

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Secularism in 1952

A RECENT contributor to this journal rightly drew attention to the vast social and intellectual changes which have overtaken the world in the last century, between 1852 and 1952. This last century represents, indeed, the precise era which has seen the Industrial Revolution get into its proper stride and attain world-wide proportions. That the legacy which it has bequeathed to us has proved somewhat indigestible is now a matter of common knowledge and observation. Humanity has already paid with two world wars for its chronic inability to cope with the novel situation. Whilst the present world situation does not indicate much hope of avoiding similar situations in the ascertainable future.

Without impinging upon the domain of party politics which, in any case, rarely deals with much else besides the merely ephemeral and the superficial, it surely is now obvious that our contemporary world is insecurely poised—very insecurely just at present!—between two enormous historical epochs: an age of “parish pump” politics and of actual economic scarcity in the past, and an era, as yet only potential, of world-wide cohesion and “the economics of plenty” in the future. The stresses and strains beneath which our own age groans would seem to rise at bottom from the enormous difficulties involved in the transition from one to another of these so dissimilar epochs.

In this tremendous drama, what is the precise function of Secularism and of the Secular Movement in this and in other lands? It must, we suggest, be conceded that we, to-day, are faced with a very different situation from that which confronted the Secularists of the generation of Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, Haeckel, and their contemporaries. Primarily, the 19th century represented an age characterised by individualism, by *laissez faire*, by cut-throat economic competition, by “the man versus the State.” Few people, we imagine, of any political persuasion or in any party camp, would wish to see those days return. Whatever may be the defects of our present age, it seems to be indisputable that its sense of social ethics and of social cohesion is immeasurably higher than that of previous generations. In one form or another, the “Welfare State” has come to stay and to expand.

To-day, the danger to society does not come from the lack of social organisation but, rather, from its excess. What is now loosely known as “Totalitarianism,” which may be briefly defined as any social regime in which the citizen has no constitutional rights against the State, is steadily waxing, whilst individual liberty, as our Victorian predecessors understood it, is as steadily on the wane. Students of social science will recall the very similar transformation in ancient Europe, when the liberal institutions of the Greek and Roman city-states gave way to the bureaucratic state-socialism which increasingly dominated the Empire and world of the Caesars.

What are the tasks of a dynamic Freethought movement in a complex age of growing centralisation such as is ours? Obviously it would be extremely superficial to make a flat antithesis between social organisation as such and Freethought itself. If we were to do this, we should soon find ourselves lined up with “die-hard” enemies of social progress, and with the worst kind of exploiters, reactionaries, and crooks of every kind, to whom “liberty” is merely a convenient alias for unrestricted personal license. Many of the social functions assumed by the State and by other public bodies throughout the present century have meant an end to intolerable abuses and assumptions of unwarrantable powers by private individuals. Under no conceivable pretext must Secularism allow itself to be manoeuvred into becoming the champion of *unrestricted* liberty. The classic phrase of Madame Roland: “O liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name” might, indeed, represent an appropriate epitaph for the age of *laissez faire*.

However, whilst much modern social organisation is progressive and in line with current needs, it undeniably contains some very dangerous aspects. At what point the individual loses his right to think freely and to criticise his surrounding social institutions, is a question which sociologists have discussed since time immemorial, and the answer authoritatively given to it by the contemporary social order is not a matter of indifference to Freethinkers. Indeed, the very existence and potentiality of Freethought itself depend ultimately on the current social attitude to this question.

The men and women of what we may term “the heroic age” of Secularism were not much troubled by this question: for 19th century society was probably as near to anarchism as any society since civilisation began: selfishness, enlightened by science, could be relied upon to bring about an ultimate Utopia, only provided that unerring “natural selection” was not interfered with by fallible human legislators! The social result was happily described by a writer of the last generation when he went on record with the classic observation that when the economists of *laissez faire* stated that Manchester was getting richer, all that they really meant was that some of “the less desirable people in Manchester” were getting richer.

To-day, our problem has entered upon a new phase, for the kind of human jungle aptly described by the slogan: “Everyone for himself and the Devil take the hindmost” is, fortunately, no longer with us. Our current problem, indeed, as we suggested above, is, indeed, the exact opposite: to distinguish between the beneficent aspects of social organisation and its abuses. For these latter exist, they are increasing along with the power of the State itself, and, if unchecked, they threaten the very existence of Freethought itself. In this country, indeed, the cradle of political democracy, there may little immediate danger of a dictatorship of the Continental style; but there are degrees even in totality, and the “total state” may arrive, as it were, on the instalment system. In the

20th century, as in all its predecessors, "the price of liberty is—still—eternal vigilance."

Organised religion, as this journal is continually pointing out, seeks to profit by the new conditions. Whilst Protestantism enjoyed its appropriate hey-day in the era of *laissez faire*, the collectivist age in which we live witnesses the current renaissance of Catholicism, the collectivist form taken by Christianity. Similarly, religion takes full advantage of the new technical means of mass propaganda. The B.B.C. is, perhaps, the most dangerous anti-secularist force in our contemporary society. Whilst the new art of mass politics which accompanies modern democracy as its sinister shadow, gives the churches a new function as "pressure groups" of which they take full advantage.

Evolution is a social and intellectual fact: under no circumstances should it be allowed to degenerate into a dogma, a mere anti-religious shibboleth. What was good enough for our grandfathers is not necessarily good enough for us. Secularism, to be effective, must be always in front of its age—but not too far in front as to lose contact with its problems: like the giant Antaeus, in the old Greek fable, Secularism renews its strength by continual contact with the secular world from which it springs and the future of which is the only future that it knows; and our world is a *changing* world.

F. A. RIDLEY.

## RELIGIOUS TERRORISM

### A Report from the Middle East

THROUGHOUT the Near and Middle East "A New Islam" political trend is gathering momentum as an expression of the current nationalistic urge which demands that "alien interference" in the political, economic and defence affairs of the Muslim world should be eliminated and that all Muslim countries, irrespective of their political differences should co-operate with each other to stabilise the growth of a strong "Islamic bloc."

This nationalistic urge is being effectively exploited by three different political factions from Iran to Egypt. The factions are democratic, ultra-nationalistic and communistic.

In Egypt, Syria, Iraq, the Lebanon and Iran a strong ultra-nationalistic movement has developed under the leadership of the former Grand Mufti of Palestine, Husseni.

This movement under such slogans as "Islam is in danger," "Moslems unite" and "Hands off, Western Devils" has brought under its control former German and Italian trained Fascist elements and present super-nationalistic younger elements, mostly college and university students and lower bracket white-collar people.

The movement has also set up "a liquidation committee" with branches throughout the Near and Middle East to Iran. The "High Council" of the movement has established close relations with independent ultra-nationalist movements which are going on in Iran, Syria, Iraq, the Lebanon, Hashemite Jordan and Egypt.

### ACTION

The "Liquidation Committee" directly under the control of the "High Council" swung to action in 1950 with Syria as target. As a result, quite a number of prominent Syrian democratic leaders were assassinated and assassinations were repeated in the Lebanon.

Very recently, Iran and Hashemite Jordan witnessed tragic murders. The murder of former Iranian Premier

and King Abdullah of Jordan clearly indicated that the "Husseni Legion" was on the march in the Muslim world in an attempt to sap the strength of ruling democratic elements and thus instal a Pan-Islamic Fascist administration.

The present oil dispute in Iran, Iraq's desire to revise Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of Alliance and Egypt's "Britain must quit from Suez" movement are not connected with the ultra-nationalistic movement.

But the "Husseni Legionnaires" are making due use of them to increase their following and to strain the relations of the Near and Middle Eastern Governments with the Western Democracies to snapping point.

The ultra-nationalists of Pakistan are also maintaining contacts with the "Husseni Legion."

### COMPOSITION

These fanatical "Legionnaires" have small arms in their possession and they belong to both upper and lower strata of the Islamic society. High Government officials, politicians, staff officers holding important positions in military set-up and prominent Muslim priests are either members of the "Legion" or its supporters and sympathisers.

This ultra-nationalistic movement which has politically and religiously connected all Muslim countries from Pakistan to Egypt and even to North Africa is using Islamic religion as a political vehicle to foster anti-Western hatred and opposition to local democratic factions.

Through political agents and high Muslim priests, leaders of the movement are telling the impressionable masses that "Western Foreign Devils" are destroying their religion, and to substantiate such statements they are dishing out to the people very attractive illustrations. For instance, they say the present Western democratic plan of improving the Muslim living standard is designed to replace Islam with Christianity.

Although the ultra-nationalists are vehemently opposing the manoeuvres of Muslim Communists, it appears that the Reds too are using religion as a political handle to strengthen their movement. For example, they repeatedly tell the village people and workers that in Soviet Union Islam is being protected in the five Turkistan republics and that Muslims there are enjoying better economic life.

JOHN TAGI.

## CATHOLIC AND NON-CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

IT is certain that the majority of people who read *The Freethinker* are instructed Freethinkers who have a complete understanding of the basic difference (not necessarily theological difference) between Catholic and non-Catholic Christianity. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that there are some readers of the journal who have not had the opportunity of acquiring the knowledge. The present writer's experience, when he addressed—quite recently—a provincial audience on the subject, convinced him that there exists quite a large minority who fail completely to perceive the basic difference existing between the two forms of Christianity.

In view of this fact, this article is primarily intended for the benefit of those Freethinkers or potential Freethinkers who are only vaguely aware that some such difference does, in fact, exist. The writer does not apologise to the more advanced readers of this journal, as it is only too clear that little progress can be made in the Freethought movement until the basic essentials of modern religion are completely understood by something more than a very small minority. Freethinkers with real understanding will undoubtedly

concur with this opinion, and work with the present writer to achieve this end.

Firstly, it must clearly be understood that any modern religion having any real power is and must be essentially political in character. If indeed it is not political, it very rapidly becomes reduced to an absurdity. Even to-day one may see examples of this phenomenon. For example, it is possible to see on any Saturday evening in any large town or city, small groups of men and women engaged in the singing of ridiculous hymns and the addressing of even more absurd testimonies to the passing crowd at large, much to the ribaldry of certain of the onlookers, many of whom, would be utterly at a loss to give adequate reasons for their laughter. It is quite clear to any serious observer, that the mental capacity of the members of these small non-Catholic groups, is such as to dispel immediately any fears that they are or possibly could be politically dangerous as an organised group to liberal views and opinions.

A slightly higher form of non-Catholic Christianity rises to the level of having some haphazard form of organisation, in that they employ pastors or leaders, who regard themselves—possibly with truth—as being shepherds to the sheep. The organisation is, of course, completely (in the modern sense of the word) parochial. Generally speaking both the pastors and chapel members usually consist of old women of both sexes, who have succeeded in deluding themselves into the belief that by attending a tin chapel on Sunday and listening to a farrago of nonsense called a sermon spoken by a man who is a Fundamentalist and on occasion indulging in the drinking of imitation lamb's blood in the form of red wine, they will ultimately attain "kingdom-come." These people are (if not mentally unbalanced) obviously quite simple and are, of course, completely harmless in the political sense.

At a higher level we have the organised non-Conformist groups, who, it is true to say, did enjoy some political influence, if not power, some few years ago. On the whole this influence was inclined to do good politically, in so far as it was responsible to quite a large extent for the rise of the Liberal-Labour movements which helped considerably the formation of the present-day Labour Party. Methodism is, however, no longer powerful, or even potentially so, and must inevitably be regarded as a dying force. Modern education has, of course, completely destroyed or discredited the fundamentalist theology of the Methodist Church, and the really sensible hard striving men and women who formally made up the back-bone of the Methodist Church are gone for good. It is clear therefore that we must regard Methodism as completely dead politically.

The highly organised Church of England is neither Catholic or non-Catholic if we are to rely upon the antics of the clerics, some of whom appear by the use of ritual to be outdoing the Roman Church itself. On the other hand other clerics appear to be becoming almost like rationalists in their endeavours to avoid at all cost a show of ritualistic superstition. It is, however, clear to the student of modern history that the Church of England is essentially non-Roman Catholic, and will never again become merely a branch of the Roman Church. It is the present writer's opinion that where Newman and Wiseman failed, none of the present-day leaders have the slightest hope of succeeding. It must be remembered that Newman in particular was in all probability the greatest theological scholar of his time, and that the contemporary leaders of the Church of England are not in the same field as Newman. Even the best of present-day leaders are hopelessly inadequate in

theological matters, and in point of fact are to be regarded as virtual heretics and Modernists in so far as the real theological doctrines of the Christian religion are concerned.

PETER S. FINGER.

(E. W. SHAW).

(To be concluded)

## REVIEW

THE Winter Number of *The Plain View* is full of good things for all who enjoy—as does the present writer—a magazine dealing with urgent and difficult problems from the purely secular point of view—though in it the word "humanist" is preferred to "secularist." Mr. H. J. Blackham continues his illuminating discussion on "The Humanist Alternative"—an article far too good to be summarised in a line or two. He appears to have little interest in the God idea judging from his lucid analysis of this particular delusion. "It is notorious," he writes, "that neither from nature nor from history can man extract any assurance of God. The profoundest Christians have turned in despair from these Atheistic deserts to a non-objective source of certitude within. . . . At worst, nature and history tell against the existence of God; at best they are equivocal. The abstract intellectual proofs of the existence of God serve no better to bring conviction to the mind of one who does not believe already on other grounds: they are formal and notional and without support in experience." And if God is not our sure foundation, what is? "It is on our personal use of science and democracy that the future of man hangs," insists Mr. Blackham; but the whole of his article should be read. Another fine contribution, by M. N. Roy, the leader of the Indian Humanist movement, and author of many important historical works, is on the "New Humanism." Like Mr. Blackham, Mr. Roy declares that the "New Humanism proclaims the sovereignty of man on the authority of modern science which has dispelled all mystery about the essence of man." It is "a social philosophy."

The two articles "Church and State in the United States" by Joseph L. Blau, and "The Teaching of a Minority Religion in our Schools" by Virginia Flemming, both deal with another urgent and much discussed problem—Religion and Education; and there are some excellent reviews of important books. One of these, *Human Fertility*, by Robert C. Cook, with an introduction by Julian Huxley, is still another work on the Malthusian problem, and it proves that "Malthus is with us again with a vengeance." As the reviewer says, "Human destiny is in question."

I cannot resist quoting from "Commentary" the following: "To come across people so incredibly queer that no ordinary writer dare put them on the stage or into a book is a commonplace experience. The real world is the world of Moliere and Dickens, of Hogarth and Rowlandson, and more fantastic yet. . . . Whenever the creative artist brings back the grotesque, primitive or modern, after all, it is more endurable just like that than it is in real life or even in imagination." And Emyln Williams is now acting the part of Dickens himself to enthusiastic audiences reveling in the way scenes from the world's greatest novels can be again brought to life through the genius of an actor. It makes sad reading though, for our Dickens haters.

H. C.

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

### ACID DROPS

**Attention!** A notable discovery has just been made in Israel, no less than the finding of the long-lost site of "King Solomon's mines." As we all read in our youth Sir Henry Rider Haggard's famous adventure story, we were brought up to believe that the mines which made Solomon the richest King that ever was, were situated in South Africa. Now, however, it seems that they were on the wise King's doorstep in Israel. It is enough to make Rider haggard, not to mention Dr. Malan.

**We learnt recently** that very strict rules govern the girls' schools attached to the convents of a French Order of nuns who specialise in educational work. One of these rules is that, under no circumstances whatsoever, may any pupil bathe nude. The reason being that it would never do for the "Saint-Esprit" (the Holy Spirit) to see them in that condition. Evidently, another Virgin Birth would create too many theological complications, and so annunciations, in future, must be carefully avoided.

**A commemoration** has just been celebrated in connection with Bevis Marks synagogue in the City of London, the oldest synagogue in Great Britain. Both the Duke of Edinburgh and the Lord Mayor of London were officially represented. "Money speaks all languages," including Hebrew, and breaks down even the barriers of traditional religious bigotry.

**Catholics and Jews** in America recently voted against "undenominational" religious teaching to be taught in schools by Protestants. They objected to religion to be taught through "religious generalities," and Rabbi Mandelbaum said undenominationalism might lead to "a new American public sect holding colourless, unconvincing, deceiving, distillation of the great faiths." Well, so what? Would it be any worse than the hotch-potch of pagan myths taught now as "true" religion?

**Every Christmas** desperate efforts are made to bring people to a state of mind when the beautiful story of Christ Jesus as a Babe with his Angels, Magi, and stable animals, should be accepted without demur. A writer in *Reveille* ridicules the story of the "other Gods" who were born about December 25, because no God in mythology "spent not a few minutes, but a lifetime on earth; and that not for what he could get, but for what he could give." This superb proof of the existence of his particular God will no doubt appeal to *Reveille* readers—but our own Materialism prompts us to ask—what did Christ Jesus give the Devil when that infernal gentleman took him for an aerial flight over Jerusalem? And is it not a fact that the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner received for his pains a howl of denunciation?

**How careful** the B.B.C. is not to wound the susceptibilities of its friends, and how ridiculous it can look in the process! For example, in a recent "Variety" programme Miss Hetty King sang the well-known song, "I'm afraid to go home in the dark." In it, as everyone knows, a husband who has been out on the tiles tells his wife, "I sat alone in the Y.M.C.A. singing just like a lark." Was it B.B.C. censorship that made Miss King render this bit as "I sat alone in a quiet cafe," destroying the whole point of the song? When the turn of the audience came to join in the chorus, they dutifully played up by singing the emasculated form of words, thus qualifying

for another free ticket in due course. What an instrument of hypocrisy our free and independent broadcasting organisation is!

**Here's news!** "Misery" Martin has gone, but The Lord's Day Observance Society intends to carry on. Mr. Martin's successor in the great task of preventing the "Continental Sunday" from spreading to Britain is Mr. H. Legerton, aged 40, previously assistant secretary. In cordially extending to Mr. Legerton the customary good wishes for the New Year, we may be allowed to express the additional wish that he will not only be the greatest secretary the L.D.O.S. has ever had, but will, also, be its last!

**Even the Roman Catholic Church** must have had the shock of its life when the glorious news that "our Gracie" was ready to throw overboard her good old Wigan Protestant faith at a moment's notice so as to marry a converted Jew was flashed round the world. After all, you can't become a Catholic just like that—you must be "instructed." So "our Gracie" is being instructed, and, no doubt, in God's good time may join the Faith (capital F). But what a farce it all is! We can't help thinking that the popular little lady may have gone over to Mormonism on the same provocation—or Islam, or even Hinduism. Perhaps the best word for her real religion is *Indifferentism*.

**Quite a little rumpus** has been gathering about the coming pilgrimage of a number of pious anti-Communists to St. Paul's where "a silent prayer, an exhortation and the singing of two hymns" were to be the antidote to Atheistic Communism. The row is between Lt.-General Martel and the Dean and Chapter who does not want the pilgrims and is now accused of "left wing" tendencies. Canon Collins, who is the Chancellor of St. Paul's, says the accusation is nonsense. Of course there will be the pilgrimage, and the Lord will be duly exhorted to damn the Communists, and there will be much singing and rejoicing by Angels in Heaven, and Lt.-General Martel will feel that he has done the right thing before the Lord and feel very happy. What blatant hypocrisy religion is responsible for!

**Catholicism appears** to be fashionable, nowadays, in artistic circles. Indeed, the repentant or disillusioned artist can always be sure of a warm welcome in the capacious bosom of Holy Church. We recently quoted the former "Surrealist" artist, Salvador Dali, in this connection. Now we learn that a much more famous or, at least, widely-known artist is considering entering a monastery, no less a person, in fact, than Mr. Maurice Chevalier. We hope, at least, that the monks don't start singing *all* Maurice Chevalier's popular hits in Church! Though, if they did, we predict a rapid increase in the size of their congregations.

**Our old friends**, the B.B.C., are evidently determined to see that the "Lord's Own Day" is still going to be celebrated in "The Lord's Own Way," despite the recent abolition of "The Common Informer" by Act of Parliament in 1951. In the weekly radio feature, "This is the Law," the subject, a week or two back, was the law relating to the observation of the Sabbath. It was emphasised repeatedly that the police have still the right moral duty, and full legal powers to prevent God's children from enjoying themselves on God's Day.

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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

Prior to his death, Mr. Rosetti had made complete arrangements for the Annual Dinner to be held at the Charing Cross Hotel on Saturday, 26th January. Reception, 6-30 p.m. Dinner, 7 p.m. It will be held as planned, and it is hoped that we shall again fill all the available places. Many will regard being there as a tribute to R. H. Rosetti and John Seibert, in whom the Society and the Freethought Movement have recently lost two stalwart champions. Others will welcome the occasion as one when Freethinkers can pledge their continued solidarity in opposition to the forces of superstition and intolerance which still dominate so much of the world and so many phases of life in this country. Incidentally, all present will be well dined, delightfully entertained and offered a new store of inspiration for the future; three not unimportant items in these days of ration cuts, gloom and uncertainty. Tickets 16s., from P. Victor Morris, Secretary, N.S.S.

Charles Bradlaugh, the founder of the *National Secular Society*, would, we think, have congratulated the people of the South American Republic of Uruguay upon their recent decision to abolish the office of President of the Republic, in order, presumably, to prevent the extension to Uruguay of a clerical fascist regime similar to that of General Peron on the other side of the River Plate. It is often forgotten, nowadays, that Bradlaugh took an active part in the First Spanish Republic of 1872-3.

## A ROMANIST'S REVIEW OF THE REFORMATION

BERNARD SHAW once stated that if Hilaire Belloc renounced "the scarecrow at the Vatican" he might become an excellent publicist. Descended on his English side by Unitarian ancestors, a Catholic bias is evident in all his recent writings. Belloc's *Elizabethan Commentary* (Cassell, 7s. 6d.), is a striking example of his prepossessions. He stresses the plebian origin of the Tudors who, with the sole exception of his venerated Queen Mary, as the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, had royal blood in her veins, with the additional merit of her persecuting allegiance to the Roman Catholic religion.

The alleged intrigue of the brother of Protector Somerset, Thomas Seymour, in the reign of the boy king, Edward VI, with the young princess Elizabeth is taken for granted and, that she was sexually abnormal, is unreservedly given as the reason of her single blessedness. According to Belloc, Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, was afflicted with severe syphilis for which there was then no medical alleviation, and he assumes that Elizabeth was

## "THE FREETHINKER" FUND

Donations for the week ended Saturday, January 5, 1952:—

A. H. Deacon, 6s.; F. H. Thomas, £1; M. Distin, 16s.; S. Benton, £2; S. Mooney, 7s. 6d.; N. C. H. Jolliffe, £1 4s.; Thos. Benton, 10s.; A. Hancock, 2s.; Wm. Angus, 18s.; E. L. Hogg, 5s. 2d.; Mrs. S. Hassall, 15s.; Miss E. M. Lloyd, 16s.

Total for week, £8 19s. 8d.

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in consequence the victim of the same venereal disease. Belloc asserts that: "She suffered continually like Henry, from a running ulcer in the leg. It was colourless and therefore less repulsive, but it lowered her self-esteem. . . . From her father, Henry VIII, Elizabeth inherited her capricious and violent angers, especially aroused in brief passionate protests against restraint, her singular incapacity for affection, and her taste for erudition (in which she excelled him)."

Henry's divorce from his first wife, leading to his headship of the Anglican Church, the repudiation of Papal supremacy, and the dissolution of the monasteries, are treated as the main causes of the Reformation. The transference of the Abbey Lands to secular landowners is viewed as the economic change which was destined to impoverish and overthrow the Catholic cult. Still, there is not a word in Belloc's book to show that influential Catholic families, at least in Henry's reign, shared with the anti-clericals in the spoils of the monastic estates. It is true that the seizure of ecclesiastical property continued under Edward VI, while even under the devout Catholic Mary, it proved impossible to induce the nobility to surrender their recently acquired possessions to the Church.

As for Henry's divorce, that might readily have received Papal approval had not his Holiness been at the mercy of the Emperor Charles V, the nephew of Henry's repudiated wife. In the modern sense, divorce was impossible in Catholic States. Yet, as Belloc concedes: "Annulment was, with the really important [people] a matter of three conditions only, wealth, influence and consent. If you had wealth you could fee the services of ecclesiastical lawyers who fattened on the ill deeds of others, if you had influence and place your plea for annulment of marriage . . . would be favourably heard."

With the legends of Elizabeth's girlhood in which Belloc revels we need not dwell. Her irreligion he cannot condone. He admits that her early life was in danger and that her puritanical pretences were used as defences. Her choice of Cecil, better known as Burghley, showed her solid sense when he became her principal minister. "She would have been a fool had she done otherwise," Belloc observes, "and no one ever has or could accuse Elizabeth Tudor of being a fool. She had found ready to her hand one of the best political brains in history and she took every advantage of that good fortune." Still, even this statement Belloc almost nullifies when he asserts that Elizabeth's sound judgment was devoid of virtue.

At least one-third of the land in England appears to have been held by religious bodies when the seizure of their revenues by the Crown under Henry, made the Reformation inevitable. If, instead of transferring the monastic estates to lay hands, the Crown had retained them, Belloc contends that the monarchy would have been the wealthiest in Europe. "At first," he urges, "it looks as though the Crown might still have kept the greater

part of its new wealth, but in the short seven years between the fall of the last great monastic establishments, Harold's foundation of Waltham Abbey and the death of Henry, the Abbey lands passed from hand to hand by grant and purchase until they were dispersed among a large body of new owners whom it would be impossible to displace."

Henry is depicted as an autocrat by Belloc, yet he gained the consent of Parliament for all the innovations of his reign. To the divinity that doth hedge a king, popular indifference to Henry's proceedings is attributed. Yet Belloc admits that the convents and abbeys had declined both in public estimation and in numbers. Also, he avers that: "When the monks and nuns were left free to repudiate their vows they did so freely. . . In the decay of the Middle Ages there was hardly any religious community which had not a considerable fraction of men and women who would have been glad to escape from the discipline of conventual life (a discipline already badly relaxed) and it was mere danger of poverty which stood in the way of their release."

Belloc heavily discounts the stories of monastic depravity reported by the Commissioners who inspected the abbeys before their dissolution. Even if one-twelfth of the enormities alleged had existed, he contends, then the religious would have been damned by the populace. Moreover, he urges that clerical scandals were fewer in England than on the Continent where the abbeys still survived.

Belloc regrets that every attempt to restore Romanism in England has failed. After 1688 and the reign of William III, Catholicism retired underground and was decidedly defeated. During the 18th century he estimates that probably one family in 100 retained the old time cult and, when the Catholic faith to some extent recovered, this was due to the immigration of the Irish peasantry after the famine in Erin in the 'forties of the 19th century when they supplied cheap labour to English agriculture and industry. "There was indeed," he notes, "a certain recouplement of Catholic numbers in England from converts, many of them distinguished. But the numerical effect of that effort was small and soon disappeared. What the future holds in this capital matter no one of us knows, but we can testify for the moment that the Faith in England has been lost."

None the less, Irish immigration still goes on, and a few second-rate novelists have recently joined the Roman Church. Also, disciplined Catholic voters at elections, intimidate members of all political parties, even Communists, most of whom place expediency above principle. The old Radical secular consistency has virtually vanished. Therein resides the danger that concessions will be granted to Romanists for which there is no ethical justification which would be utilised by the meanest methods conceivable. In any case, Catholicism in the past has proved itself capable of almost every iniquity.

T. F. PALMER.

#### MR. TABORI SUMS UP

I WAS both flattered and amused by the long article Mr. H. Cutner devoted to me in the December 23 issue of *The Freethinker*. Flattered that he should employ all that space to reply to my short letter; amused because though I had been called many things in my life, this is the first time somebody had dubbed me a Spiritualist fellow-traveller.

I wonder what it really means? Is it someone who subscribes to the *Psychic News* under a pseudonym? Or a man who wears a false nose when he attends a seance? Or someone who keeps a bit of ectoplasm in a hidden drawer? I wish I knew; I wish Mr. Cutner had been more explicit.

However, I am afraid that he is still persisting in misquoting and misinterpreting me. I'll try therefore, in words of not more than two syllables, to explain what I meant.

In both my letters I was in no way concerned with the question whether it was Lieutenant Irwin or the spirit of Hiawatha who attended that seance. I wasn't there; nor was Mr. Cutner. I don't know; nor does he.

What I was concerned with was merely the evidence on which he based his rather violent and hasty conclusions. In my twenty-five years as crime reporter, foreign correspondent and historical novelist, I have learned to go always to primary, original sources if at all possible. If I want to learn the truth about Einstein's latest theory, I won't use a colourful account in the *News of the World* for my source. If I want to know what a play or a book is like I will go and see the performance or read the book—instead of relying on a dramatic critic or a reviewer. If I were a Freethinker, I would insist on being free from prejudice and on really *thinking*—rather than jump to conclusions without taking the trouble to find out the truth.

I never said that I thought the account of the seance was edited, falsified, changed or modified in any way by Harry Price or his secretary or by the medium. What I said was that Mr. Cutner—or anybody else desirous to find out the truth—should not use a Sunday paper's version of the seance but go to the original sources. This Mr. Cutner had consistently refused to do. He relies on the *Sunday Dispatch* and on a telephone call from Mrs. Goldney. For him this is ample evidence.

I was most amused by Mr. Cutner's explanation why he did not consult Mrs. English, Mr. Coster and Mrs. Garrett. He said that I wanted him to do this because—wicked fellow-traveller as I am—I hoped this would win him over to spiritualism. Indeed, Mr. Cutner's rationalism must rest on very weak foundations if it can be so easily shaken by talking to the participants of a seance—none of whom, including the medium, have ever been spiritualists!

I was concerned in this whole dispute not with the question whether the R.101 case was a genuine case of paranormal powers or supernatural phenomena. I was concerned—and still am—with Harry Price's good name. No one dared during his lifetime to suggest that he cooked the records of seances, falsified accounts and then bribed people to keep quiet about them. Mr. Cutner has done this by implication; and others have emerged from obscurity to nibble at the reputation of a man whom in his lifetime they would not have dared to accuse of such dishonesty. That is why I wanted Mr. Cutner to go to the original sources. I wasn't concerned with what he would find there; nor am I now. But I wanted to put an end to the insinuations and innuendoes which have been seeping into the Press since Harry Price's death.

Mr. Cutner sees fit to drag in a good many things which are beside the point. The Talking Mongoose, the Walpurgis Night or the Rosalie case have nothing to do with Lieutenant Irwin and his alleged or assumed return. I have presented these cases in my biography as fully and frankly as I could and left the readers to form their own opinions. But I must repeat that I never said at any time

that the record of the R.101 seance was changed, tampered with—nor is there the slightest proof of this.

I can assure Mr. Cutner that he is entirely wrong when he presumes that Harry Price "made up" the Rosalie story. Having read every letter, every scrap of writing Price left behind, I am certain of one thing. He had practically no imagination. He was as little capable of writing a fictional ghost story as of winning the Grand National.

It is for Mr. Cutner to investigate honestly and fully the R.101 case—which is still unsolved—or to remain convicted of bad faith and muddled thinking.

And for his information: I am not, I have never been a spiritualist nor a fellow-traveller.

PAUL TABORI, PH.D., LL.D.

### "GAINFULLY OCCUPIED"

I do not deem his days to be mis-spent  
In riding round the lanes of leafy Kent;  
No business ever takes him to a place,  
But joy to see the county's lovely face.  
On second thoughts, I think that I am wrong,  
Which calls for an amendment to this song.  
For truly it is business brings him there—  
To drink in beauty and to breathe fresh air:  
Man's greatest good is that which gives him joy;  
Obtaining this, we business must employ.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

Superstition is, always has been, and forever will be, the enemy of liberty.—INGERSOLL.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### THE LATE R. H. ROSETTI

SIR,—I was one of the fortunate few who heard R. H. Rosetti give his very fine lecture on "What is Civilisation" in Birmingham on November 25, and I feel I cannot refrain from paying my very humble tribute to a very great man.

I am also quite certain that everyone else who did so was profoundly impressed, especially during the few minutes of his peroration, the inflection of his voice, the sincerity of his appeal will live for ever as an inspiration stronger than anything that I have yet known.—Yours, etc.,

A. C. WEBB.

#### THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

SIR,—I always enjoy Mr. T. F. Palmer's articles, and I was glad he saw fit to draw attention to the remarkable volume entitled *The England of Elizabeth*. I had thought of doing so myself, as I was struck by the frigidity of the religious approach and the attitude of "a plague on both of you" in dealing with Catholics and Protestants. Extraordinary to relate, there is a reference to "The Christian myth." This from a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, is shocking. However, it can be assumed that the "myth" has to be honoured in the observance at least once a Sunday. Else—farewell Fellow!

Can it be that this Fellow is fearful of the results of this rash phrase? In the course of a lecture to the Royal Society of Literature on "The Elizabethan Age and Ours," there was a passage extolling the Church of England. A lady friend of mine in the audience contrasted this with the book.

In the same lecture, Mr. Rowse saw fit to refer to "those harmless lunatics who think that Shakespeare did not write his own plays." Knowing there would be no discussion, he was bold. I wrote to him, giving a list of the lunatics, and challenging him to debate under the auspices of the Oxford University Heretics Club, where I have lectured. There was no response. He is prejudiced, as was evinced by several inaccurate allusions to Edward De Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, in his otherwise fine book. A letter from a lady pointing these out was also ignored. However, Mr. Palmer's feelings will not be exacerbated by this, as I recall that he was my opponent in my first debate on the question of Shakespeare authorship.—Yours, etc.,

WM. KENT.

### COPERNICUS

SIR,—Mr. Ebury is wrong in stating that the long-delayed publication of the work of Copernicus was due to his fear of persecution. What Copernicus really dreaded was ridicule. His own preface to Pope Paul III gave reasons for publishing the book, and quite fearlessly pointed out the absurdity of a stationary central earth; he scorned the stupidity of those who believed in such, and derided those who distorted Biblical passages to lend support to these ignorant theories. Such candid remarks prove conclusively that Copernicus did not delay publication because he feared persecution.—Yours, etc.,

RUBY TA'BOIS, F.R.A.S.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

#### Executive Committee Meeting, January 3, 1952

Present: Mr. Ridley (Acting President), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Corstorphine, Cleaver, Ebury, Griffiths, Johnson, Shaw, Woodley and the Secretary.

New members were admitted to the Parent and Fyzabad (Trinidad) Branches. A letter from the latter branch was read, and it was agreed to provide help in the form of an adequate supply of literature.

The previous discussion on membership campaigns was resumed. Mr. Ridley said that an up-to-date survey in pamphlet form of the current social and political situation, together with a statement of our movement's attitude in relation to it, was needed. Messrs. Ebury and Griffiths thought that the cost of this should be borne by the Secular Society Ltd., and it was agreed that the matter be submitted to this quarter. Meanwhile, a sub-committee consisting of Messrs. Ebury, Johnson, Shaw and the Acting President and Secretary was appointed to report on ways and means of bringing the Principles and Objects, and Immediate Practical Objects of the Society into line with the existing situation.

Mr. Woodley questioned the purpose of the South London Branch meeting advertised with the title, "The Future of the N.S.S." Mr. Shaw said that it had only one aim, to arouse a greater enthusiasm in members of his branch for the work of the Society.

Mr. Shaw raised the question of a more thorough investigation of applications for membership before admission was granted. Discussion revealed that the general opinion was that present safeguards were adequate.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary, N.S.S.

### 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

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Public Lecture Hall, Northgate).—Free-thought Demonstration, Sunday, January 13, 3 p.m. Quiz on: "Religious Interference with the Peoples' Rights." 7 p.m., lectures by GEO. COLEBROOKE and JACK CLAYTON.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "English Religion in 1952."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 15, 7 p.m.: E. ROYSTON PIKE, "Gibbon—The Man Behind the History."

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. RICHARD A. LAUDER, "The Educational Value of the Film."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. H. FAGAN, "What is the B.S.F.S.?"

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespears Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. PAT SLOAN, "Russia, the Press and the Truth."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 13, 11 a.m.: Dr. HELEN ROSENAU, "Artistic Movements and Revivals of the Past."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: JOSEPH MCCABE, "The Pope and the Population."

## CHRISTIANITY AND THE BRITISH TRADITION

FROM time to time the claim is put forward, in various quarters, that much of what is best in British life stems from the religious belief which was for long in the background (if not always in the foreground) of British thought. In other words, the traditional ideas of religion are held to be at any rate partially responsible for the way in which the political, economic, legal, and educational systems of Great Britain have developed. Now, Freethinkers will not accept all this—or if they do accept it, they will hold that it is the less desirable aspects of life which have the inspiration of religion as their origin.

It will, however, be very difficult for unbelievers of whatever school to answer the case set out in a recent book. This is *The British Tradition* (Mowbrays; 3s. 6d.), which contains a series of broadcast talks delivered in the Home Service of the B.B.C. during May, June and July, 1951, by such people as Canon Charles Smyth of Westminster, Sir John Maud, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, and Dr. Lovell Cocks, Principal of the Western College, Bristol.

Each contributor to this interesting little book has taken one province of British life and has shown the way in which the traditional religious beliefs of the British people have influenced it. And it is, as I have already said, not easy to dispute the findings of these contributors. They are, of course, all Christian believers of one school of thought or another; and their religious beliefs, naturally enough, colour what they have to say. But they all point to the conclusion that in matters of morals and ethics, particularly, this country—and, for that matter, most of the Western world—is tending to live on its spiritual capital. In other words, these men would say that the religious beliefs which have come down from the past have done a good deal to build up the British way of life. They admit that the beliefs are now held only by a minority of the population, and they would hold that this is a danger to the democratic principles of which British life is still founded. Whether readers will be found to agree with all that is said in the book is, of course, another matter. But at the same time it is impossible to deny that the case can be logically argued. And it is up to those who do not agree to show that it is in error. Personally, I think that it will not be easy to upset the position put forward so persuasively in the book.

J. R.

## B.B.C. AND RELIGION

FROM an article in the *Radio Times* entitled "British Broadcasting in 1952, we quote the following: "In this issue we outline some of the plans which have been made for sound and television programmes in the first quarter of 1952. Religious broadcasts, news, informed comment, direct reflection of notable events in the national life, plays, features, music, Variety—all these have their place in the pattern." It is significant that religion is first on the list, indicating that it comes first in the scale of values of those in authority at Broadcasting House. Does this reflect the general opinion of the people in their homes? What do they say when a religious service or talk comes on? At least nine times out of ten it evokes the same response—"Oh, turn that off!"

Of course, the B.B.C. knows this. Everybody does. "But," says the same article, "the values of the West, the way of life we cherish, have not only to be defended

externally; they have also to be sustained internally." Who are the "we" referred to in this precious dictum? Obviously not the great majority whose opinion of religious broadcasting is such that their unvarying response to it is—"Turn it off!" Are they the news readers, the speakers on secular topics, the actors, the musicians or the comics? We doubt it. They might well be those who run the Religious Broadcasting Department. If so, confound their impudence, and confound the weak-kneed lack of spirit at Broadcasting House that submits to this dictation!

P.V.M.

## THEATRE

"**The Day's Mischief.**" By Lesley Storm. The Duke of York's Theatre.

THIS is a problematical play about a girl of seventeen who falls in love with her schoolmaster. The matter might have worked itself out without a murmur from either side, had not the schoolmaster's discerning and jealous wife not noticed this unspoken passion and approached the girl directly. This might have been a suitable way of dealing with an elder girl, but this young girl is suddenly made aware of her feelings. The schoolmaster likewise might never have mentioned a word about his feelings, but he knows the issue has been forced by his wife's clumsiness. Rather thoughtlessly he arranges to meet the girl secretly late at night, for the sole purpose of sorting out the situation. In her confusion the girl on leaving him, instead of going home, decides to go to London where she knows nobody and sort out her thoughts and feelings. She is reported missing.

Her absence causes alarm in the girl's family, consisting of her parents and a partly-demented aunt. It also surrounds the schoolmaster with scandalous talk, and forces his resignation from the school. The wife retains her jealousy to the extent of hoping the girl is dead, even knowing that this would reflect very seriously on her husband, who in turn can find sympathy from nobody. Finally, he is detained under suspicion, and his wife—believing she has lost him in any case—drowns herself just before news comes that the girl has returned home. There are many interesting side issues to this play, and there is much food for discussion, but there is no angle to it that cannot be satisfactorily explained by logical reasoning.

When the play ends we do not know the reactions of the schoolmaster who still has to learn that his wife is dead, and so we may think that there should be a sequel. Some may argue that in any case his association with the girl should be over, but others may say that it could leave the way clear, seeing that he is free to marry again and has no professional discipline to bind him.

Beatrix Lehmann, as the girl's demented spinster-aunt, is outstanding in a rather small role. Muriel Pavlow takes the role of the girl with sincerity and great delicacy. Ian Hunter is humanly a schoolmaster, not quite strong enough to meet the situation. Certainly another fine performance. Catherine Lacey is impressive as the jealous wife. Walter Fitzgerald, as the journalist father, and Nuna Davey as the anxious mother are both convincing.

There was also a good performance from Mavis Walker in a short part as head of the school.

The idea is similar to that of *Young Woodley*, but in reverse. The moral is, however, if you are a middle-aged professional man, keep away from young girls.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.