

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Secularism in an Age of Crisis

IT is, to-day, an accepted truism, repeated to the verge of monotony, that our age is, in a manner peculiar to itself, an age of crisis: we are all crisis-conscious nowadays! On the causes and, still more, on the remedies for this state of crisis, there exist innumerable theories and, what we may, perhaps, term the literature of crisis has reached gigantic proportions. However, of the reality of the current social and intellectual impasse with which the inappropriately termed "Homo Sapiens" now finds himself confronted, there can be no possible room for doubt. We are living in an age of revolution. Humanity has known such ages before; what is unique and peculiar to our age; what, indeed, constitutes its essential and distinguishing characteristic is that this revolution is no longer merely partial or local in character but is, contrarily, world-wide in its range and universal in its diffusion.

Of this current world-crisis there are, of course, many operative causes, perhaps the most fundamental of these is the ceaseless, ever-accelerating tempo of the technical revolution which has now proceeded uninterruptedly for two centuries; which has virtually abolished space and time, as more static ages used to understand these limiting conditions of human activity; and which has created that terrifying alternative which dominates all our thinking, either collective suicide or an undreamed-of advance into an hitherto undiscovered civilisation of incalculable potentialities.

Over and above this fundamental fact of the machine age and its revolutionary impact upon the static and slow-moving society of pre-industrial times, there are, of course, also operative a host of secondary causes; "the cold war," product of warring ideologies and clashing power-politics, and its resulting "race for armaments"; the growing pressure of population on the means of subsistence; "The revolt of Asia" (and, to a lesser degree, of Africa) which now threatens to unloose a world-wide colour-war. One could go on repeating such operative causes indefinitely; but about the *fact* of the present world-crisis no room for doubt exists.

In all this crisis-panic how stands traditional religion in such revolutionary times as ours? Upon this point, we should avoid extremes of either excessive optimism or pessimism. Organised religion, Christianity in the Western world, has not died out and faded away almost automatically in and because of an age of science, as certain too hopeful spirits at one time optimistically forecast. Far from folding-up in this convenient way, the Churches are fighting back energetically. In which respect, it is a mistake to under-estimate Christianity which, particularly in its Roman Catholic form, displays a resiliency and an adaptability to changing circumstances far superior to that manifested by any other of the traditional religions.

However, no more than such traditional institutions as monarchy, property-rights, and similar ancient institutions have the Churches escaped the impact of the social and mental revolution of our times. They are badly shaken

and keenly apprehensive about their future. This fact is abundantly demonstrated by the declarations of the more far-sighted Christian leaders, such as the recent book of the Archbishop of York entitled *In an Age of Revolution*. The same apprehension is also demonstrated more dramatically by the morbid obsession with "Communism" demonstrated by the most experienced of Christian institutions, the Vatican. To a certain extent, of course, the present "Cold War" between the Vatican and the Kremlin is actually an old ecclesiastical rivalry in a new form; Rome versus Constantinople, which has now passed on its heritage to Moscow; Roman versus Greek Christianity. However, Communism, whatever its merits or demerits, is a virile offspring of the modern era. It is, in fact, precisely its *modern* character as the expression of *modern* revolutionary conditions which gives it an essential advantage over a still largely mediaeval Christianity.

In the modern world, as in earlier ages, "the survival of the fittest" holds good. That ancient chameleon, the Vatican knows this only too well, hence its present morbid anxiety about its future and its rabid hatred of the revolutionary forces of our time. The other Christian Churches, too, know also how really precarious their present position is. For reaction is apt, in the long run, to be an unreliable bulwark. Evolution or, if one may be permitted the term in view of recent controversies!—dialectics apply even to organisations and creeds which rashly reject them. In the long run, Christianity has no immunity as a supernatural creed; like all things beneath the sun, it must adapt itself or perish. At present, everything suggests the latter alternative, perhaps sooner than many even of its enemies imagine. For we are of the opinion that the Churches are too weighted down by mediaeval lumber to ride successfully the present unprecedented world-wide tempest.

And Secularism? How does it stand, to-day, in this era of unprecedented change, the salient characteristics of which we have already outlined above. In a sense one may affirm that the advocacy and, to a considerable extent the effective establishment of the secular State and society over so much of the contemporary world, itself actually marks one of the most impressive triumphs of the social revolution of our times. For the merest glance at the process of world history is sufficient to demonstrate that, throughout recorded history, freedom and democracy have been rare and fitful exceptions, whilst authoritarianism in Church and State has been the normal usage of human society. In that respect, indeed, it would be hardly any exaggeration to affirm that Freethought is the Social Revolution. Historically, indeed, the social and intellectual revolutions have proceeded, as it were, hand-in-hand. Both, indeed, stem from a single source, the French Revolution (1789-94) which, simultaneously, launched the militant creed of democracy upon the world, represented also the cradle of Socialism and the forcing-house of Freethought and of the Secular State which, prior to the French Revolution, remained confined to aristocratic circles and to the academic writings of a few lonely and persecuted advanced thinkers. Both Freethought and the

social crisis of our times stem from a single source. We cannot commit historical parricide by denying our revolutionary ancestry!

Thus we regard the current role of Freethought as a revolutionary role, as, indeed part, and a most important part, of the social revolution which is now transforming our contemporary world and "casting the kingdoms old into another mould." But "not all that glitters is gold," and not all that passes for social progress is, in reality, such. We regard the current role of Freethought in the contemporary world as especially concerned with the first-named of the three great slogans of the French Revolution with, above all, "Liberty." It will be the task of militant Freethought not only to drive home its secular attack on the crumbling structure of Christianity but, equally, to defend the autonomy of human reason and of the individual against the "total state" and against the repressive dictatorships of our time.

A heavy responsibility devolves upon Rationalism and upon individual Rationalists to-day. For never, surely, was the practical application of Rationalism more necessary for the attainment, not only of mental but, also, of social sanity than to-day. In the light of the overriding crisis of our times, how trivial appear the differences that have divided our movement in the past. We all pursue the same substantial goal, if by different, and appropriately different methods. We still face a powerful and relentless foe vowed to our total and irremediable destruction. To-day, as always, the proverb holds: "If we don't hang together, we shall all be hanged separately." "Unity is strength," and Reason applies even to Rationalists. In this spirit we close our ranks and go forward boldly.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### THE COMPANY OF JESUS

A SCION of the Spanish aristocracy, Ignatius Loyola, was trained in the Court of Ferdinand the Catholic King. His aspiration was for military distinction with its chivalry and glitter, but he was naturally religious and, at an early age, he penned a glorification of the first of the Christian apostles. Yet he would probably have remained among the forgotten knights of the conflicts of Charles V, had he not been severely wounded in both lower limbs at the battle of Pampeluna in 1521. The most agonising surgical operations proved futile, and he remained a lifelong cripple.

During his prolonged bed-ridden period he re-read his favourite romances and meditated over the New Testament and the lives of the saints. Debarred from an active career, he became as visionary as Swedenborg himself and imagined himself in the personal presence of Christ and the Virgin Mother. Apparently this pious illusion was due to his physical sufferings and emotional strain. He also persuaded himself that he was divinely ordained to establish in the religious realm the knightly eminence that had been denied him by his incurable wounds. Departing from his kindred, he travelled to Montserrat, resolved to emulate the austere lives of celebrated saints. His knightly arms he discarded before an image of the Virgin and donned the coarse raiment of hermits. He desired to journey to Jerusalem, but the penances and scourges he imposed upon himself, with the fasts he imagined placated the wrath of God, so weakened him that his confessor forbade them. But after many trials and tribulations, Ignatius reached Jerusalem bent on the conversion of the Saracens, but the heads of the Christian Church in that city denied his authority. So he returned to Spain where, as Von Ranke notes in his *History of the Popes*, he was charged with heresy in his teaching and in inducing others "to partici-

pate in those spiritual exercises on which he had now entered."

Consequently, Ignatius was ordered to study theology for four years before he dealt with Catholic doctrine. Later, he went to Paris, where the University was deemed the greatest in Christendom. The studies there—so alien to a soldier's—he found extremely difficult. Still, he made there two important converts and thus laid the foundation of the Society of Jesus. This semi-secret Society was destined to play a part in Romanism little suspected by its creators.

After the Pope had given his approval to the new order, the Jesuits, now considerably reinforced, gained widespread success in Italy. Their first appeal was to the multitude, but they soon approached the leisured classes. Great as were their successes in Italy, the order made greater conquests in Spain. Xavier was made a saint, while other Jesuit fathers became the confessors of kings. Immense congregations were enthralled by their preachers. Neophytes were sent to study in Paris and Jesuit teachings soon spread to the Netherlands.

As Protestantism spread, two Roman Cardinals recommended the revival of the Dominican Inquisition with intensified powers and, as Leopold von Ranke testifies: "The Jesuits account it among the glories of their order that their founder, Loyola, supported this proposition by a special memorial." The Papal bull authorising complete Dominican control of this nefarious institution was promulgated in 1542.

The original rules of the Jesuit Society were extremely inflexible. Its members were vowed to celibacy and the renunciation of all endearments of customary life. Love or attachment to kindred must be suppressed, while the Superior of each order exercised authority against which there was no appeal. No Jesuit could compose or peruse a letter, or even receive one, that was not read by his Superior. Loyola's rules gave the Superior full knowledge of all his subordinates' virtues or vices. Obedience to the vows of the Society and the Superior's commands must be observed, whether good or evil, regardless of consequences. For the Society is to each individual Jesuit, the earthly representative of God himself.

Loyola, the General of the Order, stood supreme above all. It is true that any deviation of the General from his own rules was, in theory, safeguarded, but the autocracy of the General was rarely questioned. At one time, a Jesuit was precluded from acceptance of an ecclesiastical appointment and when Ferdinand I proffered the bishopric of Trieste to a Jesuit, a letter from Loyola induced the king to withdraw his offer whereupon "the General caused solemn masses to be said in thanksgiving and a Te Deum to be sung."

Monastic austerities, such as they remained, were completely banished from the Jesuit fraternity. Religious exercises were reduced, while flagellations, fasts, and vigils were not encouraged. Labour itself must never become excessive, lest the spiritual powers of a Jesuit become impoverished.

As the Jesuits increased in number and influence, colleges were erected for the training of youth. The older professors, whose views had been so greatly broadened by the neo-Paganism of the Revival of Learning, were expelled and replaced by the disciples of Loyola, who were usually preferred by the civil authorities in Romanist dominions. Moreover, as much Jesuit instruction was imparted gratuitously, this served to secure its popularity, both with high and low sections of the community. A deep religious tendency was thus given to education, which in great measure survives to this day.

Unless they have been gravely misrepresented, the Jesuits have in recent centuries been privy to, or guilty of the blackest crimes, whenever the interests of their Order were menaced. Even the distinguished and scholarly Catholic historian, Lord Acton, testified to their lying propensities. Unfortunately, they became the trusted confessors of princes, prelates, and other powerful dignitaries, and this privileged position procured them far-reaching authority. It is stated that they pursued "one uniform method in their manner of giving absolution, to exercise themselves in cases of conscience, to adopt a short and rapid mode of interrogating their penitents."

That Ignatius was deeply superstitious and sincere, there can be no more doubt than in the case of Pascal, whose *Provincial Letters*, which relentlessly expose Jesuitry at its worst, form one of the world's classics. In the writings of Loyola, as in those of Pascal, there is an overpowering consciousness of human sin. The former meditates concerning the belief "that for one single crime the angels were cast into hell, while for him who has committed so many, the saints are for ever interceding." Yet, because of human transgressions, a divine Redeemer has been sent, with whose compassion, and that of the Holy Virgin Mary, salvation may be granted.

When Ignatius Loyola died, his Company of Jesus had attained world-wide recognition and its members still exercise an influence, the range of which few Protestants, or even Rationalists, are aware. Largely as a result of Jesuit casuistry, the Freethinking spirit, once so brilliantly displayed by Erasmus, within the Catholic communion, has, thus far, never been completely recovered.

T. F. PALMER.

### THE RHYTHM OF THE COSMOS

(Continued from page 163)

BOTH assume a succession of events according to immutable laws, the operation of which can be foreseen and, therefore, events predicted or anticipated. "It (magic) assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably, without intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus, its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature. The magician does not doubt that the same causes will always produce the same effects." Magic, thus, is antagonistic to faith, even of the natural religion, which allows gods to regulate the operation of natural phenomena according to the wishes of the supplicating man. Yet there was a time when magic and natural religion were closely associated, proving that the latter was also an expression of rationality inherent in human nature, "a device of human reason."

Both magic and natural religion assumed, one explicitly and the other by implication, that man can have the power to free himself from the domination of the ruthless forces of nature by controlling them either directly through spells and incantations, or indirectly by propitiating the gods who were conceived as enormously more powerful men. When experience exposed the limitations of the terrestrial magician's power, the savage looked up to celestial ones—the gods of the natural religion. They were not conceived as superhuman immortal beings; they were parts of nature, being originators and controllers of its various phenomena. They represented the ideal of man—personifications of power and freedom, power as the means to freedom.

Animism is supposed to prove that the primitive man instinctively believes in supernatural forces. The

defenders of this view hold that animism was antecedent to magic, being the origin of religion. Their whole argument centres around the term "anima" which, they maintain, was conceived by the savage as something immaterial, spiritual. The notion of an immaterial soul, which eventually came to be a cardinal dogma of religion, is said to have originated in animism. The controversy about the priority of animism or magic is anthropologically important; philosophically, it is immaterial. The case of those who hold that it is human nature to believe does not improve even if priority is conceded to animism.

The doctrine of soul, indeed, originated in animism; in that sense, the root of religion may be traced to the philosophy of the savage who believed that all actions and reactions in nature were purposeful. But the *anima* was not something separate from the body; it was a "vaporous materiality," identified with breath. There is abundant philological evidence to that effect. In all the old languages—Hebrew, Sanskrit, Greek, Roman, Slavonic, Arabic—the words for soul or spirit etymologically mean "breath." Now, breath is a property of the body; animism thus placed soul in the body. "It is one thing to regard an object as having anthropological consciousness and another to believe that consciousness is a distinct power capable of quitting it or of surviving its destruction or of existing independently." The human spirit is not necessarily believed to enter upon a life after death, still less is the spirit of the animal. The word *anima* means life. The soul of animism clearly was a biological notion. It was not a matter of belief, but result of experience. Savages hold the animistic doctrine of soul "on the very evidence of their senses interpreted on the biological principle which seems to them most reasonable." Tylor, therefore, speaks of the "logic of the savage." On all competent authority, animism was also an expression of the rationality of the primitive man. The fact that it contained the germ of religion only proves that the latter also is essentially rational.

If the prejudices of animism did not place their sanctions outside nature, natural religion was the rational effort of the barbarian to explain the phenomena of nature and his experience thereof. Had the notion of a creator or an Almighty God or a cosmic force been current in the dawn of civilisation, then the barbarian would not feel the necessity to search for the cause of such natural phenomena as rain, storm, movements of the stars, etc.—a search which led to his inventing the gods of natural religion. The search was an expression of his innate rationality: everything must have a cause. The gods were conceived as great magicians who could make nature bend to their will, and magicians were men who knew the laws of nature, and that knowledge gave them the power of divination.

Natural religions were theoretical systems "devised by human reason, without supernatural aid or revelation." A similar view was held many centuries later by Thomas Aquinas. "Some religious truths are attainable by the unaided exercise of human reason, while others required the disclosure of supernatural revelation before they could be known." This doctrine was preached by medieval theologians with the object of reconciling Christianity with the natural religion of the pagans. But incidentally it admitted that simple deism was a rational cult as against the mysticism of the revealed religion. M. N. ROY.

(To be concluded)

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### ACID DROPS

In that popular B.B.C. feature, "Any Questions?", Canon Darling recently showed how England could be completely won for Christianity. All that was required was the missionary zeal and religious fervour of our Communists. Given these two things, and England would once again belong to the Church. Canon Darling did not exactly indicate which Church, but such a question as the *truth* of Christianity did not trouble him, and it looked as if both missionary zeal and religious fervour could deal with "truth" once for all.

In sober fact, Canon Darling must live in a world of his own—a world apart, not merely from the slashing attack of Freethought, but even from that of the Higher Critics. Surely he knows that no amount of zeal and fervour can answer either Freethought or the Higher Critics. When Canon Darling can deal with their criticisms, when he can produce evidence for the Devils, Angels, Miracles, and Gods of Christianity, he can claim the right to talk about converting England. Until then, all he says on this point is so much ignorant blather.

The "Sun-Times" of Chicago offers daily prizes to people who can tell its readers "How I Found God." This ought to be a splendid chance for Freethinkers to rope in some cash, for most of us have found God—that is, a God of sorts. We have found Jupiter, Apollo, Krishna, and lots more, but we have an idea that none of these Gods would qualify for the prizes. The only God allowed by the *Sun-Times* is a Palestinian God called Jehovah, or his dark-skinned Son Jesus, and somehow or other we have never found either. To say that they can be found in a book of Oriental myths called the Bible would only make matters worse. But what a pity—a daily prize of £9 or so would be worth winning.

Another American Journal, the *Chicago Daily News*, prints articles daily on "What my religion means to me"—most of them boring accounts from sheer nobodies. We appreciate the difficulty the C.D.N. has in getting hot news "stories"—but most, if not all, these stories from religious fools can be fairly designated as tripe. Still religion must be boosted up even at the expense of sanity—as it mostly has been in the past and is now.

Sometimes the all-believing Christian must be in despair. Churches near a pub or a cinema will get struck by lightning, the pub and the cinema escaping; pilgrims to some holy relics will be killed in a train or a coach accident; a card player or pub crawler will win a huge prize at football pools while a devout Christian will spend endless money on postal orders and postage for years and fail to win sixpence. We all know these cases—so here's another one. In Austria, a farmer went to a holy mountain shrine to give thanks for his safe return from a prisoner of war camp, and a cross fell from the shrine and killed him. Perhaps Jesus thought it was an anti-religious Communist—though if that is not the explanation, we give it up.

Our bishops are obviously staggered at the success of "spiritual" healing when performed by Spiritualists, so it is not surprising that the *Daily Express* is at last conducting an "inquiry" into the whole problem "inspired by the recommendations of the Bishops to the Archbishop of Canterbury." The paper gives first the testimony of a doctor who insisted that the cures of five of his patients were "miracles." Needless to add, his religion "is the

bluff, simple one of the soldier"—which actually means "believe and don't ask questions, or . . . .!"

What we would like to know is whether these "miracles" were reported in the usual medical papers with full details of their pathology, names of patients, and the treatment given by medical men in such cases and why this treatment failed? Without the fullest details, it is quite impossible to test this wonderful doctor. In any case, one who has the simple faith of the average soldier would be ready to believe anything.

### GOOD FRIDAY GOES INTO THE DISCARD

GOOD FRIDAY in Sydney is something in the nature of a phenomenon. At any rate, the proceedings that mark that day must be unique in the English-speaking world. Good Friday falls within the fortnight during which is held the annual show of the Royal Agricultural Society, and on that day the attendance was again this year about 125,000. There is no pretence of anything sacred about it. The attractions include trotting races, hurdle jumping, wood-chopping contests, and a medley of side-shows, with spruikers outside them stridently urging you to pay your shilling to see the fat lady, the skeleton man, the death-defying cycling, and all the other thrills and chills that have been devised to coax a coin from your pocket.

All-round rejoicing is, in short, the order of the day. Is not this a complete reversal of what the churches would have us associate with Good Friday? Clearly, from the Christian point of view, it is the day of all days in the year that should be reverently observed. Yet the thousands who turn out to enjoy themselves must include professing Christians of all denominations. Is not this, then, the plainest possible proof that the Christianity to which they pretend is mere empty lip service—that it is, too, a flat refutation of the clerical claim that Sydney is a Christian community? This remark extends far beyond Sydney, for those attending the show embraces visitors from all parts of the State, and from everywhere throughout the Australian Commonwealth and far-away New Zealand.

Confirmation that, for the great mass of the people, Christianity is more or less moribund, insofar as having any regard for the alleged crucifixion, or what the Bible generally teaches or preaches, is being reluctantly supplied from the churches themselves. In an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on Good Friday, Rev Allan Walker, the most vocal of all Sydney's pulpiteers, said: "Probably the majority of our people have so lost touch with the churches that they have but the haziest ideas of what happened on the first Good Friday. Their children have none." This view—expressed by a member of the Anglican persuasion—was quoted word for word in an address the following Sunday in St. Mary's Cathedral by the Catholic Archbishop, Rev. Eric O'Brien, who added: "In as far as that statement is true, it reveals a condition of national ignorance which no responsible citizen can condone. I am afraid that it is not wholly untrue."

So if there's virtually nothing else where Anglicans and Catholics can come together regarding religion, they are at least in complete agreement as to Christianity to-day being a hypocritical mockery—even to a Catholic citing from his pulpit an Anglican on this point!

FRANK HILL  
(Sydney, N.S.W., Australia).

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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.

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

## SUGAR PLUMS

The Rationalist Press Association celebrated its annual dinner on Thursday, May 15, at The Holborn Restaurant, London, W.C. Professor Heath, president, of the R.P.A., was in the chair and the guest of honour was Lord Chorley, himself a prominent member of the R.P.A. Some hundred and sixty guests were present—a representative audience, which included such well-known and distinguished advocates of advanced ideas as Mr. Joseph McCabe, Professor Young, last year's Reith Lecturer, Mr. Paul Blanshard, the distinguished American publicist, Mr. Archibald Robertson, Mr. Avro Manhattan, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, president of the World Union of Freethinkers, Mr. H. J. Blackham, of the Ethical Union, and Mr. Hector Hawton of the South Place Ethical Society. An excellent dinner was followed by speeches from the chairman, Professor Heath; the Guest of Honour, Lord Chorley; Mr. F. C. C. Watts; and Mr. Royston Pike.

The usual toasts, in particular that of the R.P.A., were drunk with acclaim. All present heard with regret that Mr. Watts, for reasons of health, was resigning the chairmanship of the Board of Directors of the R.P.A., a post in which he is to be succeeded by Mr. J. Reeves, M.P. In his valedictory speech Mr. Watts made an eloquent plea for unity amongst the various sections of the Freethought Movement, who are, after all, pursuing the same ultimate goal, and he expressed his pleasure at the presence of representatives of the National Secular Society, the Ethical Union, and the South Place Ethical Society. Mr. Watts also indicated the desirability of a new approach, one specially adapted to attract youth, by the Rationalist Movement. An informal dance concluded a most successful social occasion, which demonstrated afresh the continuing vitality of the Rationalist Press Association. Long may it continue its splendid work of intellectual and social enlightenment! We trust that the future will witness a close and effective collaboration of all sections of the Freethought Movement against the common enemies, intolerance and superstition.

Mr. H. Cutner's address "Marx or Malthus?" last Sunday in Birmingham caused a lively discussion with an interested audience. He has once again to thank Mr. F. J. Munster of the Birmingham Branch of the N.S.S. for his generous hospitality.

## THE DESERTED ROOM

There now is peace in the deserted room;  
The chattering folk have gone,  
All gone downstairs;  
A human tide has swept the floor,  
Leaving but shallows, and a peace.

But is it still the peace of heretofore?  
This room, for good or ill, is not the same  
As it was ere the human tide did rise,  
And people warmed its panels with their breath.

Who, who can know, if something of an aura  
Of bright intelligence, of smiling beauty,  
Clings not about its pictures and its walls?  
None may know; yet well it may be so.

Peace now prevails in this deserted room;  
The tide has ebbed,  
But in its shallows lies a different peace.

BAYARD SIMMONS

(His 200th Poem in *The Freethinker*).

## "THE ATONEMENT" CLARIFIED

ON Monday, May 19, the exclusive columns of *The Times* found space to announce a meeting of The Society for the Study of Religions that afternoon to hear an address on "The Doctrine of the Vicarious Sacrifice or Atonement, Historical and Ethical" given by a speaker "F. A. Ridley, Esq." "Strange," I thought, "some devout layman of one of the Churches, with the same name as the Editor of *The Freethinker* and the Acting-President of the National Secular Society!"

Curious to hear this cardinal doctrine of Christianity expounded by my friend's namesake. I went to the meeting held at Livingston Hall, a centre of Nonconformist missionary activities, where the speaker turned out to be our F. A. R. himself! The Chairman (Mr. F. J. Payne, prominent English Buddhist) introduced him as "a Rationalist," not mentioning the two offices in connection with which readers of this journal know him best. The audience consisted mainly of serious people whose hobby is the study of the beliefs and practices of all religions with the laudable aim of bringing about a greater mutual understanding between their adherents. It included at least one clergyman and, by way of contrast, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, President of the World Union of Freethinkers. I gathered, however, from the Chairman's remarks and the discussion after the lecture that the Society inclined towards treating religious beliefs, whatever their nature, with considerable gentleness.

The speaker handled such an audience, in the writer's opinion, in a manner well calculated to open their eyes to the true nature of the doctrine that was his subject. He traced its origin from primitive ideas long antedating Christianity, and practices involving both human and animal sacrifices. He quoted Christian and other authorities to show the evolution of the doctrine under the pressure of differing ethical environments. At one time it represented a trick whereby the Devil was "double-crossed" and cheated out of his hoped-for reward for giving up his hold on mankind; at another, the placating of an outraged deity, God the Father, by the sacrifice of His Son; while to-day it is presented as the example of the highest self-sacrifice, to impress upon the world the loving kindness of the Christian Deity.

Mr. Ridley did not end here as the usual run of lecturers, anxious not to offend religious susceptibilities, might have done. He continued by expounding his own view that,

to anyone who has progressed to a rejection of the theistic ideas upon which the doctrine of the Atonement is based, no vicarious sacrifice is of the least value in relation to the evils that abound in the world. A system of ethics to meet present needs must be founded on a rational approach to existing conditions, and the knowledge that only the efforts of mankind can provide cures for individual and social ills.

Questions were numerous and were dealt with adequately, but the discussion by members of the audience did not attempt to face up to the lecturer's arguments. The importance of his contribution to the Society's studies was, however, recognised by Mr. F. Victor Fisher, Honorary Director of the Society, who announced that the address would be published in the next issue of their journal "Religions," circulating amongst a select body of students scattered all over the world. I came away convinced that a useful sowing of the seed of Freethought had been accomplished in a field where it should bear good fruit.

P. V. M.

## THE PRIEST AND THE SCIENTIST

### The Unfrosted Priest

ALL the members of The Lens Club were more than a little impolitely curious about our guest of the evening. We knew that he was one of the most distinguished photographers of the epoch: we also knew that he had been a priest. There were so many questions which we would have liked to have asked him, and which we had to avoid, that we found ourselves talking in fatuous commonplaces. Mathers, president of the Club, actually said, "Sometimes I find it hard to believe that our ancestors managed to live without cameras!"

Our guest of the evening smiled. "I know what you mean," he assented. "Perhaps I'm the one man alive who can give you a positive assurance that cameras had to happen. It was just some clumsy accident of the machine of our planet which held up the discovery of photography for so many unenlightened years. You may like to hear the story of how I know all about it: it is also the story of how I lost my faith.

"You see, when I was a young priest, an old scientist lived in my parish. Our paths hardly ever crossed; but one day he sent for me. He said he'd succeeded in his life task, and he wanted my testimony. If I, the priest, had to admit that the materialist had solved the Riddle of the Universe . . . well, people would accept his monograph more readily. He also wanted me to take a photograph as documentary evidence: he knew I was a keen photographer.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have obeyed the summons; but I was young and I did. I went to the large house where the scientist lived, and he took me to a great room where an exquisite machine stood close to the French windows. The thing seemed to be made of floating bulbs of different sizes and brightness. As I was staring, I heard the scientist say that this apparatus had taken him forty years to perfect; but it took me a minute or two to realise it was a planetarium—a model of the earth and the solar system.

"Gazing at it, I lost sense of scale. I had an odd feeling I was in the vast spaces of the infinite. But the scientist brought me back to reality by asking me if there was enough light to take a photo. I gathered he wanted a close-up of the orb which represented our earth. This differed from the others insofar as it was covered with minute metal filings. The scientist said it was magnetised.

"Then he explained to me that he had worked out, by prodigious astronomical calculations, the position of the

stars when life first appeared on the earth. This he had copied in his model of the heavenly bodies, where myriads of light years were compressed into inches. On this scale, he said, movement could be relatively modified and effectively represented by fluctuating electrical charges in the different globes.

"He pressed a switch and told me that now electrical magnetic forces were at work in all the stars and planets of the model, each being charged according to its size and distance from the earth. He told me to watch the effect of the forces—the gravitational pull of the stars—on the surface of our earth. He said it would be represented in the movement of the minute metal filings dusting our globe.

"Well, there was a stirring in the dust powdering the surface of our earth. As if caught in some conflict of magnetic currents, the shavings rose and fell. Then a trembling wave passed through them, and there seemed to be a spreading of minute clouds above vortices; and in those clouds I saw outlines of trees and vegetation which might have luxuriated in the first days of living history. I may have been hypnotised by the shining balls; but I was absolutely fascinated, for now my eyes were adjusted to the tiny dimensions. And after the trees, I began to vision monsters—dinosaurs and shapes of other forgotten creatures in the whirling dust.

"'You see how they came into being,' the scientist whispered, 'how everything can be accounted for simply by the force of the stars acting on this earth.'

"The outlines of the vision seemed to become firmer; and then . . . there were forms of men. And by some trick of concentration, it seemed to me that I watched the mannikins with an enlarged eye. One seemed to single himself out from the rest. He held up his hands, and in those hands there was a microscopic camera!

"'NOW!' cried the scientist, 'now take your photograph!' He was trembling with excitement, but I couldn't move. I was so appalled at the impertinence of a pinch of dust that was—*trying to photograph me!* And then there was a flash and a hideous crackling, and my eyebrows were singed, and the exquisite model was a tangle of broken wires and polished metal; and the scientist was demented. Actually, he died of an apoplectic fit.

"But, gentlemen, I had seen why we have to have cameras—and why we need not have a god."

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

## THEATRE

"Uranium 235." By Ewan MacColl (Embassy Theatre). BETWEEN world wars I and II the documentary play developed and proved to be a good vehicle for the propagandist. "Uranium 235" uses up much of the evening preaching platform-fashion over the footlights to the audience, and giving well-known facts about the progress of science and the development of the atom bomb. We are then told that the choice rests with us; to use science to serve us or to destroy us.

But between the soap-box utterances there are some good short snatches of drama and ballet illustrating the points to be made. The Atom Ballet and a sketch of the Spanish War were notably good. But I for one do not feel—as the author apparently does—that we are not awake to the dangers that surround us. Still, thanks to him for making sure.

The virtue of the evening's entertainment rests not in the play as written (despite its ideas) but in Joan Littlewood's very remarkable production. I would like to see more of her work.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## CORRECTION ACCEPTED

SIR.—I thank "J. Effel" for his correction, which I unreservedly accept.

He misquotes the title of my book. To posit the question "Does materialism explain mind?" is to suppose that the work of science, in this connection, is completed. I aver, more cautiously, that it *can* do: that is, it is capable of doing.

Whilst writing, may I remark on the curious assertion of M. N. Roy: "The origin of a new species is a mutation" (p. 147). Not so. Mutations are usually diseased weaklings and seldom leave a permanent mark on evolution.—Yours, etc., G. H. TAYLOR.

## BIRTH CONTROL

SIR.—In your issue for May 18, C. N. Airey has not considered the main issue of Birth Control. This is that Human Beings can double their numbers every few years and go on doing so in perpetuity, and that neither Science nor any Economic System can double food produce every few years in perpetuity. Therefore, World population *must* be stabilised to World food produce and in perpetuity, or the residue of the Human Race, if any, will not be worth continuing.

It is idle to suggest that this can be done without contraception—it never has been so done in human history. War, in the past, has done nothing but kill off the fittest! War in the future will do likewise besides bring economic ruin.

As for the survival of the fittest the most competent are not necessarily the "fittest." They might be very competent brutes and tyrants, or worse! Birth Control is not "non-selective" as family limitation gives those born a much better chance. Without contraception we have World overpopulation and the consequent survival of the "strongest"—possibly even ultimately Barbarians—and not necessarily the "fittest."

If by the "fittest" is meant a better civilisation, the Unity of Man, the Fraternity of all Nations and Peace, Prosperity and Goodwill then Birth Control is the only way. To regard the offspring of women as "work-slaves" and "cannon fodder" may be a survival of the strongest, but it is also a vile perversion of Human Nature, a barbaric victimisation of all women, a cruel violation of their hearts and minds, and a veritable rape of their bodies—barbarism of the vilest and most bestial nature.—Yours, etc.,

RUPERT L. HUMPHRIS.

## OUR OLDEST FREETHINKER

SIR.—In Mr. E. Pankhurst, aged 94, and a member of the West Ham Branch of the N.S.S., we have probably found the oldest living supporter of our movement and our paper. I am indebted to his daughter, Mrs. M. Quinton, until last year an active member of the N.S.S. Executive Committee, for this information. Mr. Pankhurst joined the old Plaistow Branch in 1880, and is proud of his first certificate of membership signed by Charles Bradlaugh. He has also been a constant reader of *The Freethinker* since its inception in 1881. In those turbulent times he was an active, fighting member of the Society, receiving his share of the persecution that was the lot of leaders and rank and file alike.

Since this question was opened in your columns a number of readers, inspired by the example of the veterans cited, have applied to me for N.S.S. Membership Forms. May I inform others interested who have not yet done so that following the Whitsun Conference, the newly-elected Executive Committee of the Society will hold its first meeting on Thursday, 5th June. Its business during its year of office will be to further principles and objects aimed at the overthrowing of superstition, exploitation and inhumanity, and the establishing of sanity, justice and brotherhood. What better demonstration of the practical nature of these principles and objects could there be, and what greater encouragement to the Committee than a large number of applications for membership at its first meeting?

The position to-day is that the case for Secularism is invincible, its appeal universal, its potentialities limitless, but its organisation is not nearly as strong numerically as it could and should be. Now, therefore, is the time for every believer in our cause to join up and help carry the fight to victory, realising that victory can only be achieved by the mobilisation of all the human and financial resources at our command.—Yours, etc., P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary, N.S.S.

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**ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING.** By Chapman Cohen. First and second series. Price 3s. each; postage 3d.

## A CHRISTIAN'S TRIBUTE

SIR.—I must thank you personally for your kindness in publishing a Christian's point of view in your paper, *The Freethinker*. I won't take up any more of your space seeing you have your own point of view to pursue week by week, but I do appreciate the spirit in which this correspondence was carried on.

I look forward to interesting articles week by week.—Yours, etc.,

RAYMOND MCKEOWN.

## BOREDOM AND WAR

SIR.—Mr. Blakestone has dropped his "boredom" like a hot brick and now tells us that "wars will cease when men refuse to fight." Good! Perhaps he and his "peace" friends will now do their best to persuade Russian soldiers not to fight. Our own soldiers *hate* soldiering and war—I know that from practical experience—and, therefore, require no persuasion. Why not, therefore, begin with Russia?—Yours, etc., J. RENTON.

## DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

SIR.—Let me assure Mr. Kennedy that I did not "overlook" anything that he mentions, but I do notice that his dragging in Thomas Paine is quite in accordance with what I feel about Dialectical Materialism. Paine was a Deist and I am beginning to be more and more convinced that Dialectical Materialism requires a God like Paine's, and is, therefore, "vitalistic" in character. I therefore oppose it.—Yours, etc., H. CUTNER.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, MAY 22

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Hornibrook, Shaw, Ebury, Johnson, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Barker, Tiley and the Secretary.

New members were admitted to the Parent, Manchester and Sheffield Branches. A letter from the Glasgow Secular Society requested that this Society be accepted as a branch of the N.S.S., and the Secretary was instructed to welcome their entry.

The receipt of a legacy of approximately £1,500 from the estate of the late Michael Slater of New Zealand was reported. He was not a member, but Mr. Hornibrook had met him in New Zealand and had introduced him to Freethought literature a good many years ago, which had soon converted him into a supporter of our cause.

Reports of satisfactory meetings held were received from Messrs. Ridley, Brighton and Clayton. The Secretary reported on a visit from Prof. Dr. Gerhard von Frankenberg, President of the German People's Federation for Freethought, with whom Mr. Ridley had made arrangements for the interchange of information regarding events in both countries. The Secretary also reported on final arrangements made with the Leicester Secular Society regarding the Conference, and submitted proofs of advertisements to appear in the *Leicester Mercury* and the *Leicester Evening Mail* announcing the Sunday evening Demonstration.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## OUTDOOR

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

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

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

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, May 24, 7 p.m.: A. ELSMERE.

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Messrs. WOOD and O'NEILL.

## INDOOR

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Public Demonstration, Sunday, June 1, 7 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, Chairman, with representative speakers.

### OUT OF TOUCH

"I NEVER read the pronouncements of generals before battle, the speeches of führers and prime ministers, the solidarity songs of public schools and left-wing political parties, national anthems, temperance tracts, papal encyclicals, and sermons against gambling and contraception, without seeming to hear a chorus of raspberries from all the millions of common men to whom these sentiments make no appeal."—(George Orwell in "Critical Essays.")

I was rather forcibly reminded of Orwell's remarks when the Pope issued his recent directive to Catholics re birth control and abortion, and judging from the spate of protests and criticism in the national press, the common men's chorus of raspberries on this occasion was very loud indeed.

Much less furore has been caused by the Archbishop of Canterbury's recent appeal for "a new Reformation," no doubt because, in this case, there was no threatened interference with people's private lives. Even so, to blandly "request" a revolution in public morals and a wholesale return of all Britons to the Christian faith is such a "tall order" that I think it must have received a very lusty chorus of some millions of proletarian and middle-class raspberries (or the Middle Class equivalent).

The Archbishop suggested that the new reign was a challenge to all to rededicate themselves to the Godly life: it should make lukewarm Christians zealous Christians; good citizens better citizens; bad spouses should become faithful spouses, and bad parents dutiful parents; self-seekers should become workers for the common good and spiritual parasites contributors to the "common stock of spiritual power and obedience to truth." We needed to expel "the drab and the dreary, the sordid and the salacious, the sadistic and the sexy, the trivial and the trumpery, and the assumption that everyone's main end in life is for more money, more clothes, more amusement." All this should be replaced by "the open and the honest, the encouraging and the uplifting."

A tall order, indeed! And what, one may well wonder, is whether the Archbishop seriously believes that such an appeal will really bring about a moral revolution in this country. Or is this just another official pronouncement of the kind expected of the Head of the Established Church on an important national occasion? Whatever we may think, one thing is certain, and that is that there will be no such revolution forthcoming, simply because it is not in human nature to be 100 per cent. virtuous. As Orwell says: "On the whole, human beings want to be good but not too good, and not quite all of the time."

• But assuming that the Primate's virtuous society were possible—I wonder how many British citizens would wish to live in it? What could be more deadly dull than a society of exemplary orthodox citizens—a society without an occasional interesting adultery, without amorous adventures; a society without an occasional spicy murder, a good honest-to-goodness case of swindling or arson? How unthinkable is an England of perfect husbands, perfect wives and perfect children; an England of orthodox honest and loyal citizens—an England without hypocrites and fiddlers, without rebels and heretics! No *News of the World* and no *Daily Mirror*! How dreadful! Then, too, if we were all virtuous all of the time, then our excellent Archbishop of Canterbury and his splendid body of subordinate hierarchs and priests would be unemployed. And what a disaster that would be! Our judges, lawyers and policemen would all be thrown on to the labour market. And that I just refuse to believe. But consider the effect on art and literature. These are said to reflect the soul,

the genius and the activities of the society in which they are produced. Can we imagine the kind of dull, prosy, bowdlerised and emasculated art and literature which a 100 per cent. virtuous society of yes-men would produce? The whole thing, in fact, is as unreal and unthinkable as any of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas or any of the Utopias of history.

Yet this idea of a perfect society is persistent in Christian propaganda. We can recall, for instance, the type of parson, who, when the municipal elections are on, calls for a council composed entirely of "true Christians." Or the crusading type of parson—the muscular Christian—who will not rest until the whole of the human race is converted to Christianity.

What very odd conceptions of man and society Christian ministers do have! Is it, I wonder, because they are nurtured in a false idealist philosophy—the myth-making Platonic philosophy which sees man as a series of abstractions or "principles"? Is it because they hold themselves aloof from society and so are lacking in knowledge and understanding of man and his relation to society? Is it because they rely on 4th century equipment to deal with a complex scientific society which they do not understand?

The reasons are many, but the plain fact is that the Church is completely out of touch with modern society. We may be sure that Christian pontiffs and hierarchs will continue to issue their verbose manifestos and lists of "principles" which are intended to solve complex social problems, but always they will be met, as now, with a shrug of the shoulders if not a chorus of raspberries, because human nature and human society are so very different in reality from the Christian conceptions of them. They just are out of touch.

GEORGE BELL.

### KINGS ON HIRE

"England in those days was still aristocratic—country houses and town houses retained all their pomf. Democracy had begun to exist as a theory, but not as something that coloured people's everyday thoughts. There was an old Duchess of Cleveland whom I knew who was outraged by the institution of Bank Holidays, and exclaimed acidly, 'What do the poor want with holidays? They ought to work!' This was thought a little extreme even in those days. But at the same time some sympathy was felt for the old lady in having to endure such a vulgar and democratic period.

With the greatness of the aristocracy went the comparative unimportance of the Crown. The great Whig families felt towards the Hanoverian Dynasty much as they might to an old family butler. It was they who had hired the dynasty and, if at any time it should cease to give satisfaction, they could send it back to Hanover."—Bertrand Russell, O.M., in *The Observer* (May 18, 1952).

*The National Secular Society is visiting Leicester this week-end, by invitation of the Leicester Secular Society, to hold its 87th Annual Conference. A Reception of Delegates takes place at 7-30 p.m. at The Secular Hall on Saturday, May 31, to which members and friends are invited.*

### Public Freethought Demonstration

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The case for Freethought and Secularism put by local and visiting speakers

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(Editor of "The Freethinker")

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