canossa, when Henry the Fourth, "Holy Roman Emperor" and German king, was forced to do penance outside the castle of "Canossa" in mid-winter, clad only in his shirt, before being pardoned by the great Pope Gregory the Seventh (1073-86). Since which date and event, the term "Canossa" has come to stand for the symbol of the ecclesiastical power and its supremacy over the secular state and over the civil administration. It was, to be sure, in this sense, that the term "Canossa" was used by the "Iron Chancellor," Prince Bismarck, when in the course of the celebrated "Kulturkampf"—the conflict between the newly-founded German Empire and the Church of Rome—he made the famous declaration that he "would never go to Canossa."

However, it seems that the Middle Ages are not yet ended, in some parts of Europe, at least. For in this very year of grace 1951, the world has witnessed an assertion of the spirit of papal Imperialism, the spirit of Canossa, as assertive and as blatant as anything in even the Middle Ages. Nor was this mediæval ecclesiastical dictatorship exhibited in some remote part of the world, far from the centres of contemporary civilisation; contrarily, it took place within sight of these shores, in a land which, until a few years ago, was British territory, in the Republic of Eire (Ireland) in the years 1950-51. We refer, of course, to the strange—to modern eyes, at least—affair of Dr. Noel Browne, former Minister of Health in the aforesaid Republic, who was driven from office and forced to resign by the Irish Bishops, whilst his Health scheme had to be abandoned because of the condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that this startling assertion of mediævalism almost on Britain's doorstep, was almost completely ignored by the British Press, no doubt under Catholic pressure, itself constitutes a most sinister feature, as, also, an eloquent tribute to the growing influence of Catholicism as a "pressure group" in this still professedly free and Protestant land.

We subjoin the relevant facts for the benefit of our readers:—

As a result of the Irish General Election of February 10, 1948, a coalition government under Mr. Costello succeeded the government of Mr. De Valera, which had held office since 1932. In the distribution of seats in the new Irish cabinet, the Ministry of Health went to Dr. Noel Browne, a member of one of the political parties which supported Mr. Costello's regime. Dr. Noel Browne was a young man of thirty-three, and a newcomer to the Dail (Parliament). He was a medical graduate of Trinity and a former assistant medical superintendent before entering politics in 1948. Like virtually everyone in Irish politics, Dr. Browne was a Catholic and, like most of the Irish professional class, had been trained by the Jesuits, who have acquired a dominant position in higher education in present-day Eire. (From the fact that he was permitted

to complete his medical studies at the Protestant institution of Trinity, for which Catholics had to obtain a special dispensation, Dr. Browne's orthodoxy must have presumably satisfied his Jesuit instructors.)

Dr. Browne appears to have made an excellent Minister, and in present-day Ireland, with wretched social conditions for a large portion of the population and an infantile mortality of 83 per thousand—against 30 per cent. in adjacent England and Wales, it must be acknowledged that there was plenty of scope for an enlightened administrator to make improvements. By all accounts, Dr. Browne rose to the occasion: within eighteen months, he had abolished queueing for tubercular treatment, provided sanatoria treatment for all waiting patients, and provided financial aid for them and for their dependants. Further to which, he started a £20,000,000 hospital scheme designed to give Ireland (Eire) an up-to-date hospital service, and national cancer and nutrition services—the last named, in particular, being a highly necessary step in present-day Eire, where potatoes still form the staple diet of a large part of the rural population.

"Appetite comes with eating." The go-ahead young Minister, fired by the sensational developments across St. George's Channel, went on to devise a health scheme with obvious affinities to that of the British Labour Government, which has aroused the interest of social students all over the civilised world. However, the principles of the Reformation never took root in Ireland and Dr. Browne soon discovered by bitter experience that it does not pay to have a modern outlook in a still mediæval country!

Dr. Browne's Health Scheme was of the same general character as the English one, with the same "free for all" principle, and it included a "mother-and-child" measure, which would not only give all medical service free to mothers and children, but also included special pre-natal care and health advice to expectant mothers by private practitioners where possible and, in other cases, by State medical inspectors. There was no "means test" attached to the scheme, which looked as if it was first destined to meet with no opposition except, as in England, from Conservative-minded members of the medical profession, which Dr. Browne had already reckoned with.

At this point, however, a mediæval thunderbolt burst from a clear sky. The Irish Hierarchy in its annual meeting at Maynooth in 1950, criticised the whole scheme as leading to totalitarianism, and as contrary to Catholic social and family moral teaching. Their lordships appointed a sub-committee, consisting of the Archbishop of Dublin and the Bishops of Galway and Ferns, which, in a manner that would have delighted the heart of Hildebrand, summoned Dr. Browne before it. The Minister was conciliatory and explained his scheme in detail, pointing out, in particular, that the "health education" of expectant mothers for which his scheme provided, was physical only and did not impinge upon the monopoly of the clergy to give moral instruction.

Their Catholic lordships, however, were not impressed, and the Archbishop of Dublin summoned the Taoiseach

(Prime Minister), Mr. Costello, before him and ordered him to throw overboard the whole of Dr. Browne's Health Scheme as "contrary to Catholic morals"; a proceeding the more outrageous as, believe it or believe it not, the Roman Catholic Church has no official status in the Irish Republic, the constitution of which accepts the secularist principle of the equality of all religions before the law!

However, fact and law obviously have little relation in the present-day Irish Republic. The politicians ran to cover, Mr. Costello immediately declared: "As a Catholic, I obey my church authorities and will continue to do so." "There is going to be no flouting of the Bishops on Catholic morals and social teaching," declared Mr. William Norton, leader of the Labour Party and Minister of Social Welfare. Deserted by all his colleagues, including those of his own party, Dr. Browne was forced to resign and his Health Scheme was promptly abandoned. Whilst defending his record, the ex-Minister formally submitted: "As a Catholic, I accept the ruling of their Lordships, the Hierarchy, without question."

Some of the deputies in the Dail, however, showed their resentment against the high-handed action of the Bishops. One M.P., Captain Cowan, not only declared that they had exceeded their powers, but added the fundamental criticism that the Browne affair demonstrated that "the Irish Republic is actually ruled, not by the democratically elected representatives of the people, but by Bishops, who meet in secret and give their orders to Ministers." True enough! But such has always been the practice of the Catholic Church whenever it had the power.

The clerical intervention proved decisive: Irish children will continue to live—and to die—in mediaeval fashion and numbers. Whilst, in Roman Canon Law, the decision "on Faith and morals" of a provincial synod like the Irish Hierarchy, is not infallible nor unalterable, no appeal to Rome is at all likely, particularly as Mr. De Valera is now, again in office, whom a famous Irish politician once described to the present writer as "a mediæval Catholic with an eleventh century mentality." In contemporary Ireland, the Middle Ages are still on our doorstep. Ingersoll's prophecy is now abundantly fulfilled: "Home rule means Rome rule."

F. A. RIDLEY.

### BURYING THE HERESY

FIFTY years ago, at street corners, I was joining vociferously in a hymn with the refrain "When the roll is called up yonder I'll be there." It would be a happy event for the parsons if first it could be called down here. For "when the dead in Christ arise," to quote again from the hymn, the parson might have a larger congregation than ever before to cheer him on his upward way to meet his Lord in the skies. I base my estimate on the fact that the orthodoxy of the churchyard so much exceeds that of the church. So many there seem to be resting in the Lord who have never even slept in his house; so many—according to the funeral service—died in the Lord who cared nothing for Him when living. The young Charles Lamb asked his elder sister Mary, when walking in a churchyard (probably in the Temple), where the wicked people were buried? A child with the almost incredible precocity of young John Stuart Mill might have asked his father where the sceptics, like himself, found a resting place!

These reflections invade my mind by reason of the posthumous treatment of two good friends of mine.

In January, 1939, there died in Congleton (a town in Cheshire that derived a profane notoriety by selling the

Corporation Bible to buy a new bear for baiting) Arthur B. Harris. He combined the business of barber and bookseller. Humanitarian and Freethinker, he had a secular "Wayside Pulpit" from which he weighed out against parsons, meat-eaters, vivisectionists, etc. Once he treated me as oracular, and quoted something from one of my works. What illuminating passage it was I cannot now ascertain. He was foremost in controversy in the local Press, and the obituary notice in the *Congleton Chronicle* said that he had probably occupied more space in the Correspondence Column than any other reader. In the same issue was an account of his funeral. The writer was at pains to mention that Harris was buried in "consecrated ground," and concluded his account of the interment with a pious couplet:—

"Father in thy gracious keeping,  
Leave we now thy servant sleeping."

This was too much for me. I wrote a letter to the Editor, and—much to his credit, it was nearly a column in length—the whole of it was published. Here are a few extracts:—

"When I read of the surprising religious ceremonial with which his body was interred, I felt for him like Tennyson's 'Man in wrath.' It is possible for a Londoner to have known Harris better than a Congletonian, particularly if that Londoner has received letters nearly essays long. A man may well open his mind across any distance, if he feels that minds geographically nearer his are aloof from his ideas. Your contributor says he had courageously expressed his views on many humanitarian problems, and was to the last a confirmed vegetarian and a pacifist. Why did he not say that to the last also he was a Freethinker and Rationalist (Harris had been a member of the R.P.A. for nine years)? Why this camouflaging of his deep convictions? This to Harris was one of 'the worthy causes' mentioned. Harris was an admirer of Chapman Cohen, the Editor of *The Freethinker*, and when I stayed with him once he came with me to Manchester to hear my two lectures to the Manchester Branch of the N.S.S.

'Consecrated ground'! Forsooth for him. I imagine his turning for expression for his contempt to some deliciously sardonic writer like Samuel Butler. 'All that was mortal'! He would have said that he believed that all that was mortal of A. B. H. was all there was, excepting in the fine sense of George Eliot's lines, much more appropriate than the pious verse to which he would never have subscribed:

'O may I join the choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In minds made better by their presence.'

I cannot understand how a clergyman ever consented to conduct a service for a man who denied his creeds. . . . I may cause offence to the living, but there is a duty to the dead—not to misrepresent them. We have no right to attempt to bury with them their deep convictions because they are not ours."

My address was given in full, but there was no response from any quarter. I could only hope that I had caused some dis-ease in the consciences of my friend's widow, his son, and the parson.

A few weeks ago there died H. T. Hamson, of Uxbridge; we had been close friends for thirty-six years. He had been prominent in the Institute of Journalists; he had edited the *Middlesex Advertiser* for forty years; he had founded a museum at Uxbridge, and been the chief pillar

of its Library. I had always known he was Agnostic though—unless he was to court martyrdom—it was obvious he could not be so aggressive as a barber-book-seller. He loved to recall how at Northampton he had drunk beer with William Morris; how, too, he was then an organ-blower, who never listened to the sermon, but ran away to the Secular Hall to hear Hyndman, Foote, Morris and John Burns. Recalling these past events, in his last letter to me, he referred to himself as a Bradlaughite and Agnostic. Yet, as in the case of Harris, there was no scruple about giving him a religious funeral. After citing his letter and protesting in vain, I declined to attend. From a well-known journalist I had a satirical account of the performance of the parson. The former was so contemptuous he said he almost thought my friend would sit up in his coffin and protest! My name was wrongly included in the report. No doubt it would reluctantly be omitted as I had many times lectured in Uxbridge with Hamson in the chair. The Editor inserted a correction of what might have been a disingenuous error, but declined to print my brief statement of the reason for absence. He wrote: "It would be a grave misrepresentation suddenly to label him a Bradlaughite and Agnostic now that he is dead." Suddenly!—when he had been such all his days. Misrepresentation—when these were the names he gave himself! I told my friend's successor that he was accusing the deceased of writing what he did not mean, thereby he showed his own tribute to be insincere. I added that he belonged to 1851, not 1951, in suggesting that calling a man an Agnostic was defamation. It now occurs to me that the first date was only eight years after the interment of that brave Freethought warrior, Richard Carlile. Then, in Kensal Green Cemetery, a parson named Twiggle insisted on reading the burial service. "Sir," said Carlile's eldest son Richard, "we want no service over our father's body; he lived in opposition to priestcraft, and we protest against the service being read." The mourners went out of earshot.

Parsons will not now go indecently gate-crashing but, with the slightest encouragement from a relative, they will conspire to bury the heresy with the heretic and make religious propaganda out of a Freethinker's corpse. In Hamson's case, the parson has not denied that he knew he was an Agnostic. It is the more surprising because to them the dead only "pass on." Might they not then know of the mean trick played upon them? Perhaps it is assumed that all Freethinkers become Christians on finding themselves in another world, but some would wait a while to convince themselves that it was a better one than this!

It is time that municipal authorities offered secular services as they offer chaplains. It is certain, as in the case of marriages, the demand for priestcraft would then diminish. Meantime there is a moral for readers of *The Freethinker*. It is useless to rely upon verbal wishes. If you want your body to go to the fire or the earth without words which—in the phrase of John Morley—"are as meaningless as the Abracadabra of a conjuror in his booth," you must put it in writing.

WILLIAM KENT.

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As the idea of priesthood gives a supernatural dignity to man, it also gives supernatural meaning to the whole fellowship of the Churches. The priest of old did for others what they could not do for themselves, went where they could not go, offered what they could not themselves offer.—Rev. A. E. WHITHAM.

## FAITH HEALING

AFTER a long absence the faith healer has again paid us a visit in the N.E. area. As usual, he has preceded his visit by a record of miracles performed in other parts of the world, including the usual list of incurable people. Cancer, T.B., and all deformities, have vanished at his services.

This interests me as I have had quite a lot to do with this kind of person. The first debate I had on the N.S.S. platform in 1926 was with one of these men.

He had claimed to have restored the sight of a blind schoolboy. The local paper, *Sunderland Echo*, reported this "miracle." I questioned it in a letter, but the paper replied by publishing one from the boy's parents in which they stated that their son had been blind, and had now had his sight restored. They did not know, they said, whether it was God, faith or Pastor Jeffreys, but they did know, "whereas he was blind, now he could see." We kept on with our letters, and finally the *Echo* had to publish a letter from the schoolmaster at the boy's school stating that the boy had never been blind!

At the debate, my opponent, who was one of the pastor's organisers, quoted the last few verses in Mark, as his authority for healing the sick. At question time, a member of the audience rose and asked if he believed the whole of the quotation, and having had the assurance that he did, produced a small green bottle labelled "Poison," and read out the verse which says: "They shall drink deadly things, and they shall not harm them." He asked my opponent to demonstrate his faith, but met with a blank refusal. It was a pity, for afterwards the questioner confided in me that the contents of the bottle was *cold tea*.

I next met one up in Northumberland who made a triumphal entrance riding on a white horse preceded by the Salvation Army Band. We had a few tries to get him to defend his position, without result.

But when he left he discarded the white horse and band, and in their place took the last train and the wife of one of his local converts.

Later I met another in North Shields, and after some lively discussions on the Harbour View, he crossed the River Tyne (not Jordan) and eventually he became a resident in one of his Majesty's hotels for being too eager to collect people's spare cash in order to build a Temple. We have been unable to get our new healer to risk opening up old wounds, however. Still, we may again manage to give these worthy gentlemen something to cure, i.e., doubt.

J. T. BRIGHTON

(Vice-President of the N.S.S.).

## MY GADABOUT

My brain's a gadabout,  
She will not stay at home;  
But am I sad about  
Her keen desire to roam?  
No; for the fields of knowledge  
My brain would fain explore,  
In forum or in college,  
Are what a brain is for;  
Though sometimes it needs courage  
To enter realms untrod before.  
The world lies open to us—What a show!  
Ready, good gadabout? Come on, let's go.

B. S.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH. By Colonel Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

### ACID DROPS

**The General Election** reminds us of a story told of the cynical aristocrat, Lord Melbourne, who lived to be the pious Queen Victoria's first Prime Minister and to give his name to a great Australian city. At an election meeting, his lordship was asked by an indignant dissenter: "Why do you always show this disgusting partiality to the established Church?" To which query, Melbourne made the classic retort: "My friend, I show partiality to the established Church because it is established; get your damned sect established, and I will show partiality to that, too"! Upon another occasion, his lordship is said to have remarked: "I have the greatest respect for Christianity as long as it doesn't interfere with private life." Politics were franker in those days. We doubt very much if any politician dare say that now in public.

**Attention, all angels!** For a petition has just been addressed to the Almighty by the pious inhabitants of the Island of Malta, which is likely to cause considerable confusion, we imagine, in the celestial postal department which deals with such earthly affairs. Briefly, the natives of Malta require the Deity to send them less rain. It is much to be hoped that this petition will not get confused with other, more orthodox petitions, which usually ask for *more* rain. Otherwise, the days of the Flood may return in Malta, whilst drought will be the rule elsewhere. Answering prayers seems to indicate "full employment" for the appropriate department!

**The B.B.C. has made** a notable literary discovery. In a discussion upon detective fiction in its postal feature, "Dear Sir," several correspondents claimed that the detective of fiction originated long before Conan Doyle and his celebrated "Sherlock Holmes" stories. One bold scribe traced the origin of the detective story back to the Bible, or, at least, what comes to much the same thing, to the Apocrypha, where, our readers may recall, there occurs the pleasant story of *Bel and the Dragon*, where Daniel, under divine inspiration, laid a trap for the priest of Bel, who was fraudulently misappropriating the offerings placed upon the altar by credulous worshippers. Thus, detective fiction originated in ancient Babylon and Daniel was the first detective. Soon, we fear, Scotland Yard will be proposing to set up a statue of Daniel, with or without his den of lions, as the patron saint of the "Criminal Investigation Department"!

**Some time ago** in this column we reported that Tommy Burns, former heavyweight champion of the world, had turned religious and become the Reverend Tommy Burns. We now learn that another ex-world champion, the negro lightweight, Harry Armstrong, has become a practising evangelist and is now swapping punches with Old Nick instead of with less "spiritual" rivals. We once read that *unsuccessful* pugilists usually seem to end up as "punch-drunk," but a similar kind of cerebral insanity also seems to overtake *successful* members of the punching profession.

**A series of lectures** has been given to children on the radio, designed to tell them who Jesus Christ was, delivered by a parson (or parsons) and full of the most credulous adulation. Jesus is the veritable Son of God, the only true Messiah, the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings, and every word and comma in the Gospels is absolutely "authentic," and every event, particularly those in which the Jews are lashed to scorn, recorded by the

Gospel writers is literally true. Passages are read out in that dreadful parsonic voice which is supposed to be "reverent." Every miracle took place exactly as described and the Bible ghosts, devils, angels, demons, witches and wizards are put before our children as "truth." And yet we have Rationalists who assure us that our fight against such incredible superstition is quite over!

**In an Election Broadcast** on Monday, October 15, Mr. R. R. Stokes, Labour Minister and devout Roman Catholic, declared that he was in the Labour Party because it embodied "Christian"—that is, presumably, Roman Catholic—"principles." Many years ago, we recollect hearing the then leader of the Labour Party, Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, declare that the founder of the authentic British Labour Movement was Robert Owen (1770-1858), and it is common knowledge that Owen was a militant Atheist who ruined his career by his aggressive attacks upon Christianity. Does Mr. Stokes derive his "Christian principles" from an Atheist? It is all very confusing!

**Giving his recollections** upon the wireless, Mr. Robertson Scott, the veteran 85-year-old Rationalist, referred pointedly to the shocking religious intolerance of his youth in, presumably, the 1870s. He related how, when a cheap excursion at 7s. 6d. per head was run on Sundays to neighbouring towns, local religious organisations distributed handbills announcing "7s. 6d. for a trip to Hell." Evidently, secularist ideas have made great progress since those now far-off days. But Mr. Scott's reminiscence represented a telling reminder to the younger generation of what the "good old days" were really like. We are glad to see that the evergreen author is not resting on his well-earned laurels, but still puts over a word for rationalism wherever possible.

**A.D. 1951.** Eight summonses for alleged offences under the Sunday Trading Acts were taken out by the London County Council against Festival Gardens stall-holders. Two of the summonses were dismissed, and fines imposed in three cases, then the remaining summonses were withdrawn. But the shame of having taken out the summonses remains with the L.C.C. How do souvenirs of Puritanism manage to get on important public bodies? In this particular instance, the religious mentality is 300 years behind that of the average intelligent Londoner.

**Like other creeds,** Spiritualism also has its backsliders, and very painful to other Spiritualists they are. One of the latest is a Mr. R. Gasson (born a Jew), who "healed the sick, made the blind to see, and produced various forms of phenomena." Mr. Gasson appears to have got tired of doing all this, and passionately wanted to be a Christian, so he promptly joined a Pentecostal church, found Jesus Christ, and told his fellow Spiritualists that all his "healing was the work of the Devil." Here is a delightful case for the Society for Psychical Research to take up; they really ought to put Mr. W. H. Salter and Mr. G. N. M. Tyrrell on the track. Perhaps these crudite gentlemen will be able to materialise Mr. Gasson's Devil?

**A man who shook gates** at Heston and Isleworth, Middlesex, saying he was on his way to heaven was fined 10s. at Brentford for being drunk and disorderly. Now must a man be considered drunk and disorderly because he wants to go to heaven? And should he be fined Ten Shillings?

**"THE FREETHINKER"**

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C. 1.  
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

**TO CORRESPONDENTS**

E. DYSON.—Thanks for your suggestion, but would not readers' replies be better directed to the *Sunday Chronicle*? After all, letters to this journal on the subject would be merely preaching to the converted.

S. SUMNER.—We note your support for Mr. Hornibrook but it is rather too political for our columns. Is not the Dean of Canterbury a Communist?

V. H. SMITH.—Your support for Mr. Du Cann is appreciated, but your quotation from Luke is very well known.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (*Home and Abroad*): One year, 19s. 2d.; half-year, 9s. 7d.; three months, 4s. 11d.

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 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.

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

**SUGAR PLUMS**

In view of certain recent correspondence in the appropriate column of this journal, it may be relevant, as well as desirable, to indicate what is the attitude of *The Freethinker* to current political controversies. Naturally, the philosophy of secularism has its political aspects; the briefest glance at the "Aims and Objects" of the National Secular Society is sufficient to establish this fact, equally obvious, a paper such as *The Freethinker* cannot be party political, in the sense of attaching itself exclusively to any one party. Amongst our contributors and readers, there are men and women of many shades of political opinion. As Freethinkers they have, of course, the right to express any relevant opinions in the columns of this journal. This necessarily includes political opinions. It must, however, be understood that all such partizan opinions represent the views, exclusively, of their authors.

Readers in Leicester may be reminded that Mr. H. Cutner is speaking to-day (Sunday, November 4) at Humberstone Gate. His address begins at 6-30, and he will try and initiate his audience into what goes on "Behind the Scenes with Spiritualists." His exposure of some of the methods used should prove highly entertaining.

We recently read a contemporary account of a papal conclave in the 16th century. It lasted for several months and the Cardinals only elected a Pope at last under the pressure of starvation, having been put on a diet of bread and water for several days. The stench inside the conclave, where the Cardinals were shut in until they made their final decision on the new Pope, was so foul that several Cardinals collapsed and had to be taken to hospital, whilst perfumed gloves had to be worn by the survivors. Roman bookmakers betted freely on the result; the English candidate, Cardinal Pole (who was not elected), starting at odds of 3 to 1. One bookmaker made 20,000 gold crowns (worth several times that amount in modern sterling) on

**The Freethinker Fund**

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To find space for the numerous articles awaiting publication we shall acknowledge all contributions by post instead of printing lists.

**is now open**

the result. However, the Holy Ghost, who must have worked overtime, finally selected the "Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We have referred previously in the columns of this journal to the important issues involved for the international Freethought movement by the struggle over secular education now proceeding in the French Fourth Republic. Recently, we published a letter from a French correspondent upon this subject. We are pleased to inform our readers that we shall be publishing in an early issue of *The Freethinker* an article which will review the whole question of secular education in contemporary France, written especially for this journal by the well-known French political leader and anti-clerical writer, M. Marceau Pivert. M. Pivert is the author of the standard work on the subject, *L'Ecole et L'Eglise* ("The School and the Church"). He is a former member of the (pre-war) French Government, and is, at present, secretary of the "Federation of the Seine" in the French Socialist Party (S.F.I.O.) and a member of the Executive Committee of the Party. In his private capacity, M. Pivert is a professor of physics and a distinguished educationalist. His book has just been re-issued in France with a Preface by the former French prime minister, the late M. Leon Blum. We need not stress the vital importance of this question in the land of Voltaire and of so many of the modern protagonists of Freethought.

**MUDDLED THINKING**

MR. DU CANN confines his reply to my last article to a letter (*The Freethinker*, September 30), in which he charges me with "dragging the controversy down to a low plain of childishness and triviality on which he cannot breathe." This is one way of getting out of a difficulty. When he cannot defend his absurdities he is afflicted with a mental asthma. This, I suppose, is the reason why he chooses to reply in the exiguous form of a letter. His trouble is not lack of breath, but lack of argument.

But let us see what he can do on a plane where his hypersensitive organism can function. In my last article I took exception to his assertion that, in his use of the term, Freethinker, "all the world, including such writers as Dean Swift, Gray, Thackeray and Lord Morley was with him," and I challenged him to cite any passage in the works of these writers where the name Freethinker is used otherwise than in its anti-religious sense.

In reply he gives us quotations from each of them which, by some curious trick of self-deception (the wish being father to the thought) his fancies support his contention. Considerations of space prevent my giving them in full, but the reader (if so far interested) may turn to his letter for confirmation of my statements. Thus, according to Mr. Du Cann, "Swift puts libertines as well as Atheists

and despisers of Religion amongst his category of those who usually pass under the name of Freethinkers." On this Mr. Du Cann's comment is: "This is freethinking in morals as well as religion."

In Swift's opinion libertines were Freethinkers *because* they contemned the restraints of religion. He used the name not with reference to their immorality, but with reference to their *irreligion*—their libertinism being the result of their freethinking. For the purpose of his argument Mr. Du Cann confounds laxity in morals with free-thinking in religion; they have no connection. On the contrary, the true Freethinker is, in virtue of his free-thought, on an ethically higher plane than the religionist.

Next we come to Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* from which (for some reason I cannot fathom) he quotes "Miss Crawley's shocking freethinking ways and her free notions about morals à la Voltaire." What conceivable meaning has the word here except its anti-religious one, and what have Voltaire's morals to do with his rejection of Christianity? He gives a second quotation from the same book in which the famous Sir Pitt Crawley is described as "inclined to be a sad Freethinker on these points"; the points being "crops, corn laws and politics." Though familiar with *Vanity Fair* I cannot locate the passage, but this matters little to my argument. To be a sad Freethinker on crops, corn laws and politics is so vague a use of the term as to be meaningless.

Then we get "Lord Morley's famous declaration in 1874 that the modern Freethinker does not attack Christianity, he explains it." What Morley meant was that he explains it *away* which, of course, is using the word in its proper sense.

The instance he quotes from the poet Gray is irrelevant and, as such, not worth notice. "The first time," he tells us, "the word Freethinker appears in any English book was in 1692 in Smith's *The Religious Imposter*. Freethinkers are there described as the 'New Religious Fraternity of Freethinkers.'" Again I ask, what then? Is not the name there used exclusively in its religious sense—*which is the point in question?*

He says: "Mr. Yates is foolish to assert that the original signification of Freethinker was one who denies the doctrines of Christianity . . . the first Freethinkers were deists. Belief in God is a vital part of Christianity." I hardly know what to make of this bit of muddled thinking. If the *first* Freethinkers were deists, and if deism is the denial of Christianity what was the "original signification" of Freethinker if not one who denies Christianity? Belief in God is a vital part of Mohammedanism, but Moslems are not Christians. Does Mr. Du Cann need to be told that it is belief in the *divinity* of Christ that makes the Christian?

He says I am rude and rash enough to accuse him of bluffing and that I ought to withdraw my accusation and apologise.

To bluff, presupposes a knowledge of the contrary of what is asserted. It now appears, however, that Mr. Du Cann really believes that his quotations support his contention. I am therefore willing to acquit him of deception, and allow his sincerity at the expense of his judgment.

A. YATES.

## THE PROBLEM OF EXISTENCE

### A Dialogue

**MOLTOVEDE:** Our life is only a moment in eternity. Why worry about it? So short and trivial an affair is manifestly worth little worry.

**Paroladoro:** Yes, but it's a painful moment; and it's

our destiny to worry and fret; and that kind of philosophy has little consolation except for dead men for whom the moment in eternity is gone. As we see the moment through the microscope of the present, its length seems considerable and certainly is not comforting; and indeed the length of human life is one of our greatest ills; for, if we lived but twenty-five or thirty years instead of the seventy years which some men live out, our lives would not be nearly so wearisome as they are; for seventy years of this life are too many.

**Moltovede:** Even so, life is a short affair; and the only thing that need concern us is how we pass the present moments. The past and the future are myths.

**Paroladoro:** You will have us then to eat, drink, and be merry?

**Moltovede:** There's no better advice.

**Paroladoro:** Perhaps not; but it is not an answer to the problem of existence.

**Moltovede:** There is no absolute or final answer to the problem. If we weren't so badly deceived when we're young regarding the nature of life, the problem of living, it wouldn't be so complicated and imposing a thing; and if we weren't deceived when we're young by religions and false idealism and by literary fictions into believing that we are what we are not, that we have immortal souls, that this world is the preparing ground for another and better world, that men are demigods, and that there is much happiness in life, the problem of existence would no doubt be somewhat less of an acute intellectual problem or problem of ideas than it is to the young man disenchanted with his old beliefs and searching for substitutes for them or for an answer to the mystery of life. With such thoroughly false misinstruction in these matters, little wonder it is that the world looks like a mess when we arrive at the age of reason and discover we have been misinstructed! Some of our problems are intellectual; but the basic problems of life are real rather than ideal and are to be solved in a real world with effort and work. Life is little more than satisfying the needs and desires; and its problems arise chiefly from the opposed or frustrated attempt to satisfy them; and the solution of it must be a way to live it out tolerably to the end. One of the few things worth acquiring in this world is peace of mind; and the two great aims are good health and something to do which is worth doing.

**Paroladoro:** We should, then, make life a real problem of something to be done rather than a metaphysical or religious problem of ethics and of no one knows what, the living of which affects an imaginary future life?

**Moltovede:** If you're going to live, to-day is the day to live; and, if the present is disenchanting and full of inquietude and not what could be desired, as it usually is, the fault is with existence itself and not with the intelligence which we have and through which we learn to limit our hopes and our vision and to live in the present which is the only time we have.

W. RITTENOUR.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE R.101 CASE

SIR,—Mrs. Goldney objects to my saying that the Price Report of the R.101 case was *made up*. "It should not have been made," she adds. Well, here is what Mr. Tabori himself says: "I think it would be best for both gentlemen (Messrs. Cutner and Wood) to ignore the newspaper version (of the R.101 Report); this was *edited and changed* (my italics) for the purposes of Sunday circulation and Harry Price had little to do with it." (*The Freethinker*, August 21, 1949.) Perhaps Mrs. Goldney had better have it out with Mr. Tabori.—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

## A BIBLICAL FAIRY TALE

SIR,—I often listen on a Sunday to hymn singing, etc., and get a good laugh at some of it. Last Sunday I could not believe my ears, the preacher said: "I will now read to you that *beautiful fairy tale*, Adam and Eve and Garden of Eden."

I was taught that the Bible was true, every word of it. Fancy the clergy having to admit that it is not. Now the way he explained it all away was that the fairy tale was to get the children and that the grown-ups would find a beautiful moral in it. Ye gods! What a come down!—Yours, etc.,  
R. MASON.

## A SLIP OF THE PEN

SIR,—In his article on "The Biography of a Ghost Hunter" in the current issue of *The Freethinker* Mr. Cutner wonders "if Price would have investigated the story of 'Cinderella' and her talking wolf."

As a student of folklore and mythology I, too, would like to investigate this story, which I have never come across in my researches, so perhaps Mr. Cutner will let us have further details of this interesting bit of folk legend, or can it be that he is confusing it with the well known story of "Red Riding Hood and the Three Bears"?—Yours, etc.,  
J. MARTIN ALEXANDER.

[Mr. Cutner regrets the slip. It should have been "Red Riding Hood."—EDITOR.]

## CHARLES DICKENS

SIR,—May I crave room for a last word on this subject? Mr. H. Cutner, in his letter in your issue of September 30, 1951, says that he is delighted that Dickens "exaggerated" in drawing his characters and that "had they been literally true to life they would have been bores." But Mr. J. B. O'Hare stated in your issue of October 21, 1951, that "if Thomas Owen would care to take a leisurely walk from Charing Cross to Camden Town he would meet every Dickens character as large as life." These two Dickens' fans cannot both be right. My opinion is that they are both wrong.

Mr. O'Hare wants to know why I read *Pickwick Papers* twice? To make sure that my judgment was not hasty nor warped. He also accuses me of writing "with true Calvinistic scorn." Might I suggest to him that it is rather risky for a Freethinker to refer slightly to Calvinists? Calvinists and Determinists are stable companions anyway.

I don't think that I am devoid of humour. I enjoy the humour of W. W. Jacobs, George Eliot, and J. M. Barrie for instance. But then Jacobs was a Jew, George Eliot was Welsh, and Barrie was a Scot.

In my opinion not one of Dickens's characters comes within miles of Mrs. Poyser in "Adam Bede."

In conclusion, my excuse for indulging in this correspondence is the same as that of the small boy who was chided for "making faces" at a bulldog. "He (Mr. Cutner) started it."—Yours, etc.,  
THOMAS OWEN.

## IRRELIGIOUS ETHICS

SIR,—Under this curious heading Robert H. Corrick suggests that I as a secular ethicist find robbery funny. If he had written that I was able to perceive humour in the recital of a case of robbery I should cheerfully agree. This happened in my review in your columns of the biography "W. C. Fields, His Follies and Fortunes." I quoted the story of a meeting of the young comedian-juggler with a deacon, which was to me deliciously comical. I am afraid I disbelieved the ending of the story as to the collection and sale of thirty umbrellas from the church as a reprisal for non-payment of services. Imagine two boys (as Fields and his partner were then) riding on a public vehicle with this load without raising suspicion? And would a shopkeeper buy the umbrellas from two boys without asking questions? If the reader is interested, see the story in *The Freethinker* of September 16, page 332.

I also mentioned in my review of the book that W. C. Fields had stipulated that his body was to be cremated without any sort of funeral. His wishes were entirely overruled, and in point of fact there were three funeral services! I instanced this because Christians often act contrarily to the expressed wishes of unbelievers as regards the last rites.

As illustrating the difference between religion and morality there is a humorous story in *The Freethinker* (October 7) of a priest who was recently arrested in Bessarabia for selling "seats in heaven" to credulous peasants who, in some cases, sold their best cow to make sure of a good seat. The priest kept a "map of heaven" on his desk, showing numbered seats like those in a theatre plan. Places next to God cost double the usual fee. Here again I presume we are allowed to laugh at an immoral action; and is there much difference in this case, except in degree, to a religious person urging us to seek the Kingdom of Heaven with the threat of Hell?

Of course my brother in his letter is also trying to draw the former Editor in regard to the latter's article "Should Ethics Supplant Religion?" The above-mentioned incidents give some good reasons why ethics should.—Yours, etc.,  
ALFRED D. CORRICK.

## THE FIRST CAUSE

SIR,—In seeking the origin of the Universe, Theists and Christians, alike with Herbert Spencer and Bertrand Russell, say there must be a First Cause. To me this term seems redundant.

The First Cause, as such, must know what it is going to cause; this necessarily implies intelligence, which again implies personality. So let Christians return to their personal God alone to account for the origin of the Universe. A creating Spirit is outside discussion.—Yours, etc.,  
T. G. KIRKBY.

## OBITUARY

Glasgow Secularists have lost another member by the death of Alex Galbraith after a long and painful illness.

We extend our sympathy to his widow who, though handicapped with age and inability to move about much, still possesses that youthful enthusiasm and love for Freethought that characterises those working for the Cause.

The cremation took place at Paisley where a Secular Service was read by the undersigned.  
R. M. HAMILTON.

Jim Barnes, one of the "Old Guard" of Freethought in Blackburn, died on Sunday, October 14, after more than a year's bad health. He had rendered good service to the "Best of Causes" in a quiet way over many years.

At his request a Secular Service was conducted by the undersigned at the Carleton Crematorium, Blackpool, before relatives and friends. Our sympathy is extended to his wife and family.  
J. CLAYTON.

## WHERE ROME RULES

"Under the Franco regime (1939-51) Catholicism is again established as the religion of the State. Religious bodies have recovered their religious status; confiscated property has been returned; allowances to the (Catholic) clergy are again paid by the State; divorce is suppressed; cemeteries are brought back to ecclesiastical jurisdiction. There are nine Metropolitan Sees and 61 Suffragan Sees, the chief being Toledo, where the Primate resides.

"There are about 26,000 Protestants with 211 churches and chapels outside which no public ceremonies are permitted. There is no liberty for propaganda, and the circulation of Holy Scripture, except in annotated Roman Catholic editions, is forbidden."

—(*The Statesman's Year Book*, 1951, p. 1,374).

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## OUTDOOR

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

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

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

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, November 3, 6-30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

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

## INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Rev. DOUGLAS E. LEGGE: A Lecture.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 6, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. G. L. COLEBROOKE, "The Freethought Road to Peace."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. H. CUTNER, "Behind the Scenes with Spiritualists."

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (Week-End School, Lyme Hall, Disley, Cheshire).—Saturday, November 3: Mr. H. L. HUTCHINSON, "Ethics and War."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. B. A. BACON: A Lecture.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 4, 11 a.m.: Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE, "An Indian Life Story."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 pm.: Dr. R. L. WORRALL, "Science and Free Thinking."

## A YOUNG POET

PROBABLY many readers of these columns will be acquainted with the work of Mr. Jack R. Clemo, a young author of great promise, who was given an "Atlantic Award" a year or two ago, and who recently won one of the poetry prizes given by the Arts Council in connection with the Festival of Britain. Mr. Clemo's first two books, both highly praised by many competent critics, were a novel, *Wilding Graft*, which some writers compared to the work of Hardy, and an extremely odd autobiography, *Confession of a Rebel*, which appeared last year. His third book, *The Clay Verge* (Chatto and Windus; 4s. 6d.), which has just been published, is again different and again expressive of his very individual talent. It is a book of verses. They are often religious verses, but expressed in an idiom which is Mr. Clemo's own, and which comes home with great force even to those who will not share many of his religious views.

For the most part the poems are placed in the background of the Cornish china-clay country, around St. Austell, which has been Mr. Clemo's home. And their deceptive simplicity of manner does not hide the depth of thought and feeling which is always there, speaking to the reader with a very real message.

Read this, from a poem entitled "Prisoner of God":—

Who needs forgiveness now?  
For You had prisoned me  
Within the walls of pain-dark mystery,  
And left her free to vow  
Her life to other ends and so escape  
These damps You chose for me, this mould and grime,  
Which fashions me for monkhood, not the slime  
In honest daylight of the hungering clay.

It cannot be denied that there is a strikingly individual note there. And equally Mr. Clemo's note can be detected in his poems of Nature (if that is the right word), where he conjures up the eerie landscape of the china-clay pits:—

A bush was on that dump:  
A single stain of green and gold  
'Mid glacial whiteness fold on fold—  
A fang of Nature from the cold  
And clay-purged sand: denied a clump,  
She put forth one gorse-stump.

I do not know what poet (except possibly Browning, whose techniques are here and there echoed in Mr. Clemo's rhymes) has influenced him. In spite of his religious obsessions, I think that this young man has a kinship with the glooms of James Thomson. *The City of Dreadful Night* is, of course, a far more sustained effort than anything which Mr. Clemo has yet done. But at the same time there is a suggestion of the abysmal gloom of Thomson's great poem here and there among Mr. Clemo's lyrics. At any rate, I am sure that many poetry-lovers, whatever their theological views, will find some pleasure in this little book. It may well herald the arrival of a fine new poet on the scene. And in these unpoetical days that is something to be duly noted.

J. R.

## THEATRE

## "Ardele" by Jean Anouilh. Vaudeville Theatre

A LONG succession of French plays, including several from Anouilh, have come to London during the past two years, and their success seems to have stimulated certain parties into becoming over-venturesome.

When I saw this play in Paris two years ago (its French title is "Ardèle ou La Marguerite"), I was convinced that it could not translate. Lucienne Hill's translation is good, but it cannot save a play suited exclusively to the French language. For French is a language of fine emotions that have no English equivalent, and try as we will these people just do not appear four-dimensional when speaking English.

As with the language, so it is with the gestures. Therefore, George Relph as the General who depends so much on the maid for distraction from his invalid, demented wife, is hardly able to make us feel that the girl is essential to his existence; that she is the only thing that makes his life tolerable. In spite of that, Mr. Relph's performance was a fine one.

In their respective parts, all the actors are better than the play in English. They include Isabel Jeans as the Countess, Ronald Squire as the Count, Ronald Howard, Veronica Hurst and Jane Henderson. The play, as written, is masterly, and there can be little to say about that.

Some fellow critics have, however, found the piece revolting. This is apparently because Ardèle is a hunchback who is loved by another hunchback, and although I may have a warped outlook on such matters, I cannot see any possible objection to two people with the same physical deformity making a match of it. But Ardèle's family are a conventional crowd, so the General has to call a family conference in order to bring her to reason. They do not succeed, for the lovers plan a suicide pact.

It is during this family meeting that we learn that not a single one is settled happily in love. In fact, there is a peculiar *ménage à trois* in which the rival openly does his best to oust the husband. The General's youngest son is in love with his eldest brother's wife, a young woman who married by force of circumstance. Finally, we are given the children's idea of blissful married life, in which they play a game which always ends in quarrelling.

But Anouilh is not without logic, for love never means the same to more than one couple, and its understanding is influenced by the conditions of one's environment.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

## ORIGIN OF LIFE

Coming to the question of life being found on other planets, Professor Haldane apologised for discoursing as a mere biologist. He mentioned three hypothesis:—

- (a) That life had a supernatural origin.
- (b) That it originated from inorganic materials, and
- (c) That life is a constituent of the universe, and can only arise from pre-existing life.

The first hypothesis, he said, should be taken seriously, and he would propose to do so. From the fact that there are 400,000 species of beetles on this planet, but only 8,000 species of mammals, he concluded that the Creator, if He exists, has a special preference for beetles, and so we might be more likely to meet them than any other type of animal on a planet which could support life.

## GIVING 'EM HELL

I give 'em the old-  
fashioned Hell,  
Congregations know well,  
I don't mike it;  
And I know it goes  
down mighty well—  
Collections are proving they  
like it!

A. E. C.

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