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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Vatican in English Politics

IN an agitated article in *The Catholic Herald* (November 23, 1951), Mr. Douglas Hyde, formerly of *The Daily Worker*, proclaimed the necessity of "fighting to keep the Christian influence alive in the British Labour movement," a polite euphemism for subordinating the organisation of the Labour Party and of the Trade Unions to the purposes of the Roman Catholic Church. It is a matter of common knowledge that a similar objective has already been attained by Rome in relation to several Labour Parties in various parts of the world. For example, we have been informed by overseas visitors from the Antipodes that Catholic influence in the Labour Party in Australia is extremely powerful; so much so, in fact, that in parts of the island continent the local labour organisations have become little more than "Catholic action" groups. Whilst in our geographical neighbour, Eire (Irish Republic), we recently demonstrated that like, indeed, all Irish political parties, the Irish Labour Party is completely subservient to Rome: the old slogan of Daniel O'Connell: "I take my religion from Rome and my politics from my country": seems to have gone completely out of fashion.

Incidentally, this submissiveness extends to the Irish Trade Unions equally: only a few years ago, the Teachers' Union actually altered its constitution at the order of the Irish hierarchy which complained that the aforesaid constitution contained phraseology "offensive to Catholic moral teaching"; and, of course, we do not forget the case of Dr. Browne already treated at length in this column and, more recently, recalled by a correspondent.

It is to this happy state of complete submission to the dictates of Holy Church, in political matters no less than in theology, and in this world no less than in the next, that Mr. Hyde and his co-religionists intend to subdue the British Labour movement and, indeed, British politics in general. As far as their immediate aim, the British Labour movement is concerned, they find, as Mr. Hyde eloquently reminds his readers, that their principal rival is the British Communist Party.

To be sure, it is not only in Britain that this is so, and the Church of Rome finds its principal rival in what we have termed "The Church of Moscow." Indeed, as the present writer once observed elsewhere and in another connection, the Church of Rome fears Moscow and the Cominform precisely because it sees there a, as it were, distorted mirror of itself; a rival totalitarian system similarly combining dogma and politics: resolute, highly disciplined and, like Rome herself, world-wide in strategy and membership. In our opinion, this inverted resemblance—the philosophical "identity of opposites"!—explains the morbid and quite peculiar note of fear that runs through the references to communism in all Catholic writers, including the ex-Communist Hyde himself.

However, the fight, declares *The Catholic Herald*, is now definitely on for the "soul" of the Labour movement.

Why the Labour movement primarily? No doubt because the Vatican, a shrewd and far-sighted political organisation which has neither permanent friends nor foes, but only permanent interests, thinks that a dominant role in the future will be played by Labour. Moreover, conditions in England are peculiarly favourable to Catholic penetration in the Labour Party. Successive Irish immigrations into England since the "hungry forties" and "potato famines" of the last century, have furnished the Catholic Church authorities in Britain with a ready-made Irish proletariat traditionally submissive to the Church. Moreover, the British Labour Party, unlike its continental Socialist opposite numbers, is neither Marxist nor Materialistic; in its outlook upon doctrine it is purely empirical. This has long been recognised by the Vatican. Even the ultra-reactionary Pope Pius the Eleventh, the ally of Fascism and the deadly enemy of Socialism, specially exempted the British Labour movement from the otherwise universal condemnation which he passed upon continental Socialism.

Not, of course, that Rome confines her activities in intervention in English politics to the Labour movements. Contrarily the Vatican has a finger in every pie: for British Liberalism, like British Labour, has never, again in contradistinction to continental Liberal Parties, been condemned by Rome. However, Catholic permeation of the Tory and Liberal Parties here is more difficult than in the case of the Labour Party. For the Tory and Liberal Parties both have traditionally anti-Catholic religious associations. Was not the Church of England once styled by a perspicacious wit as "the Tory Party at prayer"? Whilst "the Non-conformist conscience" practically dominated the Liberal Party during its hey-day. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that there are more Catholic M.P.s in the present Parliament upon the Labour Benches than in either of the other parties. (The same is also true in Australia, where Toryism is, we understand, also traditionally associated with Protestantism.)

However, the Vatican traditionally "has no politics," in the sense that it never commits itself absolutely to one party. The "Universal" Church seeks universal rule! and, to-day, the present state of British parties gives her an ideal opportunity to exercise a kind of "Balance of Power" in contemporary British politics. With successive elections returning the two major parties, Tory and Labour, at almost equal strength, thus dividing the country into two permanent political blocs, the prospects of a "pressure group" appear bright. Its whole history demonstrates Romanism as a past-master in this species of political activity: indeed, probably the most tenacious and artful "pressure group" in all history is Jesuit-led Catholicism.

A far greater authority than Mr. Douglas Hyde, Archbishop Downey of Liverpool, has recently summarised the current situation from the Roman standpoint. His Grace pointed out that the present political impasse affords Catholicism in this country an ideal opportunity to hold

the balance of power between the contending parties. Thus we seem destined to enjoy a peculiar species of "democracy" in which a Catholic minority, estimated as at present (1950), 2,808,596 in number, out of a total population of some fifty millions, will become our effective masters, a democratic dictatorship! However, clerical strategy, that of the Jesuits, in particular, has always excelled in turning movements of the kind here indicated. With both major parties scared into palpitations of the heart at the fear of losing any appreciable number of votes in a General Election where the turnover of a few seats would change the whole balance of power, the kind of strategy advocated by Archbishop Downey operates under the most favourable conditions.

Such is the current political landscape. Under such circumstances, it seems clear that an Olympian aloofness from the political arena is no longer, if, indeed, it ever was possible for secularists. We, too, must add practice to theory and "educate, agitate, organise" on behalf of the permanent non-party aims of Secularism which, unlike the aims of our Catholic opponents, are also the aims of Humanity, the aims of social and intellectual, no less than of political progress.

F. A. RIDLEY.

WHO'S BEING RATIONAL?

IN a recent private correspondence both the editor of this paper and the writer of this note deplored the way that culture and sanity are being sacrificed for a war which is to be advertised as a crusade "to save Christian civilisation." It is a thought which should give Freethinkers a jolt; but, alas, so many of us have exhausted our strength in freeing ourselves from another superstition. We accept myth under other labels than the religious one because we feel that we have had our rebellion. Yet it should be our earnest work to smash the superstitions which are supported by the Church and which help to maintain the churches (as recruiting centres, as funk-holes in times of terrible stress, etc.).

Religion is not the only superstition which is fostered by those who have a vested interest in ignorance's dividends: war is another. Both, indeed, have mutual investments. Yet, to-day, war is unthinkable. People say that issues are complicated, just as an old priest will smoke-screen some callous action, which has dogmatic sanction, with talk of hidden complications; but the truth is that never before have political issues been simpler. We either prepare for peace or The End.

I wonder if the gentlemen who plan our cultural and physical annihilation (for, in fact, nothing will be saved this time) could get away with it without the general background of Christian respectability; without the Christian-social fog, our leaders might be judged rationally and found to be bunglers and rogues.

Generals quote the Bible, trigger-happy politicians parade to special services, and priests themselves sanctimoniously bless bombs; and so their mighty efforts to murder our minds and bodies seem to be no worse than the mysterious ways of God. The God-knows-best attitude is merged into the war-mongers-are-doing-their-best excuse.

If we had the courage to look at our rulers rationally, we would no more support those who cannot ensure *utopia as a minimum demand* than donate fortunes to the sky-pie merchants. Our politicians are supposed to be experts, and they are paid salaries as expert protectors; yet they behave no more expertly than schoolchildren. They meet their foreign counterparts to wrangle about strategic bases for the next war which will add their names to "history";

they repeat their own propaganda as if it were a prayer and so ensure their headlines in a Christian Press. What is most intolerable, they feel pleased with themselves, all comfortable within as men who can shake hands with a bishop.

Surely if they cannot guarantee peace and prosperity, they should be dismissed instantly by their masters, the public, as incompetents? If they say it is all very difficult, let them be put aside for people who know it is all too simple. Minds not evolved in the power-war of politicians are continuously pointing out the rational solutions, as all readers of such rational papers as *The New Statesman* and *Peace News* are aware. But Christian civilisation does not demand rationalism from its secular leaders, because it is itself irrational.

There has been some correspondence in this paper recently about C.O.s. Personally, I cannot see how rationalists can fail to be with C.O.s in their stand against war. This is not a question of cowardice, but of being rational. Non-rational "heroism" is no more to be praised than irrational religious fervour: both are neuroses. True (rational) courage comes in opposing the mob emotions, in being adult.

The mob lives and it doesn't learn that there is no solution any longer to political problems in obliteration war. Nazism is "the thing" again in Germany, the "little yellow bastards" are once again our loyal pals, and so on and so on; and what has been solved except the neurotic impulses of certain public figures? The one certainty is that Europe was nearly broken by the last war, and the world will be fatally shattered by the next. But it is part of the Christian tradition that we should expect this world to be evil and so many, who reject explicit Christian symbols, are influenced unconsciously by the tradition. One must be a Freethinker—even in the unconscious!

The alternative to war is not slavery under some monster, but a rational facing of facts. (See *The New Statesman*, see *Peace News*.) Finally, it may mean a united world; but are countries to-day any more rational than patron saints? Of course there are wonderful "patriotic" emotions, just as there are wonderful religious emotions, but now they have to be paid for with extinction of the mind and the human race. European countries, anyway, are comparatively modern abstractions, and each country has a border line, and half-way across that line may be a town so that people born on one side of a street may be forced by political superstition to hate and fight those born on the other side of the street. Does it make any more sense than the doctrine of the immaculate conception?

Perhaps the failure of our culture, then, is something which we deserve, since we, who are supposed to be rationalists, are so indulgent to what passes for our minds. Like the Christian mobs, we'd rather be torn to pieces than think. And it's no use saying that human nature can't be changed, for that is to say that we do not believe in education, in freethought. It is as "natural" for a man to be religious as to be war-like, if one is going to use that discredited argument. (Our ancestors were men of peace, as a matter of fact, in the days of fruit gatherers; and war is a cultural growth.) So are we, as rationalists, going to let the whole dreary and devastating business start again without our protest?

Rationalists! for mercy's sake be rational!

OSWELL BLAKESTONE.

HENRY HETHERINGTON. By A. G. Barker. A Pioneer in the Freethought and Working-class Struggle of a Hundred Years Ago. Price 6d.; postage 1½d.

ISRAEL

MR. DOV-JOSEPH, the new Israeli Minister of Trade and Industry, announced a few days ago that the economy of the "Promised Land" is in a state of anarchy. This announcement coming shortly after the long drawn-out negotiations that preceded the formation of the new Government must have come as a shock to the pious who assumed quite logically that divine intervention would save the situation by some miraculous means.

Unfortunately the fundamental contradictions embodied in the very establishment of the State of Israel are now beginning to bare themselves before the creators of this Lilliputian State. Zionism is now in the throes of a crisis that was predicted in advance by some of its sympathetic critics. It is a crisis of the same order as the hypothetical crisis which Christianity would face if Jesus Christ "revealed" himself to the world for the second time. It is a crisis which would have similar repercussions to Karl Marx's "awakening from the dead" and viewing his millions of alleged followers throughout the world.

It is our intention to explain the causes of this "permanent contradiction" within the body of Zionist doctrine and practice.

For a start, Zionism is based on the myth that Jews wherever their temporary residence might be have more in common with each other than they have with their adopted countries. It has been rightly observed that while an English Jew realises he is a Jew *in* England, he is more than acutely aware that he is an Englishman *in* Israel! The "melting pot" in Israel has failed to break down the very sharp social barriers that exist between Oriental Jews from Bokhara and the Yemen, Persia and India on the one hand and the highly Westernised Jews from the U.S.A., Great Britain and the Continent on the other. Many generations will have to pass before a true Israeli nation is born. This primary contradiction will persist in Israel's transition from a ramshackle conglomeration of sub-nations to a modern, highly-developed, streamlined nation.

The second problem which faces the Israeli Government is this: how can it reconcile a controlled economy with the country's entire financial dependence on the U.S. Government and American Zionist funds? The private investor finds that the conditions for investment as laid down by the monopoly "trade union," the Histadut are not very favourable. If the Histadut extends its control to all spheres of the economy, no financial assistance from abroad will be forthcoming. If, on the other hand, controls are removed a serious inflation would ensue which might ensure the political victory of the legitimate spokesmen for private enterprise—the General Zionists.

The third, and I believe, almost insoluble contradiction of the Zionist Movement lies in the fact that through the artificial division between Jew and Arab in the Middle East, Israel is prevented from trading with the Arab countries. The boycott of Israel by the Arab League countries inflicts severe economic hardship on both sets of people. As I see it, only a Federation of Middle Eastern countries, including Israel, could possibly resolve this dilemma. This implies, of course, an attitude of calmness and detached thinking which is not possessed by the extremists of either the Arab or Jewish communities.

Israel itself, besides being a land of political dilemmas and economic contradictions, seems to provide a geographical and human background to all these conflicts. Israel is a country of contrasts—a land flowing with milk

and honey—and yet at the same time, a land of barren, desert sands. The crowded cities of Telaviv, Haifa and Jerusalem are infinitely removed from the peaceful collective farms situated along the present frontiers between Israel and her neighbours. Telaviv, in particular, is something like a boom town, overflowing with people from every country of the earth, pulsating with a tremendous nervous energy.

Jerusalem, the Holy City of Jews, Muslims and Christians, certainly merits the attention devoted to it, if only for the reason that it is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Looking up at the star-studded sky in Jerusalem, one wonders how many millions of people have viewed it, and how many pious and impious men have been slaughtered in cold blood for the right to possess this city undisturbed by infidel worshippers.

It is of interest to note that Israel is now the Holy Land not only of the three great religions, but also of that strange archaic community, the Samaritans, and by contrast the equally strange ultra-modernist Bahai religion.

Israel is destined to become the focus of all the world's troubles and ailments. For into this tiny area of land are concentrated more problems, paradoxes, contrasts and contradictions than any other land in the world. Israel is thus a microcosm of world society.

It is my conviction that Israel will survive despite her heritage of fanaticism and religious passion. In such circumstances Israel will become an integral part of a well-ordered and free society that has forgotten the meaning of the Holy War, and buried once and for all the tradition of sectarian strife and bloodshed.

"AKIBA."

"INDIAN SUMMER"

By Peter Watling. Criterion Theatre.

PETER WATLING, whose second West End production this is, has a definite bent towards the Chekhovian style of dealing with a play. Now this is all very well so long as the manner of treating the subject is compatible with our times, and that the subject is sufficiently topical. With his previous play, *Rain on the Just*, we were shown that Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* has a theme applicable to England to-day. Unfortunately, there is no such saving grace for the play under review.

We are faced with quite an ordinary family living in South Kensington, and whose only distinction seems to be that they have a military background associated with India, which in itself has practically nothing to do with the play. It boils down to a mere survey of commonplace events in an ordinary family—the kind of thing one would commonly refer to as a family play. There have been so many of these in the past few years that it seems there is little point in adding to them. At their best they are not truly good plays, even coming from such able and experienced authors as J. B. Priestley or Dodie Smith, but a section of the public are fond of this type of play.

John Gielgud's production runs smoothly, and this—together with good performances from Jane Baxter and Betty Ann Davies as two sisters—helps the play along.

But why call this a comedy? The subject matter is serious enough, for Mr. Watling's approach to the family is pessimistic.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? By H. Cutner. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 2d.

ACID DROPS

In the West-End of London we noticed, the other day, the announcement of a series of lectures entitled "Christ and Time." We are prepared, however, to bet that no lecture was included in this series dealing with the most important question of all: Christ *in* Time: did Jesus Christ, as the Gospels portray Him, ever have any historical existence in Time at all? It is surely about time Christians discussed this?

The Roman Catholic Church has always, since the days of Oscar Wilde and earlier, kept "open house" for repentant artists. The latest addition to her gallery of picturesque artists is the Spanish "surrealist" artist, Salvador Dali. In a press conference at the "Lefevre Galleries" where an exhibition of his works is now on view, Senor Dali, according to our contemporary, *The Daily Telegraph*, declared: "I prophesy the atomic explosion will produce a new kind of life, a new mystic life. Religion is the only solution. To-day are the last moments of materialism." We are inclined to agree that an atomic explosion would represent actually "the last moments of materialism." We are also inclined to include mysticism or, at least, the mystic in the atomic débacle.

Irreverent sceptics, "lewd fellows of the baser sort," as Holy Writ so aptly describes them, may continue to pick holes in theological science, but they have their answer in Holy Scripture. Take, for example, the recent hullabaloo about the Pope's recent admission that the world is five billion years old, whereas Genesis, still officially held to be inspired by the Catholic Church, says distinctly that the whole job was done in six days. Holy Scripture, however, had already foreseen and thoughtfully provided the answer to that one: "In the eyes of the Lord one day is as a thousand (or a billion) years." Down, base reason, down!

"Do the damned feel physical pain." This, surely pertinent question, particularly for Atheists, is now answered in the affirmative by Holy Church. Time was, however, when theological opinion was divided on the subject. We recently perused a bulky treatise by a 17th century Jesuit who was quite definitely of opinion that it is, in the nature of things, impossible to torment an immaterial spirit with physical fire. In the Reverend Father's own expressive words: "To torment a spirit is as impossible as to paint a smell."

According to our contemporary, the *News Chronicle*, the Russian Government is, now, again giving official encouragement to "The League of Militant Atheists." This must be good news for the religious Press which is deadly dull nowadays and seems to have got nothing to say. Now, typewriters will click, fountain pens will be filled, and drawers ransacked for old articles from "Our Correspondent in Riga," depicting the murder of monks, the raping of nuns, and Chinese torturers working overtime under orders from the Kremlin, just as they used to do in the good old days after the Russian Revolution. "It's an ill-wind," etc.

A Mr. Arthur Bradley threw a Bible at the Judge whilst on trial for murder. After a re-trial he has now been sentenced to death. He should have kept the Bible and cited precedents from its crime-filled pages. He would have found plenty of murderers whom the Lord not only pardoned but rewarded.

In the "Dear Sir" feature of the B.B.C., dealing with listeners' letters, one of these pointed out that the so-called date of the birth of Jesus, December 25, was in reality the birthday of Nimrod, the grandfather of Noah—proving, in this particular case, that the listener, while not swallowing Christmas as the birthday of Jesus, was ready to swallow similar nonsense about equally mythical characters. Needless to add, another letter was read out immediately afterwards insisting that December 25 was the Birthday of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and we must never forget it. We have an idea that most intelligent people are now aware that the birth of "our Lord," with its Angels, Wise Men, Stable and Animals, and Moving Star, is just legend and myth, while Christmas itself is an age-old pagan holiday.

A New Zealand parson, the Rev. J. Grocott, has been touring England to see how the religious part of our educational system was functioning, and he gave a talk recently over the radio on his impressions. Very mournfully, he told his listeners that in New Zealand education was purely secular and it was time to change that unhappy state of things. He was delighted to find how thoroughly religion was taught in schools over here, and how enthusiastic all the children were with their hymn singing and Bible lessons, and he could now go back and do his best to change his country's Secular Education for an education thoroughly religious.

We doubt whether Mr. Grocott will, at the same time, point out our increasing juvenile delinquency which he cannot now attribute to lack of religious teaching. Nor will he tell New Zealand that our prisons are full of young offenders most of whom certainly are proud of being Christians. It would be interesting to learn some facts about New Zealand prisons—whether the lack of religious education has filled them or vice versa. In any case, we hope that New Zealand will never change the only consistent and fair education for all—Secular Education.

With the exit of Messrs. Hitler, Mussolini and Co. from the historical stage, General Franco remains the last Fascist Dictator in Europe. As is well known, the "great Christian gentleman" is *persona grata* at the Vatican. He is not, however, the first Spanish general to become a Dictator with the help of the Church. In the early 19th century the then Spanish Dictator was one General Narvaez, now deservedly forgotten. A pious Catholic, this general made a most edifying end. As he lay on his deathbed the priest, following the prescribed ritual, asked him if he forgave his enemies, to which the dying Dictator sorrowfully replied: "I have no enemies left to forgive. I had the last one shot half an hour ago!"

A few Sundays back the B.B.C. broadcast a radio version of the famous Greek comedy *The Frogs*, by the Athenian dramatist Aristophanes. An introductory talk was given by the veteran classical scholar, Gilbert Murray, the translator of the play. Professor Murray remarked that, whilst educated Athenians were theists, yet they regarded the gods of the popular religion as comic figures and were prepared to enjoy a joke at their expense, such as Aristophanes provided so liberally in his play. We imagine that Dean Inge and Bishop Barnes would have gone down well in Athens. But would our modern Inquisitor of the drama, the censor of plays, permit a modern Aristophanes to make similar fun of, say, the Holy Trinity? We rather doubt it.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

In reply to several letters, we wish to point out that no writer in these columns has any animosity whatever towards the late John Symes—the present Editor, indeed, knew and admired him very much. This correspondence must now cease.

H. SHAW.—We believe that the late R. H. Rosetti was a Socialist in his personal capacity—but his work on the N.S.S. was concerned with the propagation of Secularism.

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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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS

Readers will notice that we have been obliged—with great regret—to raise our subscription rates from January, 1952. The price of *The Freethinker* will henceforth be fourpence—though we may add that even this will not cover our rising expenses.

After the interval for physical recuperation and for "spiritual" refreshment afforded by the Christmas recess, the London Branches of the N.S.S. are getting down to the second half of their winter session. The South London Branch announces that it has again taken the "London and Brighton Hotel," Queens Road, Peckham, for its 1952 session. This will open on January 6, 1952, with a special members' meeting, confined exclusively to members of the N.S.S., when the President of the South London and Lewisham Branch, Mr. E. W. Shaw, will lecture on "The Future of the National Secular Society." Details of further lectures organised by this branch can be obtained from the Secretary, Mr. A. S. Gibbins, 58, Overdown Road, Bellingham, London, S.E.6.

We were amused to note an article in our Spiritualist contemporary, *Psychic News*, by our one-time contributor, Mr. W. H. Wood, still smarting over the exposure we made of the fraud of the now famous "seance"—the R. 101 case. He is delighted that the *Literary Guide*, "a journal devoted to Materialism" (it is nothing of the kind) has published an article "recalling some interesting cases of psychic phenomena" thus proving that, at long last, "Rationalists" have now a "more tolerant outlook," which he attributes no doubt to himself and his thorough belief in survival.

Of course, our own writer, Mr. H. Cutner, faced with all this wonderful proof of immortality for everybody "was seized with apoplectic convulsions and rushed into print." Mr. Cutner's "crime" was to accuse Mr. Wood of "bluffing"—which, by the way, he still maintains. Mr. Wood said that the account published in the *Sunday Dispatch* was exactly the same as the "Official Inquiry account"—that they absolutely tallied. This was pure bluff and Mr. Wood knew it.

DECLINE OF A PURITAN

THE first four centuries of formerly supposed Roman history have the support of no worthy evidence, for most early records perished when the Gauls sacked Rome in 388 B.C. There is, says Michelet, no Roman writer before Cato (B.C. 234 to 147), and the first historians of Rome were Greeks. One Greek of the time of Augustus asserts that the Roman history of all his fellow-countrymen is derived from popular rumour. He avers the same of the Roman historians. The most ancient regular native historian was Q. Fabius (flourished 250 B.C.). Cicero and Livy seem to have little respect for the older historians.

The history of the early kings may be dismissed as legend. Their stories reveal, however, that reality of early republican times, the long struggle between the patricians and plebeians, which ended only when large-scale slavery intervened.

In plebeian vision Romulus opens an asylum to all. The patricians substitute for him Numa, his colleague and enemy, who is accused of killing him.

The patrician influence then becomes visible in the legends, for Numa, a Sabine, and, therefore, a barbaric warrior, is depicted as a contemplative philosopher, retiring into solitude, walking in the woods consecrated to the gods, whose society he enjoys. The next king, Tullus Hostilius is struck by lightning, which suggests execution by the patricians, for they alone possess the religious rites and one of these is augury, sometimes by lightning.

There is no need to review further legend. The internal conflict of Rome endured, but the plebeians gradually acquired political power. Tribunes are appointed to represent them, and finally gain the censorship, the last asylum of aristocratical power.

At the time of the glory of the patrician Scipios, one of whom was the conqueror of Carthage, another noble, V. Flaccus, brought from Tusculum a young Italian of singularly energetic character, tried courage, and biting eloquence. He was a red-haired man, with blue eyes, and a look defiant of friend and foe. His family name was Porcius (the swineherd). They called him Cato (catus, wise). He became the enemy of the nobles.

In the morning, he went as an advocate to plead in the small towns near Tusculum. Then he stripped himself naked, laboured with his slaves, ate with them, and drank, like them, water, vinegar, or thin wine. He was, however, not a gentle master. The father of a family, he wrote in his book on agriculture, ought not to see his old and sick slaves. There is nothing better, he said, than to enrich oneself by commerce, except that it is so risky, or to lend money at usury, if that were less dishonourable, but the feeling of our ancestors was that while the thief should restore twice the amount he had stolen, the usurer should restore quadruple the amount he had lent. He therefore praised farming as honourable, productive of good soldiers, and, at the same time, the most secure occupation.

Sent as a praetor into Spain, he sent home the commissaries, declaring that war should support war. He took four hundred towns, and brought an immense sum to the public treasury, and on re-embarking, sold his war-horse, to spare the republic the expense of its freight. The severity showed by Cato against himself added authority to the harshness of his attacks upon the nobles. In Sicily, he blamed the expenditure of Scipio Africanus. Scipio sent him back, saying that he did not like so exact a quaestor.

All Cato's energy was needed to suppress the insolence of the great families. They seemed above the law. A

son-in-law of Fabius, having been accused of treason, his father-in-law had only to say he was innocent, since he remained the son-in-law of Fabius. Scaurus, being accused, said Vatius of Lucron accuses Scaurus of having received presents to betray the republic; Scaurus declares his innocence. Which of the two will you believe? The accuser of a Metellus placed before the judges the documents, evidence of his extortion; all members of the court turned away their eyes. Africanus exercised a regular dictatorship. One day, when the quaestors hesitated unlawfully to open the public treasury, Scipio took the keys and opened it himself.

The Scipio brothers had in the war of Antiochus regulated the conditions of peace on their private authority. What sums, it was asked, did they bring from rich Asia? At the day of trial Africanus did not deign to reply to his accusers. He said: "Romans, on this day I conquered Hannibal and the Carthaginians. Follow me to the Capitol, to render thanks to the gods, and ask them ever to give you chiefs who resemble me." All followed him. He triumphed that day over the majesty of the republic and the laws.

His brother, some state, being apprehended by the lictors of the tribunes, Africanus took him from them, destroyed the order for his arrest and said, I shall not give an account of four millions of sesterces, when I put two hundred millions into the treasury. He retired to a property he had in Campania. His enemy, Tiberius Gracchus, a tribune himself, prevented his being disturbed in his exile. He died there, and had the inscription placed on his tomb: Ungrateful country, you do not possess even my bones.

His brother was still attacked. Cato supported the request for an inquiry into the amounts received or extorted from Antiochus. The accused were convicted. The judgment set forth that L. Scipio, for granting an advantageous peace to Antiochus, had received from him 6,000 pounds of gold and 480 pounds of silver more than he had paid into the treasury, and other accused, various sums. The aristocracy received a terrible blow. Cato was raised to the censorship.

A strange tale of corruption will remind many of one of the allegations made against the early Christians. A certain Rutilius had proposed to his son-in-law, of whom he was guardian, to initiate him into the mysteries of the bacchanalia, which from Etruria and Campania had passed into Rome (166-4 B.C.). The youth mentioned it to a courtesan whom he loved. She appeared struck with terror, and told him that apparently his mother and guardian feared to render him an account, and wished him killed. The consul was informed. The courtesan confessed that the bacchanalia were a frantic worship of life and death, among the rites of which were prostitution and murder. Those refusing to share in infamy were seized and thrown into caves. Men and women mingled promiscuously together in the darkness. Inquiry found that 7,000 persons had, in Rome, shared in these horrors.

Michelet quotes authorities, but he somewhere describes Plutarch as a writer of romances, which does not stop him citing his tale of Flaminius answering the reproach of a boy that he had not yet seen a man die, by murdering a Gaulish chieftain before the boy's eyes.

Cato expelled Flaminius from the senate, deprived a Scipio of his house, taxed all luxuries, and even degraded a senator for kissing his wife in the presence of his daughter. Cato, when an aged man, lost some austerity, maintained an intercourse with a female slave, under the

eyes of his son and daughter-in-law. He quitted agriculture for usury, and recommended the latter profession to his son.

(The late) J. G. LUPTON.

ZULU KINGS OF LONG AGO

CHAKA, the Napoleon of South Africa more than a century ago, never saw a white man until nearly the end of his stormy life.

Fynn, that intrepid Englishman, ventured into Zululand to trade ivory and in his Diary narrates the interviews he had with the King. When Chaka was told about the advantages of civilised life under George the Fourth, Fynn says that not the slightest envy was shown. Pressed to admit that the British had at least some worthwhile instruction to impart, Chaka replied that they (the British) suffered from an insuperable handicap—a white skin!

Chaka ruled his people despotically and in his career of conquest of other Bantu tribes it is estimated that something like a million people lost their lives. When his mother died he ordered the nation to mourn for a month and instant death was the penalty for any individual who was discovered with dry eyes. The fountain of tears is not inexhaustible and desperate were the expedients to preserve the visible signs of grief, such as splashing the face with water or spittle when under the watchful eyes of the King's messengers. Nevertheless, hundreds were executed for failure to come up to the mark and Fynn was so distressed that he made the King promise that never again would such fearful obsequies be repeated. Not that the King's mother had ever been at all popular and even her son feared her as a witch rather than loved her. She became pregnant with the future Chaka illegitimately (according to Zulu law) and to conceal her shame described her condition as "looseness of the bowels." The name stuck to her child, "Chaka" being a Zulu word for looseness of the bowels. Yet in spite of all Chaka was admired by his people and the modern Zulus have made of him a legendary figure of glory. Fynn says that he was concerned for the safety of his subjects in times of sickness, famine and natural catastrophe.

A palace revolt, led by Chaka's half-brother, Dingaan, ended in the murder of the King. Dingaan was accepted as King without disturbance and it was during his reign that the first organised attempt was made to convert the Zulus. The Rev. Owen, from the London Missionary Society, was granted leave to establish a mission at the Royal Kraal and his efforts to interest the King were related in a Diary he kept. Dingaan must have had a keenly critical mind judged by the account given by Mr. Owen. Here are some instances:—

"Dingaan asked me how many days Jesus Christ had been dead (before the Resurrection). If only three days (said he) it is very likely that he was not dead in reality but only supposed to be. I asked . . . why should it be thought an incredible thing with you that God should raise the dead? Could not He who formed us at first bring us into being again? They said they were formed by their parents. At length they told me to say no more about the dead—leave them where they are, go to the sick and keep them from dying, for this is easier than to raise the dead.

". . . Dingaan asked me why I was in such a hurry to convert his people. I said that life was short. He asked me how that could be as (according to me) we were all to wake up again. One day Dingaan asked me how old I was and wanted me to tell him his age. When I said that I did not know, he asked me if it was not written in God's

book." Digaan evidently expected all or nothing from the Bible!

Mr. Owen's Diary is an historic document. There is no space here to give more than a hint of its absorbing interest. It was during his residence at Royal Kraal that the Boer Voortrekkers in search of concessions were entertained by Digaan and then treacherously murdered. This led to the final overthrow of Bantu power and political independence in South Africa.

Readers of *The Freethinker* can also be heartily recommended to read Fynn's Diary, recently published. It is a tale of courage and endurance rarely equalled.

E. A. McDONALD.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE LATE R. H. ROSETTI

SIR,—It is hard to believe that Robert Rosetti is dead. Such was the quiet and unassuming vigour of the man that one felt he would keep on his cheery way for many a long year yet. The loss to the National Secular Society is very great indeed, but the loss is not limited to them, for Rosetti had a wider outlook than the limits of his own association, realising that it was one aspect of a nation-wide and of a world-wide movement, and that, in a minority, union and harmony make for strength, isolation and dissension offer victory to the enemy.

As an officer of the World Union of Freethinkers, in particular as chairman of its London Committee, I wish to express our sense of the great gap Rosetti's going leaves behind him, and our deep sympathy with the National Secular Society on its well-nigh irreparable loss.

Personally, I have lost a valued friend.—Yours, etc.,

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER, President.

Union Mondiale des Libres Penseurs.

SIR,—The news of Mr. R. H. Rosetti's sudden death came as a severe shock and blow to all North-Eastern Freethinkers. For years he has been held in great respect by us all, and our feelings toward him were not only of respect, but they had developed into an affection. His cheerful manner and great ability as a speaker and organiser had made him one of the outstanding personalities in the National Secular Society. We shall miss him and his work, but we have much to be glad about the way he has worked for and served our great cause.

Few movements had such capable and friendly leaders, and his name will always be honoured by all who knew or had come in contact with him.

Personally, I shall never forget his coming into my life some quarter of a century ago. He was the first great speaker of N.S.S. I had ever heard, and if I had not been sure of my position before that evening, I certainly was afterwards.

Throughout our association he has never changed that friendly and kindly concern for our welfare and the great work and ideas we shared. He never expected rewards or glory for what he did, but his name will live in our records and, indeed, the world's record of great men who fought for freedom of conscience. The work he did and the life he lived will ever be an inspiration to us I'm sure.

Please put on record the grief we feel at his sudden passing, and the thanks we owe him for all he was, and all he did.

The good he did will live after him; there was no evil to inter with his bones.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN T. BRIGHTON
(Vice-President, N.S.S.).

SIR,—On behalf of the members of the Glasgow Secular Society I write to express our deep sorrow at the passing of the N.S.S. President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti.

We remember him, especially the older members, as a quiet, courteous and kindly gentleman. When visiting Glasgow he always attracted a large and intelligent audience who came to hear his lectures. His sudden death was, I feel sure, quite unexpected, and must have come as a shock to his friends.

Herewith I enclose £1 towards *The Freethinker* Fund—the proceeds of a retiring collection at last Sunday's meeting.
—Yours, etc.,
J. BARROWMAN, Secretary.

AN AMERICAN TRIBUTE

SIR,—Thank you for *The Freethinker*, which you are sending me in exchange for *Progressive World*. By this time you should be getting the latter each month. Please let me know if it fails to reach you.

I read my copy of *The Freethinker* from beginning to the end on the day it arrives. It's one of the very best things that come in my mail and I wish to congratulate you and your fellow-writers on the quality of its content.

May I have the privilege of borrowing and reprinting in *Progressive* an occasional article from your pages? I will, of course, give full credit to both *The Freethinker* and the writer in every instance. If at any time you may wish to reprint anything from our magazine, you are entirely welcome to do so.

I note in your November 11 issue that the National Secular Society will hold its Annual Dinner on January 26. Please convey my hearty greetings to the members assembled.—Yours, etc.,

HUGH ROBERT ORR,

Editor, *Progressive World* Magazine.

[Certainly, you are at liberty to reprint any of our articles.—Ed.]

"TO END WAR"

SIR,—Re article on above in your issue December 2, is this to be taken as merely the view of your contributor or looked upon as a policy advocated by *The Freethinker*?

I notice the writer says: "The only way is for the mass of the people to refuse to fight."

Is this the *only* way? If so, what hope is there of realisation?
—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

[Political views, in general, are those of our contributors.—Ed.]

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting, December 18, 1951

Present: Mr. Ridley (Chairman), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Griffiths, Hornibrook, Johnson, Shaw and Morris (Secretary).

The Secretary reported his release from post previously held, enabling him to commence his duties on December 17 instead of at the New Year, and his engagement as from the earlier date was confirmed.

The vacant position of President was again discussed, and Mr. F. A. Ridley was appointed Acting-President, as covered by the Rules, until the 1952 Conference.

Mr. Shaw, following a visit to the Leicester Secular Society, passed on to the Committee two invitations: (a) for an N.S.S. representative to attend the Leicester Society's Centenary celebrations in March, and (b) for the N.S.S., 1952, Conference next Whitsun to be held at Leicester, with the local Society acting as hosts. It was decided that Mr. Shaw represent the N.S.S. in respect of (a), and that (b) be considered further in due course for submission to branches.

New members were admitted to Birmingham, Bradford and West London Branches.

A letter from Birmingham Branch on how N.S.S. Branches might support *The Freethinker* Fund was noted with unanimous approval.

Mr. Ridley, suggesting that public meetings would be better attended if subjects and titles were more topical and vital, initiated a discussion of ways and means of improving N.S.S. propaganda in which all present took part.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

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: L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER.

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street (off New Street)).—Sunday, December 30, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. HORNIBROOK (London), "Unpopular Opinions."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. BERT HAYLETT, "The French Revolution."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday morning, 11 a.m., Dec. 30: A. D. HOWELL SMITH, B.A.: "The Bible in the Light of Modern Knowledge."

UNINTELLIGENCE OF INSECTS

BEHAVIOUR of insects confronted by glass varies with different species, but to all it is a problem. Apparently they have no comprehension of it as a solid medium, treating it as an impalpable part of the yielding atmosphere through which they fly.

This makes one wonder. Glass windows have been in use for centuries. Hundreds of generations of winged insects must have bumped against them. Yet present ones seem no wiser, no more capable of avoiding glass, of easing up to evade violent collisions with it; of discovering their way off it after alighting, either by flying at an angle and seeking exit where the window is open, or by creeping past obstacles as window-frames and finding the open air.

After centuries of glass-bumping and crawling no insect has succeeded, so far as we can observe, in communicating to its fellows the nature of glass and procedure to follow in dealing with it, or of transmitting that knowledge to succeeding generations.

Yet each sort of insect has a different performance from others when flying about windows.

Hive bees fly in gently. Speaking anthropomorphically the honeybee is short-tempered. It crawls sedately up window panes but buzzes furiously when checked by top bar of frame. Returning to the bottom it ascends again. Doing this many times, each more impatiently and with louder buzzes at every repetition it may by accident blunder over the edge of the frame or tumble down between the middle bars and find the open air.

I have seen bees stay for an hour and show not the least capacity for deliberately getting out of the room via the open space of the window. There was no sign of intelligence, defining such as ability to deal with new and unexpected situations.

Wild bees were not so stupid. They were more cautious in their movements, more patient, quieter, found egress a little quicker than their hived congeners.

Humble bees, blundering in aimlessly, booming noisily, showed more approximation to thought or sense of direction than the smaller bees. Humble bees search about, as they habitually do everywhere, eventually finding exit by their half-flying, half-walking peregrinations.

Wasps in the window are more active and steadier in their movements than bees. They continue up and down, persistent and untiring, with slower and more cautious progressions to left and right, and will find their way out quicker than honeybees and wild bees, but not as certainly as humble bees.

Common flies rush in *en masse*, then separate into groups. One circulates round and round the electric fittings pendant from the middle of the ceiling. A few roam aimlessly about the room with much alighting on pictures and mirrors. A larger number disport themselves in the window, showing little desire to go out. A few do so. Others occasionally change places with the central circulators and wanderers about the walls.

Marvel of the big flies, blowflies or blue bottles is they do not smash themselves against solid objects. They swoop in, bump around the walls, light and rest briefly, zoom loudly to and fro, then crash into the glass as though in hopes of driving bodily through it. Eventually in their many erratic zigzags they miss the pane and vanish through the open space. There is no sense of direction in it, merely the luck of repeated blind efforts.

So it is with all of them. Flies of many kinds, occasional beetles, ladybirds, craneflies, each with minor variations repeats the unreasoning performance of trying to force a way out through glass. Its unyielding hardness and impenetrability seem to convey no message to insects, cause no variation in their mechanical conduct.

Conversely, moths flutter madly at night to get in, magnetised by the light when curtains are undrawn. The amethyst gleam of their eyes is fascinating to watch as they glide up and down the glass with quivering wing-beats uncountably fast.

A coloured butterfly, usually a single gorgeous red admiral or peacock, slip in unobtrusively if such is possible to that painted creature, but quietly and effortlessly. Butterflies which intrude seem to have less trouble than any other insects seeking egress.

Communal insects, hivebees and wasps appear the most helpless and unintelligent, least capable of self-preserving actions when parted from the collective drill of their missed fellows.

Contrarily the individualistic insects, humble bees and butterflies show faint possibility, not perhaps of conscious thought, but of purposive action with slight variation from the instinctive to meet exigencies of special difficulty.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

DEATHLESS ARMY

"Millions now living, will never—!"
We saw it, and heard it, for years.
It glared from the posters, on hoardings—
Confirming the worst of our fears.

"Millions now living won't snuff it!"
No need, then, for millions to mourn;
Rutherford phrased it, and plugged it—
Alas! Poor old Rutherford's gone.

They brought little mad music-boxes,
With the Founder's firm faith, to our doors;
"The voice of our marvellous master—
On a record, for five-bob, is yours!"

And many who bought and believed it,
The story passed on, and it spread;
But one can't help a sneaking suspicion—
That many, now living, ARE dead.

A.E.C.

CHRISTMAS—THE FESTIVAL OF THE SUN-GOD

This is the great day of the *first religion*, the *mother* of all religions—the worship of the *sun*. Sun-worship is not only the *first*, but the most natural and the most reasonable of all. The sun is the god of benefits, of growth of life, of warmth, of happiness and joy.

This bright god knew no hatred, no malice, and never sought for revenge, and to-day let us all work and hope for the triumph of *light*, of *right* and *reason* which means, in reality, the victory of *fact* over *falsehood* and *superstition*.

I believe in the festival called Christmas—not in the celebration of the birth of any man, but to celebrate the triumph of light over darkness—the Victory of the Sun. In regard to giving gifts on or near that day, a real gift should be given to those who cannot return one—namely, gifts from the rich to the poor, from the prosperous to the unfortunate.

There is no need of giving water to the sea, or light to the sun, or throwing apples into an orchard. Give a gift that will make the receiver happy—and he or she who gives in that way increases his or her own joy.

Happiness is the only good, and the way to be happy is to make other people happy.—INGERSOLL.

(Sent in by JOSEPH CLOSE.)