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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Religious Terrorism in the Middle East

FROM the grey skies of London in 1605 to the dazzling skies of the Middle East in 1951, represents a long journey in both space and time. None the less, this is the precise journey that we propose to make, for at each end of this journey we shall encounter identical phenomena; the phenomena of religious terrorism. Last week, this column surveyed the subterranean plots hatched in Jacobean England by Guy Fawkes and his co-religionists. Here, in another continent, and in connection with another religion, we observe the same forces at work in our own contemporary world.

There have been two classic epochs in the history of religious terrorism, that is, of religion deliberately stirring up the fanaticism of its devotees and resorting to deliberate terrorism in order to survive the assaults of its religious rivals and secular enemies. One of these was represented by the Catholic Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when, under the leadership of the Jesuits, the Church of Rome struck back fiercely at the congeries of religious, political and economic forces which the Reformation had unloosed for her destruction. This was the age when the rulers of Protestant Europe trembled before the dagger of the Jesuit-trained assassins—amongst whom our own Guy Fawkes is to be ranked. (We recall how the leading English Jesuits followed Fawkes to the gallows for their alleged share in instigating the "Gunpowder Plot.") To be sure, Michelet and other Protestant and Freethinking historians have described for our edification the "dagger law" of the famous "Company of Jesus," and the vast casuistic literatures justifying the murder of heretics, which, in this self-same era, were compiled by the theologians of the Order.

The Jesuits, however, though apt enough pupils, were not the originators of the devious art of religious assassination. In so far as it is possible to ascribe this "science" to any single religion, the doubtful honour of originating it belongs to the Semitic religions of the Middle East, to the Jews in the Old Testament, and to the universal successor of their tribal creed, Islam, the religion of Muhammed and of the Koran. In the history of the Middle East, the classic era, the golden age of terrorism studied as an art and pressed as a science into the service of organised religion, is to be found in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries of our era; the age of the Sheikh-al-Jebal—anglice—"The Old Man of the Mountain"—and his white-robed slayers who, drugged with Hashish and inflamed with fanatical religious zeal, terrorised East and West, Asia and Europe, for two and a-half centuries (1089-1256) from their mountain strongholds on the Caspian Sea and in the mountains of Lebanon. Under the name of Hashishin—anglice "assassins"—the Muslim killers who terrorised the medieval world, have passed into universal history and have added a new word—their collective designation,

"assassin"—to the vocabulary of most civilised nations.

We mention the above examples of religious terrorism, the Christian Jesuits and the Muslim "Assassins," not purely for their academic interest, but because at the time these lines are written, in the twentieth Christian and fourteenth Muslim century, a fresh wave of religious terrorism is to-day again sweeping over the world of the Middle East. During the present year, one Arab king, Abdullah, King of Trans-Jordan, two Prime Ministers of powerful Muslim States, the Prime Minister of Persia, General Rasmara, and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan; besides leading members of the Egyptian and Lebanese Governments, have been struck down by the pistols and daggers of assassins. Moreover, whilst, as always in a totalitarian creed like Islam, political and economic motives were present, it is beyond doubt that the fundamental urge behind this reign of terror is a religious one. It is the old war-cry: "Islam is in danger," that nerves the arm of the Muslim killer, nor unhappily, is there any reason to believe that we have yet reached the end of this contemporary orgy of religious murder.

"Like causes produce like results." The current situation to which the Muslim killers react is actually strikingly similar to those which confronted in earlier ages their historic prototypes, the "Assassins" and the Jesuits. The "Assassins" in the twelfth century were the answer to the Christian Crusades. Menaced with destruction by the sword, the Muslim world struck back with the dagger. Similarly, the highly elaborated Jesuit "science" of homicide in the age of the Counter-Reformation, represented the Jesuit answer to their contemporary Protestant revolt against Catholicism which had summarily ended the medieval supremacy of the Church of Rome.

It is not otherwise in the Middle East to-day. Islam, the religion of the Koran, to-day faces a critical situation due to a host of enemies, old and new: the revival of its old enemy, Hindu India, to the East of the Muslim world; the new and hostile State of Israel which, like the States set up by the medieval Crusaders, drives a wedge into the heart of the Arabic and Muslim world; the desertion of Turkey, a secularist State which has deserted the fold of the Prophet; last but not least, the oil-politics of Christian England and America which threaten, or appear to threaten, the independence of their still Muslim States. Such is the general background to the current epidemic of assassinations which is now terrorising the entire Middle East, from Muslim Morocco and Egypt in the West to Muslim Persia and Pakistan in the East. One hundred and fifty million human beings condemned to perpetual terror!

The briefest survey of the recent assassinations is sufficient to prove the truth of the contention advanced above. The follower of the fanatical Grand Mufti of Jerusalem who struck down King Abdullah in the House of God itself, did so because that monarch was pro-British (pro-Christian in the eyes of Islam) and did not

manifest sufficient enthusiasm for the projected "jihad" (holy war) against the foreign cuckoo in the Muslim nest, the infidel State of Israel. His successor is said to show no such Muslim weaknesses. The murder of highly placed ministers in Persia and Egypt has led to the rise of nationalist anti-Western regimes; and, respectively, in the oil wells of Abadan and in the Suez-Sudan, the puppet regimes of Moussadeq and Nahas Pasha have done all that their unseen masters, the terrorist secret societies of Islam—the Egyptian "Muslim Brotherhood" and the Persian "Fedayan Islam"—have demanded of them. Indeed, the proverbial "sword of Damocles" hangs perpetually over Moussadeq and company, and however suicidal their policies may be, they must carry them through or follow their predecessors into an untimely grave. Similarly, the Prime Minister of Pakistan seems to have perished because he was unwilling to lead the holy war against the Hindu idolators in the traditional fashion. Whether his successor will prove more complaisant to the hidden hand remains to be seen. But everything indicates that the current reign of terror has by no means exhausted its quota of victims.

Presumably, since violence is never permanent, the present revolutionary era in the Middle East will eventually find its equilibrium. But that time is not yet. Islam, which once sought to conquer the world with the sword of the Crusader, now seeks to retain her shaken rule with the dagger and pistol of the assassin.

F. A. RIDLEY.

GOD IN THE SCHOOL

MANY people to-day regard the struggle for liberty from enforced worship as won, and take little interest in the efforts of those who by their eternal vigilance pay the price of freedom. Such an attitude is much too optimistic; the battle is far from won, and in these days of intensive legislation we face a very grave attack on the younger generation who are, by law, compelled to worship if they are unfortunate enough to come under the control of the usual educational authorities. Clause 25 of the New Education Act, states:—

"The school day in every County School and in every Voluntary School shall begin with collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance."

Objections from Atheist parents are met by a Conscience Clause by which a child may contract out; but in point of fact it takes an unusual child to stand out against the generally accepted practice and brand himself an oddity in the eyes of his schoolfellows and teachers. Many parents counsel their children to attend the religious worship rather than draw unwholesome attention and perhaps victimisation to themselves.

Apropos of the Conscience Clause, the following story was told to me by one of H.M. Inspectors. When Clause 25 first became law, the Ministry was pressed as to what constituted "worship." The Ministry's lawyers replied that worship was—well, worship! They added that if a school happened to choose a form of worship which involved human sacrifice, the victim could always contract out of it under the Conscience Clause. So there we have it; any sort of mumbo-jumbo is good enough, provided that the children have a supernatural being to worship.

It is a sad reflection on the amount of progress we have made against the tyranny of the Church that now in the

middle of the twentieth century the secular power compels the great majority of children to attend institutions where every morning they have in point of fact worship thrust upon them. The worship may consist of a great deal of dogma and ritual or comparatively little but, however, the point is that year after year at the time when he is most impressionable the young citizen is subjected every morning of his school days to a process which is deliberately designed to condition him to accept the *inevitability* of worship and to take for granted the Church and the whole structure of crooked thinking behind it. Children may come from homes in which religion is never given a thought, but faced with the mass ritual, the "corporate worship" at school, they are given the idea that *this* is what society at large believes in, and renders individual struggle for sanity and personal integrity a lonely thing.

It is interesting to inquire into what happens to children who are spared the infliction of the usual ritualistic humbug on their lives. In considering schools which are independent of the Ministry we can dismiss the snob public schools, for there religion is laid on with a trowel, with stained glass, carved saints, trembling organs, god-eating, red lights and all the rest of the paraphernalia to impress the child mind. There is, however, a category of schools which is not only independent of the State but of the Church as well, and which have no form of worship or of religious instruction. Such schools are loosely known as "progressive schools"; they vary somewhat in character, but are at one in attempting to give a thoroughly rationalist education.

It is maintained by some upholders of religion that if children were taught nothing about God they would nevertheless invent him for themselves. This interesting idea is proven wrong in practice. Children who are not lied to, who are taught nothing of the usual nonsense about Gentle Jesus, Heaven, Hell and the rest of the mythology, show very little interest in religion. They realise that it exists in society to-day, but regard themselves lucky to escape it. Moreover, it requires a constant barrage of propaganda to maintain irrational belief in a child. I have seen children come to the school where I work (which is rationalist) with the hang-over from religious instruction at a previous school or from some pious relative, and finding that neither their teachers nor their schoolfellows had any belief in the supernatural have soon dared to trust the dictates of their own common sense. Religion is not natural to children; belief in God or in ghosts of any kind is something which can only be fostered in their minds through abusing their confidence, and very often such belief requires *fear* to make it take root.

It is an unfortunate thing that many parents who are Atheists themselves think that it is right and proper that children should have some religion. If one tackles them on their cynicism of glibly lying to their children and filling the little ones up with the monstrous twaddle of Christianity, they retort by asking how else can they ensure obedience and morality from their children. Their argument is, in short, that only if their children are made to go in awe of a "Heavenly Father" who can see through brick walls and hear unspoken words, will they behave themselves properly. The same argument applies to schools; a schoolteacher cannot watch his little charges once his back is turned, or hear the ribald remarks *sotto voce* at the back of the class; how useful it is then to have this all-seeing eye and all-hearing ear snooping in every classroom, corridor, playground, and lavatory!

And if any offenders escape detection and the headmaster's cane, how useful it is to have a burning, fiery lake of brimstone waiting for them after all!

These ideas are said to be somewhat old fashioned: I wish they were more so. The methods which were used to bludgeon down reason and enforce spiritual timidity among men are happily somewhat less successful to-day—but nevertheless they are still reserved for children. But parents and teachers who lie to their children in the hope of exerting an easier discipline have to face the challenge of the growing mind, the growing power of reason. Sooner or later the growing child will see through the hypocrite, and treat him with the mistrust he deserves.

There is no need to lie to children. Discipline which is based on the supernatural is just asking to be challenged and overthrown. In the rationalist progressive schools tolerable social behaviour is expected of children because it is *rational*. We do not wantonly kick our neighbour in the teeth, because such conduct would be uncomfortable for us all—not because it would sadden Gentle Jesus. We do not embezzle the games-fund and spend it on fags, because our fellow sportsmen would demand restitution rather forcefully—not because God laid down the fourth commandment. In fact all social behaviour, all morality has its justification in rational thinking. If children are to receive any education for social living it must be along rationalist lines; to bring in the supernatural, with God's likes and dislikes and the unaccountable prejudices of the Holy Ghost, is to queer the pitch entirely. The religious-minded child, not unnaturally, gets the idea that he can be every sort of little swine, provided he keeps on the right side of Jesus, and squares his soul with God. Anyone who has had much to do with children knows that this is no mere theory, it is an all too evident fact. At Catholic schools in particular bullying, sly hypocrisy, surreptitious pornography and a great deal of misery are the rule. I cannot urge too strongly that parents and teachers who are themselves rationalists should become alive to the menace of religion in schools. We adults have had a great deal of liberty gained for us by the pioneers of the past. We can express our minds freely without the fear of being burnt for heresy; the ridiculous blasphemy laws, although still extant, are too unpopular to be applied; we need no longer fear denunciation and arrest when we do not go to church on Sundays; all along the line we are winning against the forces of superstition and crabbed unreason. But what of our children? Year after year they are being subjected in the ordinary school to the process of deception which was used to befuddle the intellect of adults before the dominance of the Church was effectively challenged.

The rationalist progressive schools are few and, like most pioneer ventures, struggling in competition with the State schools—and with those strongholds of the Church, the Public Schools. While there is no likelihood of their being arbitrarily closed down like the schools of Francesco Ferrer, or of their directors being murdered as he was, their security of existence is most uncertain as the growing political centralism of our time brings more and more fields of activity under the control of the State. Yet if ever the educational system is to be rescued from the hands of high priests, both ecclesiastic and lay, if it is to serve the purpose of education rather than indoctrination, attention must be given to the methods of the rationalist progressive schools, which involve radical development following on the dropping of religious worship and instruction from the curriculum.

TONY GIBSON.

PRIMER OF PROGRESS

- A means the Atom, first flew in a flare
When put in the Post Office, labelled, "With Care."
- B is the By-pass, to take traffic round,
Buried six farms and a large playing ground.
- C stands for Credit, you put down the price,
Then umpteen more payments to get something nice.
- D for Diseases, the moment they cure one;
The Docs get to work to discover a newer one.
- E. Evolution by which man arose.
He'll reach higher still if he keeps on his toes.
- F denotes Freedom; we won her afloat;
Now she's safely secured—'neath the old castle moat.
- G. Getting there—every real road-hog's aim.
When you've got there, it's only a dump—just the same.
- H is the Hydrogen Bomb, ready soon—
With our final demand on the Man in the Moon.
- I. Ingenuity—used up in vain;
Wisdom that's wasted for some grabber's gain.
- J the Jackass, who, with toil and with strife,
Discovers some dope for prolonging *this* life!
- K means the "Kitty"—the wealth of this Isle,
Apotheosised in an Atomic Pile.
- L for the Learned, in close concentration,
Striving to cut the Big Pool Permutation.
- M is the Mind we can't see in the Brute—
(Though he never used his, to burn, gas and shoot.)
- N stands for Neon, those half-mile-high letters,
Which tell us to drink the same booze as our betters.
- O means Opinion, you know that it's yours;
You're told so by wireless and papers in scores.
- P for Persuasion, they once used the rack;
It's Psychiatry now that they put on your track.
- Q is for Query—"If I press this button"—
"Will the earth vanish?"—well, nothing is "Sutton."
- R means the Record, sweet music's container,
They use it for crooners, who sing through a strainer.
- S stands for Speed; it may get you somewhere—
But what's to be done with the minutes to spare?
- T. Television—no homework to-night,
Too busy watching a farce or a fight.
- U for Uranium—Sonny has lots—
He's gang-leader now, and bosses the tots.
- V denotes Vitamins—killed poor old Pa,
Heard they were in his beer—dropped in the bar.
- W, the Work which each new gadget saves;
All we've to do is to tend it like slaves.
- X—Xylophone, sounds like ten fire-alarms,
What an advance on old Mozart and Brahms?
- Y means the yearning for Peace, Perfect Peace—
We'd get it, if only this progress would cease.
- Z is the Zoo, where the poor captives stare,
At their clever descendants—they feel safer there.

MISTAKES OF MOSES. By Col. R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d., postage 1½d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By G. W. Foote. Price 3d., postage 1½d.

ACID DROPS

Following upon the Chinese occupation of Tibet, we learn that a patriotic subscription is being raised in order to buy a fighter aeroplane named "Buddhism," which is to be sent on active service in the Chinese armed forces upon the Korean Front. We always understood that Buddhism was a pacific creed but it now seems to be moving with the times, perhaps "Buddhist civilisation" is also in danger?

From the B.B.C. we recently learned that the melancholy task of building cemeteries for the dead in the second World War is now nearly completed. In view, however, of the feverish war-preparations now proceeding virtually everywhere, and the fact that wars at ever-diminishing intervals seem now to have become part of the normal routine of civilised nations, we suggest that it might be as well to start building cemeteries before the next one starts?

We learn from the West African Press that "Catholic action" is quite active in that part of the world. Its latest exploit is to send a delegate, a Mr. Stephen Mensah, as its representative to the "International Congress of Lay Apostles" held at Rome. During his pious pilgrimage in Europe, Mr. Mensah will visit the Vatican and the Grotto of Our Lady in Fatima. So this son of "Darkest Africa" will get plenty of opportunity to see darkest Europe as well!

From Oslo, the Norwegian Capital, comes the intriguing episode. A tramp stole a lorry empty except for two coffins. Hardly had the lorry started when a coffin lid opened and an anxious voice queried: "Is the weather still bad." Thereupon, the tramp fled in terror, was seriously injured whilst jumping off the lorry, and had to be taken to hospital—actually, it transpired that the voice from the coffin was that of a hitch-hiker who had taken refuge from the rain. The unfortunate tramp probably thought that it was the resurrection morning.

Condolences to our Holy Father the Pope. For we learn the sad news that a papal gendarme (policeman) has just been jugged in Vatican City for embezzling £2,000 given him to buy cigarettes. Evidently papal infallibility does not extend to financial matters, and there must be surely some pretty heavy chain-smokers in the papal entourage.

At the age of 91, Dr. Inge, the enfant terrible of the Anglican Church, has just delivered a lecture in London. Despite his almost patriarchal years, the ex-"gloomy Dean" travelled up to London by train. From what we know of them, many of Dr. Inge's orthodox colleagues are probably busily engaged in praying for a "happy death" and would regard it as an "act of God" if a railway accident expedited it on the return journey!

Another member of the Beaverbrook stable, *The Sunday Express*, has just added an important item to our knowledge of the character and reign of Queen Victoria. Much curiosity has been aroused by the old Queen's obvious partiality for her Highland gillie, John Brown. However, in a letter to the *Express*, the well-known spiritualist, Mr. Maurice Barbanell, offers an explanation as innocent as convincing: John Brown was the medium through whom Victoria communicated with her adored husband, the late Prince Consort. Future biographers, please note!

In a voice almost broken with tears—if that is possible—Dr. R. W. Moore, Harrow's Headmaster, spoke recently on the wireless of the increasing hardship of the poor, dear clergy, as well as the enormous difficulty in getting fresh recruits into the ranks of God's anointed. It was all very pathetic and he had no remedy to offer. It never seemed to occur to him that the reluctance of many young men to take what are facetiously called "Holy Orders" was not altogether due to the poor salary offered, but because our better and more scientific education made them realise that Christianity—in spite of the efforts of thousands of Dr. Moores—was *not true*.

To Professor Manson of the University of Manchester was given the honour of explaining in a school broadcast why the miracles of Jesus were all true. They were in the Gospels and they were believed in by the "first" Christians and what better proof could there be than that? All the same, the worthy Professor did not insist too much on the "Virgin" Birth; all that was necessary to believe was in the Incarnation and you could do what you like with the Virgin Birth. We wonder what some of the virgins, who were teaching the children, thought of Prof. Manson trying theological arguments on the Virgin Birth with children under ten?

But the one outstanding miracle for which the historical proofs were literally perfect was the Resurrection. All children just had to believe in it because it was in the Bible, and because the early Christians all believed it, to say nothing of Paul and his hundreds of witnesses. As we listened to this hopeless twaddle, we wondered exactly what qualities it was that made Prof. Manson a Professor? Was it his child-like Faith? Was it his utter incapacity to think? We give it up.

A solicitor appearing in a magistrate's court at Birmingham recently, declared that some books which had been confiscated by the police as "inciting to violence," were actually no worse than the radio feature "Dick Barton," which had a similar effect. There is always a Bible in court, and we would undertake to find episodes in the Holy Book which make Barton and company look like genteel amateurs when it comes to violence. But we are quite sure that no right-thinking magistrate would order God's Word to be confiscated on that account.

It is sometimes alleged that no real Christians exist any more. However, in the Church of England there is, at least, one clergyman who is walking faithfully in the footsteps of the Master and who casts out devils in a bona fide early Christian style. The only difference being that he casts them out of horses instead of, like Jesus, into swine. This true disciple is Reverend Ernest Rumens, Vicar of Lambourn, Berks, and ex-full back for Ashford, Kent. Mr. Rumens, so our contemporary, *The Daily Express*, informs us, cast out a ghost or ghosts—who—or is it which?—had been haunting trainer Harry Whiteman's racing stables at Lambourn. The service of exorcism, complete with cassock and holy water, took forty-five minutes and was repeated in every horse-box until not a ghostly vestige was left. We hope that the horses now understand that Christ is their Saviour and that evolution is just nonsense. After Mr. Rumens's exhibition of witchcraft we can understand them having doubts about evolution.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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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

To London readers this may be a last minute reminder of the "Any Questions?" session in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, on Thursday evening November 29, commencing at 7 p.m. Questions on "Religion or Secularism?" will be invited from the audience and will be answered by a team of speakers consisting of Messrs. Ridley, Ebury, and Barker, with Mr. R. H. Rosetti in the chair. Bring your questions and your friends and an interesting and instructive evening should follow.

The Annual Dinner of the N.S.S. will again be held in the Charing Cross Hotel, Strand, London, W.C. 1. The date is Saturday, January 26, 1952. There will be the reception at which Freethinkers from all parts meet and exchange greetings, the dinner, speeches, and a first rate musical programme. Tickets are 16s. each and are limited in number to the capacity of the dining hall so that, as in previous years, the disappointments will be among the late applicants for them. Applications, with cash, stating if any vegetarians, to 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

During what, it is now the fashion to term "The Victorian Age," an intense local activity was manifested in many of what are now termed "provincial towns." Very few of these intellectual forums are now left in our top-heavy age of growing centralisation. Conspicuous amongst such that remain is the "Cosmopolitan Debating Society" in Nottingham, the leading debating society in the Midlands which has enjoyed a continuous existence since 1898, and where a wide variety of subjects is discussed before a keen and critical audience. Both the former president of the N.S.S., Mr. Chapman Cohen, and the present president, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, have figured prominently in the records of the "Cosmo."

Last Sunday the speaker was Mr. F. A. Ridley, the present editor of *The Freethinker*. His subject was "Christianity and Communism," and the speaker treated these eminently controversial matters "as an historian and not a controversialist." A lively discussion followed the lecture, to which the speaker replied in considerable detail. In the evening, Mr. Ridley addressed the Nottingham Branch of the N.S.S. on the subject of "The Menace of Rome." The lecture covered both the political and theological aspects of modern Romanism and emphasized that Rome has now succeeded Biblical "Fundamentalism" as the major enemy of Freethought. Mr. A. Elsmere, Branch chairman, presided.

Birmingham members were in a happy mood last Sunday evening. It was a packed house in Satis Café where Mr. R. H. Rosetti's lecture on "What is Civilisation" was

"THE FREETHINKER" FUND

Donations for the week ended Saturday, November 24, 1951: J. W. H. Davies, £1; Bayard Simmons, £6 10s.; Emily M. Amer, 5s.; A. H. Briancourt, £1; S. Clowes, 4s.; Len. Ebury, 2s. 6d.; Mrs. E. Ebury, 2s.; E.C.R., 10s.; J. M. Conishon, 10s.; Wm. Angus, £7 7s.; H.C., 10s.; A. H. Chapman, 2s. 6d.; R. C. Bossemarer, £2; A. Beale, 10s. 5d.; E. Henderson, £1; P. Turner, 10s.; Jors, 5s.; Anon., £5; A. Hancock, 1s.; S. Cohen, 10s.; Dan Chapman, £1.

Total for week, £28 19s. 5d.

Total received to date, £348 14s. 8d.

closely followed. A stream of ready and good questions only stopped when closing time was reached. There was also a good sale of literature. The excellent audience was a sure indication of hard and useful local work in which secretary C. H. Smith no doubt took the lead.

CORRECTION.—In the obituary notice re Arthur Hanson in last week's issue, the statement that his sisters understood there was to be a silent service was not correct. The sisters knew a clergyman would be present to give a religious service. We think that their first statement misled the secretary of the Bradford Branch N.S.S. who sent in the obituary notice.

STANDS HELL WHERE IT DID?

ONLY in the minds of Johnsonians will Scotland and Hell be associated. In one of his anti-Caledonian sallies—not to be taken too seriously as sometimes they were leg-pulls for Boswell's benefit—the doctor said in reply to the defence that God made Scotland, "God made Hell too." To Johnson he made it to some purpose, as in the last year of his life he confessed to the astonished Dr. Adams, Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, a fear that he might be "sent to Hell, sir, and punished everlastingly." I like Johnson here in one aspect. He did not envisage preferential treatment for literary gentlemen, even though the Recording Angel must be regarded as one.

The question asked in Shakespeare about Scotland was applied by me to Hell, when I saw that the Rev. F. H. Ellis was to speak on the subject in the Church of St. Mary Woolnoth in the City. Appropriately to a discourse on the nether regions, this Wren church is over an underground station. The service was timed to last twenty-five minutes, and for this reason it seemed regrettable to lavish more than five on hymns and prayers. However, the parson perhaps felt he could not give his congregation Hell for more than fifteen minutes. Indeed this short period seemed to exhaust his knowledge. Three times, in the first three minutes, he told us what a difficult subject it was. This word again was reminiscent of Dr. Johnson. His unmusical ear detected no beauty in a musical recital, and it was urged upon him that it was difficult. "Difficult, sir, I wish it was impossible," was the reply. We Freethinkers think Hell is, but the parson was more hopeful of its possibilities. The principal witness was Jesus. However, even so, it was admitted that "we lack a certain number of details concerning Hell and future retribution."

There was no valid argument against the existence or the fact of Hell, said Mr. Ellis. In the New Testament it was described as figurative and symbolical. "Nevertheless, symbols and figures stand for something, and usually the thing symbolised is worse and more violent than the symbols used to describe them." When one thought of the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth—it is said that

one sceptical and toothless sinner was assured of new dentures for the purpose when he hinted to his parson that some remission of punishment might be inevitable—it hardly seemed that the fact could be more appalling than the fiction.

When the parson came to justify the “everlasting bonfire” he argued like a schoolboy. “It is ethically right to separate the bad from the good; that is a principle admitted by all.” Why separation necessarily implied damnation we were not told. “The universal conscience of mankind thought that there should be some form of future retribution for the finally impenitent.” Impenitent of what—unbelief or unpardonable wickedness? We were not told. Had it not occurred to Mr. Ellis that Confucians, Buddhists and others numbered by the millions, have no such conception? “The dust cart was an argument for Hell!” The refuse had to be collected and taken away. If left it would spread disease and epidemics. Very good—for dust, but “Dust thou art,” the poet tells us, “was not spoken of the soul.” The dust cannot have the Devil of a time that the soul can, according to this parson’s eschatology. On this argument the criminal should not only be segregated but tortured as well.

Here is another extraordinary passage:—

“We must not only look at the actual sin, but the person against whom a sin is committed. If a man shot a citizen, it would be a great offence. If he shot a member of the royal house it would be considered a still greater offence.”

Not by the law. In 1812 a Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval, was shot in the House of Commons. Justice was very summary, as the murderer was executed a week later. Even in those days of harsh laws nobody proposed he should first be tortured. Perhaps the snobbish parson would want hanging and quartering if a member of the royal family was killed. Most amazing was the following attempt to justify the ways of God to man:—

“There is quite a lot of suffering in this world that is unnecessary. We don’t think it inconsistent with the mercy of God that thousands and millions of people are in agony through no fault of their own.”

This was a reply to the hypothetical objector who said it was inconsistent with that mercy. He might well have said, “Some of us do.” So if the good Lord gives you a devil of a time here, for a limited period, this is all the more reason to expect a more devilish time for an unlimited period elsewhere! Yet, only a few months ago a Methodist cousin of mine at a funeral played and sung with great gusto, whilst looking towards my silent self, a hymn that commenced:—

“This, this is the God we adore
Our faithful unchangeable Friend,
Whose love is as great as His power,
And neither knows measure or end.”

On the parson’s showing it might be “Our Moloch which art in Heaven.”

Sir Leslie Stephen told of a parson whose attempted apologetics fell so short of the mark that a churchwarden whispered in his ear afterwards: “You see, sir, I think there be a God.” Perhaps many of this congregation of fifty—mostly women—had more doubts created than the reverend gentleman could allay. They might well have thought that the objections of the man in the street were more valid than the belief of the man in the pulpit.

Stands Hell where it did? Not quite, as may be seen by reference to a quotation from Rev. C. H. Spurgeon to be found in my anthology, *Lift Up Your Heads*. The word “everlasting” was twice used, but we heard nothing

of fire. Perhaps Ingersoll was right in suggesting an increasing need for an overcoat in Hell. Still, it is to be hellish enough, notwithstanding!

There had been a sermon on Heaven. Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell are what the clergy choose to consider the four last things. Perhaps the first was omitted as being too obvious and matter of fact. To a Freethinker it is the only last thing. Why was the Day of Judgment not tackled? Can it be that this staggers even the credulity of the clergy? If astronomical space is required for Hell, astronomical time would hardly suffice for that long, long trial. In my orthodox days we used to hear variously of the Judgment Seat of God or the Judgment Seat of Christ, but surely all three members of the Trinity must be installed on the Bench for so formidable a task! Even so, I have visions of their tiring of the job, and with an impatient flourish towards the last billions in the queue saying: “We have had enough—the rest of you be damned, we can’t have Heaven crammed.” If so, the Rev. F. H. Ellis, happily esconced in the latter place, will be able to say “I warned them in October, 1951.”

WILLIAM KENT.

A NEW WRITER

IT is not often that I feel really enthusiastic about a new writer whose work I have had the pleasure of discovering; not often, either, that I feel a contemporary has in him that touch of real talent which makes his work memorable. As one becomes middle-aged, I think that one loses that first fine flush of enthusiasm which one had in youth. I know that twenty years or more ago I thought that every book by T. F. Powys, H. E. Bates, or L. A. G. Strong was an event; I no longer feel like that about any writer.

But I have just come across a book of short stories which has given me a greater thrill of pleasure than I have had from any volume of the kind since I first read the tales of A. E. Coppard. That, as I am sure every connoisseur of the short story will agree, is high praise. The book is Charles Causley’s *Hands to Dance* (Carroll and Nicholson, 10s. 6d.).

It is impossible by quotation to give any indication of Mr. Causley’s high quality. To do that it would be needful to quote one of the tales as a whole. It must suffice if I say that he has a real flavour of his own. He is unlike any other short-story writer of his generation, and his stories (told, for the most part, in the first person) come home to the reader with an emphasis very unusual to-day.

Some of the stories are war stories, placed mainly around the Mediterranean, in Malta and Alexandria. Causley served in the Royal Navy during the war, and possibly some of the background of these wartime tales is autobiographical. Almost certainly the character of the narrator, a quizzical, rather diffident young man who feels somewhat out of place in the ranks of the Navy, is based on Causley’s own character and his own experiences. But, whatever may be the facts of this, it is quite sure that readers seeking something new and outstanding in the literature of our day cannot afford to neglect him.

There is little, of course, in the way of political or theological comment. And in any case a writer who introduces such things into imaginative writing is apt to degenerate into a mere propagandist. But these stories reflect life as it is lived in the mid-twentieth century—and that, I think, is the main job of the imaginative artist. It is certainly a job that Charles Causley does supremely well.

J. R.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE SYME CASE

SIR,—While accepting your acknowledgment of my letter in *The Freethinker* of 11th November, I wish most emphatically to repudiate your suggestion that my letter in any way conveyed the idea that I wished to re-open the Syme case. Moreover, I am not aware that the Secular Society had at any time taken a particular interest in the case.

My only reason for writing, being to show that the Rt. Hon. Gentleman had his limitations (at any rate) as a politician. Mr. Close says in his concluding paragraph: "Not only his great talents were put to the service of Freethought, but he was a politician who was able to debate on *questions of vital importance*." Surely, sir, a clean Police Service is of vital importance if any public service is?

Mr. Close also tells us that the Rt. Hon. Gentleman was a man who could be trusted to do his duty, and how richly he deserved the honour which was bestowed on him. This honour, as you know, is given to all members of our Government. While I admit you have every right to decide what to publish, and what to reject, I can still have my own thoughts on the subject. It appears a very lame excuse for you to say: "Quite possibly members of the Government knew only what they were told." Surely you forget, sir, that Mr. Close describes the late Rt. Hon. Gentleman as being worthy of being included in Longfellow's great men. However, I can only conclude that you thought it would not be in the public interest to publish the Rt. Hon. Gentleman's letter.

There is no appeal against what certain persons say is in the public interest; but I am sanguine enough to believe that the late Ex-Inspector John Syme's character will bear favourable comparison with that of the late Rt. Hon. John Robertson's in the years to come.—Yours, etc.,

A. W. I. MCHATTIE.

THE R.101 CASE

SIR,—I really must ask Mr. Cutner not to misquote me. I did not say that the Price Report of the R.101 case was changed, edited or tampered with in any way at any time by any one when published in Price's books or official pamphlets. What I did say was that if a critical examination of the report was to be made, it should be based on these texts and not on any newspaper version. Obviously there is a great deal of difference between the two statements.

The persons who are alone fit to speak about the seance are those who were present. Mrs. Garrett and Mr. Ian Coster are easily available, so is, I believe, Miss Benham (Mrs. English). If Mr. Cutner wanted to make a thorough examination of the case, he should obviously get in touch with them instead of analysing texts and reports second hand.—Yours, etc.,

PAUL TABORI.

CHURCH OR STATE MARRIAGES?

SIR,—In his admirable article, "Marriage—Sacred or Profane?" Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann suggests that Secularists should work for civil marriage by explaining its real advantages over the religious ceremony. But how, beyond our own ranks? The B.B.C. is unlikely to permit a broadcast, but our President might ask for time on the air. I understood from the N.S.S. annual report that Mr. Rosetti had been admitted to the panel of broadcasters. Would any of our conventional newspapers print Mr. Du Cann's article, or one like it?

I must query the statement that "in England, on the whole, people tend to prefer Church marriage." What evidence is there for this? I understand that the total number each year of Civil Registry Marriages exceeds those taking place in Churches and Chapels. Can we have the figures, please, which are no doubt obtainable at Somerset House? If my impression is correct, the arguments put forward by Mr. Du Cann are strengthened.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SOCIALISM

SIR,—In view of the jubilant assertion by Labour politicians that Labour polled more votes at the General Election than the Conservatives, it may be useful to review some of the methods and apparent indifferences to principle employed in acquiring some of these votes.

The Election at Huyton supplies a notable example. On Sunday evening, October 21, a meeting in support of Mr. Harold Wilson was held in Progress Hall. I attended in the hope of hearing how Labour proposed to extricate us from the mess the country is in at present. Instead, Mr. Wilson devoted almost the whole of his speech to firstly: trying to prove he was not a Communist by drawing attention to the support given him by Messrs. Stokes, Logan and Hugh Delargy and other Catholic M.P.s; and secondly, to declaring his support for a further expenditure of public money on

Roman Catholic schools. Some of his audience invited Mr. Wilson to waive his modesty and openly declare what he had done for a local Catholic Church recently. That the Roman Catholic Church is the declared enemy of Socialism and defender of the right of private property did not seem to trouble him in the least. One would have thought, too, that his solicitude for welfare services for the people might cause him to resent the recent "Canossa" in Eire where the Roman Catholic hierarchy demanded the resignation of Dr. Noel Browne for attempting to introduce State health and maternity services into that country. Indeed, they called the Toiseach and other ministers before them and extracted an abject submission to the fiat of the Church.

Nothing, so forcibly illustrating the esoteric Catholic outlook has happened since that devout Catholic, Mr. de Valera, sent his message of condolence, on the death of Hitler, to the authors of Belsen and Buchenwald. Perhaps Mr. Wilson thinks it couldn't happen here! Eire is a country where the infant mortality rate is 83 per thousand, compared with 30 in England and Wales. Yet Mr. Wilson is not only willing that little Catholics should be segregated from the little "heretics" of the established Church and other "sects," but that nineteen-twentieths of the population should pay for schools over which they have no control and in which the little ones are taught that the State has no right to provide health and maternity services for the people. But then Mr. Wilson needed votes; and no doubt a "weathercock" group of Catholic votes helped him to escape defeat at Huyton.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN MCMANUS.

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.

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

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Rev. E. R. GOLDSACK, M.A., "Swedenborg and Degrees."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1). Tuesday, December 4: Mr. J. A. C. BROWN, M.B., Ch.B., "Do We Need Religion?"

Glasgow Secular Society (McClellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Elder CLIFFORD N. CUTLER and Elder DARRELL F. SMITH, "The Strength of the Mormon Position."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mrs. SHAFER, "Is Religion Necessary?"

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (Onward Hall, 207, Deansgate).—Saturday, December 1, 3 p.m.: Mr. D. GARSIDE, B.A., "Origin of the Clash between East and West."

National Secular Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C.1).—Thursday, November 29, "Any Questions" on "Religion or Secularism." Questions invited from audience and answered by Messrs. F. A. RIDLEY (Editor, *The Freethinker*), L. EBURY (Vice President, N.S.S.) and J. W. BARKER (Kingston Branch, N.S.S.). Chairman R. H. ROSETTI (President, N.S.S.). Admission Free.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. A. RILEY (N.U.R.), "Russia Visited."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, December 2, 11 a.m.: Mr. L. L. WHYTE, "Divided Man at the Crossroads."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: Mr. PETER COTES (Director, New Boltons Theatre), "The Play of Ideas."

OUTWORKERS wanted to work at home. Light assembly, Knitting, Envelope Making, etc. Experienced and inexperienced Write: Vocational Advisory Service, Denton, Manchester.

TO END WAR

I.

THE method for ending war is as simple as it is urgent. About the latter, thinking people are agreed. Another war after years of preparation, atom bombs and other worse agencies of destruction promised us will mean an end of European civilisation, possibly of the whole population.

It is a prospect which may please the coloured races, but one which Europe has no reason to welcome. Not that Europe alone will be the sufferer, but it is likely to be the hardest hit.

The cause of war is so obvious that most persons cannot see it, or will not see it.

"War is a game which, were their subjects wise, Kings could not play at."

So true as to be ignored. If we enlarge "Kings" to mean all Governments, we need not seek further for the causes of war.

Considered historically few will dispute it. Ranging back over millenniums we find emperors, kings, princes, dukes, dictators, consuls, autocrats, despots, who made war for an amazing variety of reasons, bad ones, none for the good of people over whom they tyrannised.

Now war as policy recoils on the heads of those who practise it. They are disturbed, frightened, but unable to quell the monster they create and urge into horrific activities. Only the mass of people can put an end to war.

Some who admit past wars to be dreadful condone modern warfare by approving elaborate and costly preparations for it.

The theory is to keep peace one must prepare for war. This has broken down so many times in practice it ceases to interest thinking men and women. Preparing for war leads to war. That has happened times out of number, and will again unless and until an entirely different course of action is followed. To prevent war we must prepare for peace.

A complexity of the problem is that many modern states owe their origin to armed revolt against oppression. This creates a predisposition to regard war as an instrument of democracy, but it does not necessarily follow, often the reverse. Revolutionaries may have had to use force because armed force was keeping them suppressed, but once free they should be peaceful.

It is interesting, cogent to the argument, to compare and contrast the condition of the United States of America with that of the divided and inimical countries of Europe.

II.

Imagine each of the forty-eight States living up to the ideal of national sovereignty. Each would have a separate army, navy, air force, secret service, customs barrier; by now the disunited states would be in worse state than the Balkans; were that possible.

Instead the United States without artificial boundaries reach combined a prosperity of pooled natural resources and production which is the envy of the world. All other continents should take the lesson from the U.S.A. and act upon it. Europe particularly must learn to avoid fratricidal wars which if persisted in will lead to self-extermination.

Furthermore, the U.S.A.—Canada frontier, three thousand miles long, is unguarded. Consequently there is no ill-feeling between Yankees and Canucks, no "incidents" so common on protected boundaries, no mention of war or possibility of it.

The conclusion is that disarmament offers the only means of achieving peace; abolition of fighting impedimenta on land and sea and in air, then peace would ensue.

One cannot imagine millions of Germans leaving their work and crossing frontiers to fight millions of French—or any other nationals—unless their governments told them to do so. We must create a condition of affairs in which governments will not have that evil power. The only way is to disarm them, so they have not the weapons to make war.

Peace treaties are useless. During centuries there have been hundreds of peace treaties, broken when it suited self-seeking governments to do so.

The League of Nations collapsed immediately it was disobeyed by a predatory government. Its basis was wrong to the degree of foolishness or criminality. It was not a League of Nations. It was a League of some governments all of whom believed in war and prepared for more. One might as well form a League of Burglars to protect householders against burglary, only in this case it could have been termed more accurately a League of Murderers; for all held lethal weapons and constantly threatened to use them till they found themselves unable to do otherwise.

The United Nations was born in cynicism. Veto by each Great Power abrogates any good it can do.

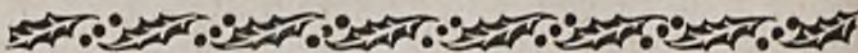
III.

How is disarmament to be accomplished? Not by governments. They fear the loss of so much the abolition of war preparedness entails. Even Socialist and Communist governments turn nationalistic and aggressive once they have power. One country dominating the world might attain peace, but steps to such an end presume a shattering war leaving the human race unable to enjoy peace.

The only way is for the losers of war, the mass of people, to refuse to fight. If governments could not get soldiers, sailors or airmen they would adjust their policies peacefully.

Proclaimed the Communist Manifesto, "Workers of the World, Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains! You have the world to win!"

Little followed. To-day it should be a call to the world. War preparations, conditions and taxation are the chains. Those struck off—mankind will be nearer freedom and prosperity than ever it has been before. One nation alone cannot do it, or a group. Only concerted action by the whole world populace against war will achieve it.



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