

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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ON several occasions before, in this column, we have drawn attention both to the political activities of the Roman Catholic Church in general and, in particular, to the current persistent attempts of that organisation to inter-penetrate the English political parties. In the course of the past few weeks, fresh evidence of this activity has been provided in the British Press; the political ubiquity of the Roman Church has been, once again, indicated by the fact that both the extreme "Left" and the extreme "Right" have been the objects of Catholic political propaganda.

On Sunday, November 30 last, our Tory contemporary, *The Sunday Express*, carried an article bearing the somewhat startling title, "Our Guest of Dishonour." The author of the article in question was Mr. Evelyn Waugh, the well-known novelist, and our unwanted guest is none other than the Jugo-Slav dictator, Joseph Broz, better known as "Marshal Tito," who is to visit this country next March as the guest of the British Government.

Mr. Waugh—and, presumably, Mr. John Gordon, the Editor of *The Sunday Express*, who gave prominence to Mr. Waugh's article—does not like the gallant Marshal. He roundly accuses Tito of persecuting the Roman Catholic Church and of aiming systematically at the total extirpation of Christianity in Jugo-Slavia. What else, asks our author, can we expect from a political leader who recently boasted that he, and not Stalin, is the true heir of Marx, Lenin and authentic Bolshevism? Marshal Tito, argues his Catholic critic, is the last, as Nero was, traditionally, the first of the persecutors of the Church. Mr. Waugh accuses Mr. Eden and the Foreign Office, who officially invited the Jugo-Slav leader to visit Britain, of being indifferent to the persecution of Christianity—an accusation which would surely cause Mr. Eden's pious Christian and Tory predecessors at the Foreign Office, Balfour, Curzon and Austen Chamberlain, to turn in their graves. The British Government would not invite a notorious Jew-baiter here; then why this eagerness to welcome the Jugo-Slav "Nero"? Can it be that our political opportunists don't really object either to Communism or to dictatorship, but are merely so afraid of Russia that they gladly clutch at any stick, even a Communist one like Tito, which can be used to beat off the present Muscovite menace?

The attitude of Christians—that is, presumably, of Roman Catholics—concludes our Catholic author, has nothing in common with such political opportunism; the enemy is Marxism, Leninism, Communism, in all and any of its forms. Tito, equally with Stalin, is the "anti-Christ," the enemy and persecutor of the Church. If and when he arrives in Britain, millions of Christians will pray to God to remove the stain of this dishonour from our land which, plaintively complains Mr. Waugh, is still "largely a Christian country."

Whilst novelist Waugh was holding forth in this strain

in *The Sunday Express*, his fellow-novelist and fellow-Catholic, Graham Greene, was writing in a similar strain to the Liberal and Nonconformist *News Chronicle*. However, the Liberal journal does not, apparently, agree on this point with Messrs. Waugh and Greene. For, soon after, an article appeared from the pen of Mr. A. J. Cummings, political commentator of the *News Chronicle*,

rebuking the Catholic opposition to the Tito visit.

What effect, if any, will all this Vatican-inspired hullabaloo have on Marshal Tito and upon his projected visit to Britain? Probably, none at all. Indeed, the Marshal is, nowadays, so busy with his shooting or, more

accurately, hanging war with the Cominform, that he probably has not got the leisure to read reports of the English Press. However, the Pope has just done his best to raise the Catholic issue again in Jugo-Slavia by announcing that Archbishop Stepinac, of Croatia, now under house arrest in Jugo-Slavia for treasonable activities against Tito's regime, is shortly to be made a cardinal. Marshal Tito has, on occasions, been compared with our own King Henry the Eighth. Let us hope, for the sake of Archbishop Stepinac, that he does not react to the creation of the new cardinal in the same way as did Henry on a famous occasion. We recall how, when Pope Paul the Third bestowed a cardinal's hat on John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, then imprisoned in the Tower of London for treasonable activities, Henry remarked prophetically that "the head will be off before the hat is on." And so it was! (1535.)

Mr. Waugh, as we have seen, does not like Tito. He even declares in his article that Catholics "recognise in him one of the six or seven most deadly and most powerful enemies of all they hold holy." We hold no brief for religious persecution, whether conducted by the Pope, Stalin, Tito or anyone else. But readers of a recent issue of *The Freethinker* (December 7, 1952) will recall that an Irish correspondent, Mr. F. C. Edwards, had some rather different information on what really happened in Jugo-Slavia with regard to religious persecution there. According to him, it was R.C. Archbishop, now Cardinal, Stepinac and his Catholic Fascist backers who, before the advent of Tito and his Communist regime, began by savagely persecuting the Serbian "Orthodox" Church, always an obstacle to Vatican domination, and the same charge is made in much greater detail in Mr. Avro Manhattan's new book, *Catholic Imperialism and World Freedom*, which we hope to review shortly in this column.

No doubt it is Mr. Manhattan's terrible inditement on this and other contemporary issues that explains the savage attack made on his book in a recent review by Mr. Hugh Delargy, M.P. Mr. Delargy's review, entitled "A Catholic Witch Hunt," appeared in our left-wing Socialist contemporary, *The Tribune*, the organ of Mr. Aneurin Bevan and his group, the absolute political

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Catholics at Cross Purposes

By F. A. RIDLEY

antithesis of *The Sunday Express*. However, is not the Catholic Church "universal" by definition?

Mr. Delargy is himself a Roman Catholic and writes in *The Tribune*, which regularly demands more "Socialism in our time." Perhaps Mr. Delargy is too busy in his parliamentary duties to have found out that the Popes, not once, but repeatedly, have declared all forms of Socialism, the most moderate equally with the most extreme, to be incompatible with Catholicism, and under the ban of the Church. If Mr. Delargy and his Catholic Labour colleagues do not know this, we shall be delighted to supply them with the exact references. However, in apparent ignorance of the fact that he is himself a heretic, our Catholic Socialist proceeds to denounce Mr. Manhattan with the utmost vigour and asserts that Catholicism is essentially a rational creed. Shades of Karl Marx and

Robert Owen! However, it is unnecessary here to defend Mr. Manhattan: the brilliant author of *The Catholic Church Against the 20th Century* is quite capable of looking after himself in that field.

So much for Mr. Waugh on the extreme Tory "Right" and Mr. Delargy on the extreme Socialist "Left." However, we notice a certain discrepancy between our two champions of the "One True Church." According to Mr. Waugh, Tito is, if not "anti-Christ"—we assume that Stalin is still that?—at least he is well in the running for the role of "Catholic Enemy Number Two." Mr. Delargy, on the other hand, is a follower of Mr. Bevan, Tito's friend, champion and recent guest, and is himself a writer in *The Tribune*, which regularly endorses and defends Tito. It is all very confusing! Can it be that our Catholic apologists are arguing at cross purposes?

Abolish the Oath

By C. G. L. DU CANN

PERJURY is rife, and even rampant, in English law-courts. This fact is so blatant and obvious that no one familiar with the courts will trouble to deny it. Those responsible for the administration of justice cannot escape blame for this shocking state of affairs.

To some extent, the existence of the religious oath is responsible. That oath requires attention for it is a highly evil, and indeed scandalous, thing.

If an atheist enters the witness-box he is (thanks to the late Charles Bradlaugh's life and work) a privileged being. He has only to say that he will speak the truth—and that is enough! Upon his simple word, the atheist is accepted as a witness, and his testimony accepted too. But let an ordinary Christian enter the box. His simple word is not accepted. He must be bound by a compulsory oath—no ordinary oath either, but a most tremendous and far-reaching oath, before he or his testimony will be accepted. The obvious implication can only be that atheists are truthful folk by the mere fact of being atheists, while the Christian is such a congenital liar that he can only be restrained from lying or perjury by Omnipotence at the very least.

A curious state of affairs. You would think Christians would be so insulted by this invidious comparison that they would agitate for the abolition of the oath. But not a bit of it. They have not wakened up to it yet.

Extraordinary Christians, like Quakers, for example, whose religion precludes oath-taking and who are so eccentric in their Christianity that they believe the Bible when it says "Swear not," are also privileged, like the atheist. But the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, the Methodist and all their like are not accepted except "on oath."

Let us look at this Oath. Its terms are fantastic and will not bear a moment's thought. That is why most people (who never think) gabble it without a qualm "because everybody does, you know." Here it is:—

"I swear by Almighty God that I will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Consider that. The *whole* truth for instance. No human being can tell the whole truth about anything. And the very next second, judges or barristers or solicitors are telling the wretched oath-taker not to tell the whole truth: They say "Not that"; "We don't want that"; "Don't go on"; "Confine yourself to my question"; "We can't have that"; "That's not evidence"; "You mustn't tell the Court about that." For not "the whole truth," but only what is technical legal evidence is allowed to be uttered by the oath-taker. This is the law and the procedure. And

these things shamelessly contradict the oath immediately after it is uttered.

Consider further the words: "And nothing but the truth." After saying those words, the witness may be asked, especially if he is an expert witness, his mere opinion, or what he thinks! As if too, the majority of human statements, however conscientiously made, have not inevitably, some admixture of falsity in them. Few opinions are 100 per cent. true. How can they be, the average human mind being the feeble and fallible instrument that it is! Even the best human mind is not a precision instrument of mathematical accuracy.

Under the circumstances of that oath, the Pope of Rome or the Archbishop of Canterbury could hardly escape becoming in some degree at least a liar and perjurer in the sight of God, and perhaps in the sight of critical and observing men. How then shall ordinary John Smith escape the damnation of that oath, even if he is only giving evidence about a motor-car's collision?

Such an oath as this is, of course, a survival of barbarous days. It is a vestige of the time when the illiterate and superstitious lower-classes could be scared by the terror of God's name into the truth, or when the educated upper-class hoped they could be so scared. But how does the average English witness react to-day? He takes God's name in vain as lightly as if he merely swore by Uncle Tom Cobley and all.

Can you wonder that in England the oath in law-courts is almost universally despised and disregarded as soon as it is uttered. Recently, one or two of the Judges of the High Court, in a Mrs. Partington's attempt to make the oath more respected, have insisted on "Silence" in court while it is being administered. This is but one timid step in the right direction and its value lasts no longer than the silence.

Put against this useless and blasphemous oath, the simple "affirmation" allowed to the privileged atheist and eccentric religious person by the Oaths Act, 1888, that he does "solemnly and sincerely and truly declare and affirm" that he will speak the truth. Which of the two is the sensible and dignified form for a self-respecting human being to utter? Even the Chinese oath that if the Chinaman does not tell the truth his soul will be cracked like a cracked saucer is better than the Christian oath.

Not the least ludicrous aspect of the Christian Oath lies in the fact that in strict law those silly words about "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" are not prescribed at all. They are merely an old expression which survives. Formerly, the words ended "So help me God."

but this "accustomed concluding expression" has been dropped. It is time the expression "the whole truth and nothing but" was also dropped.

Whether Scotsmen lie more than Englishmen may be doubted (except by Englishmen) but the Scotch form is even worse than the English. The Scottish form consists of swearing: "by Almighty God as I shall answer to God at the Great Day of Judgment that I will speak the truth, etc." This is even worse than the form imposed on English Christians.

If the Christian Churches really revered their God—nay, if they had a real jot of respect for "His Holy Name" as they pretend—how could they allow Him to be invoked by professing Christians over such a legal trifle, say, as a parking offence or the like? Christians profess a horror of blasphemy, of sacrilege, of breaches of the Third Commandment, which threatens that "the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." Yet directly they enter the box in a law-court they are ready to commit all three sins. The plain truth is that the religious oath in its present form is a horrid thing to atheists and religious

people alike. Its continued existence is due only to apathy, conservatism, and want of thought. It is an indefensible thing. It is a disgrace to those who take it and those who supinely allow it to be taken. It ought to have been attacked and abolished long ago. Certainly it ought to be abolished now.

One argument will be brought forward in its favour. That is that already there is too much perjury and the oath may deter some people from perjury by playing on their superstitious fears

Experience seems to show that this is merely "wishful thinking" (as it is called). Modern English liars are more likely to be deterred by the fear of a prosecution for perjury, here and now, than by the fear of God's Wrath hereafter and in eternity. In any event there is one, and only one, way to get rid of liars and lying. That is to get rid of human beings altogether. It is more convenient to get rid of the oath perhaps, even in England where individual human beings are regarded as of little importance, except as present tax-providers and future fodder for Atom-bombs.

What is Nature?

By FREDA PECKMAN

MY recent letter posing the above question has aroused some controversy and heated exasperation at my ignorance. Yet I remain unenlightened. I am well acquainted with the scientific ideal of complete objectivity and impartiality, but ideals, as we know, are not always practised. My argument is not with scientific method as applied to pure science itself, i.e., in the discovery of penicillin, or the splitting of the atom. Here the true scientific outlook is brilliantly displayed. But I do not consider that science always displays the scientific attitude to those matters which are actually outside its province, matters which, strictly speaking, belong to philosophy.

Science, being analysis and classification, likes to have everything as far as possible "cut and dried," hence scientific Materialism, which abhors any nook or cranny through which might creep a trace of supernaturalism. But the fundamental problems of philosophy cannot be reduced to scientific formulæ, because by their very nature they are not amenable to such treatment and classification. The scientific mind is the *open* mind. To cling dogmatically to uncompromising Materialism in our quest for certainty is as unscientific as an unquestioning religious faith.

It is important, then, to distinguish between the scientific outlook and the scientific method. The former is applicable, and admirably so, in every aspect of life. The latter is applicable only to scientific research itself, and cannot be extended to art or poetry—or philosophy! These are *not* "cut-and-dried."

Who, or what, is Nature? Has "Nature" any actual objective existence, or is it one more subjective theory in the mind of man to explain the unexplainable, such as the God idea, Pantheism and Plato's Forms? The whole question is far more complex than might be supposed, and, indeed, warrants closer attention than I can give to it here.

"Nature" is an abstract word, and abstract words are notoriously the very devil to define! "H. C.," in his article, seems to be saying that Nature can't be explained, but everybody just *knows* what it is. This is reminiscent of the Plato dialogues, where definitions are sought of such abstract ideas as "courage" and "justice." No satisfactory conclusions are reached, but an interesting fact emerges. Instead of defining, say, courage, Plato's protagonist merely gives examples of courageous acts. But what, insists Plato, is that quality possessed in common by

all these varied acts which entitles them to be known collectively as acts of courage to say that they possess the quality of courage is to argue in a circle! This is "H.C.'s" method. I ask, "What is Nature?" He writes of magnets attracting iron, of trees growing fruit and says: "That is Nature." These phenomena are rather part of a collective, continuous process which, for want of a better word, we term "Nature."

With the decline in religion at the end of the 19th century, the word "God" came to be in bad odour with scientific materialists who preferred to speak of "Nature." What exactly did the change entail? Religion believed Nature to be God's creation, and its laws subject to his direction. With the elimination of God, Nature was inevitably raised to higher and independent status. (There was also a change in sex, but this may be disregarded; Nature is apparently feminine.) Nature is regarded as a force which makes its own laws, and rules itself without being subject to some higher force known as "God." In fact, one must agree that God is definitely redundant. The argument is simple: A universe which made itself is far more reasonable than a power, i.e., God, which made itself, and then made another power, i.e., Nature, which runs the Universe in co-partnership, more or less, yet always liable to sudden interference from the capricious elder partner.

But in replacing "God" with "Nature," we have not solved all our difficulties—that is, philosophical difficulties. Is Nature purposive? Is it good, bad or indifferent? Above all, how do we reconcile Nature, "red in tooth and claw," with that sublime trinity of the human spirit—whether these values be objective or subjective—the good, the true and the beautiful?

The Divine

Why should a poet listen to a priest?
He has Apollo and the Muses Nine.
Drop in on him, and stay to dine,
And speak of this and that, and not the least
Of Truth and Beauty, and that Love which flows
From the warm heart of life: all man truly knows
Of the divine.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

Acid Drops

No one will be surprised at any kind of censorship in the "satellite" countries, and therefore one can understand Hungary getting a book censorship as silly as the Roman Catholic one. Conan Doyle, Louisa Alcott, A. A. Milne, and other similar dangerous authors, are all banned, to say nothing of Rider Haggard, Hall Caine, and Ouida. Even Latin grammars and books on chemistry are forbidden. It must be sheer balm for Roman Catholics to see how widely their "Index" is being copied in totalitarian countries.

Two brothers, one 17, the other 14, convicted of robbery with violence were given severe sentences the other day. But their case will never be quoted by advocates of plenty of religion for our schools. They were highly commended by the local vicar, the elder boy being not only a "steady fellow," but a member of the church youth club. The *Daily Mail* headlines the case, "Do Such Bullies Sing in the Choir?" Come, come, the answer is easy. Of course they do.

More convincing proofs for the existence of God from the B.B.C. Dr. Farrer, who is a chaplain at Oxford, answered the question the other day: Does God direct men? with a convincing affirmative. Was it not God who made Joan of Arc hear "voices," obviously God's voices? Whose voices could they be but God's? Then, what about the Cross seen by Constantine in the sky—did not God Himself put it there to bring Constantine to Christ? What other explanation can there be? Moreover, "inspiration" is quite common, while "revelation" is very rare. Therefore God exists. With children at school taught like this, what chance can a blatant Atheist have in discussion with them? He can only break down and run like—well, run hard for Christ, once for all. And won't the Angels rejoice?

After constantly telling us all about the wonderful Saving Grace of Christ Jesus, it is quite refreshing to find a Jesuit now telling us all about the Father of Lies—Satan. The Rev. R. Nash, S.J., in the *Sunday Press*, knows exactly what Satan thinks, just as he knows what Christ Jesus thinks. "I am the father of lies," Satan is made to say. He lied to Eve, and lied to "God's Chosen People," and he even lied to the "Son of God Himself." Fortunately, the Son of God Himself was able to resist the temptation to succumb to Satan's lies, and the world was saved.

Satan even went so far as to say that "the Catholic Church is a deceiver"—a crime that the Supreme Head of the Jesuits will never forgive. Satan loves to work "underground" (not the London Transport one!) and he chuckles with fiendish joy when "highbrows" (we used to be called blatant Infidels) solemnly assure fools that Satan does not exist. Satan is always ready to "spit venom" in a Catholic's face—in fact Father Nash has put Goethe's Mephistopheles completely in the shade! But we do learn one thing—Father Nash believes in Satan just as much as the ordinary Christian believes in God. And why shouldn't he?

It has been decided at last that after all, the "anointing" of the Queen at her Coronation will not be seen on T.V. This is wisely decided, for "anointing" is a messy job and may, indeed, cause laughter. The ritual of turning a queen into a goddess or something like it is, of course, part of our religious tradition, but is not necessarily the better for that. And ridicule may easily kill the solemnity of the occasion—which would never do.

Theatre

"The Mousetrap." By Agatha Christie. Ambassadors Theatre.

AGATHA CHRISTIE has been writing "Who dunnit" books and plays for very many years, and her style has become typified. Like Noël Coward, Agatha Christie writes a form of play that truly belongs to the middle twenties, for since then the treatment of the murder thriller has changed considerably. Her last play—*The Hollow*—was a sweeping success, and I was completely taken in. This time I decided not to be caught, and was sure I knew the killer by the end of Act II. Alas, I was wrong, which proves that this form of play is as effective as it was twenty-five years ago.

Miss Christie's people are merely types. She makes no attempt to bring character to the young, married couple—Sheila Sim and John Paul—who open a guest house in the wilds of Berkshire, and which becomes isolated by a heavy fall of snow. Nor is Allan McClelland given the chance to be more than queer with a flair for cooking. Mignon O'Doherty is a hard-headed magistrate, Aubrey Dexter an army major, Jessica Spencer the opposite end of the stick to Allan McClelland, Martin Miller an eccentric Italian whose car breaks down near the house, and Richard Attenborough arrives on skis as Detective Sergeant Trotter, who comes to track down the murderer.

Peter Cotes has dealt with the direction most carefully. He manages to obtain eerie effects by lighting, pauses and subtle timing. The acting of all parts is excellent. I think Richard Attenborough is at his best; Mignon O'Doherty antagonised me at once; Jessica Spencer impressed me in a complete change of personality; Martin Miller charmed me no less than in his previous success *Sweet Madness*.

Thriller enthusiasts will not be disappointed by the liberal offerings of this play.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

Carnival

When Joy with lovely eyes says Come!
And beckons, beckons everywhere,
What cautious mortal stays at home,
Or heeds the whisper of Take Care?

The world is spinning and turns over,
With lunacy the earth is gay,
The foolish breezes taunt each lover,
Come out and throw your cap away!

O feel the madness, heart! Relinquish
Your sober, solemn winter glance.
The sombre lamp of thought extinguish,
To all the gipsy music, dance!

Come, Judges, gaol the prim and proper,
With clapping let the rogues go free,
Let circumspection go a cropper,
And sit with nymphs upon your knee.

The barefoot minute through the grasses
Runs like flame, is swiftly gone.
Dance with Joy before she passes,
Leap a moment in the sun.

Time enough for grave reflections
When the sexton wets his thumb.
Cast off care in all directions,
While Joy with lovely eyes says Come!

JOHN O'HARE.

THE FREETHINKER

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"The Freethinker" Fund

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To Correspondents

MISS EVELYN BELCHAMBERS wishes to make it quite clear that her article on the Amsterdam Conference represents her personal views only.

Will intending contributors to *The Freethinker* kindly keep their articles *short*? Our space is extremely limited and we are, nowadays, receiving far too many articles which require several issues.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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 Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

However, our most successful article in the international sphere was our Editorial, *The Vatican and United Europe*, which has aroused great interest, no doubt due to its painfully topical subject, in continental circles. This article appeared on the front page of the official organ of French Freethought, *La Raison Militante*. It also appeared, in a different translation, in *Correspondence Socialiste Internationale*, the paper of the Paris Socialist Party (Federation of the Seine), and is to appear shortly in *l'Ecole Emancipé*, a trade union journal of the anti-clerical Teachers' Union. Our French comrades are, at present, putting up a great fight against clerical encroachments, and we wish them "bon voyage"! *The Freethinker* has even penetrated beyond the "Iron Curtain" and has received "Moscow Gold," or its Leningrad equivalent. For the *Bibliotechnical Institute* of Leningrad has just taken out a subscription. At the other extreme, *The (R.C.) Faith*, of Malta, published our Editorial on Leonardo da Vinci and frequently quotes our Editorials. We are now hopefully waiting for orders from the Vatican, the Kremlin, and the White House!

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Plattfields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.; (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site), every Sunday, 8 p.m.; (Alexandra Park Gate), every Wednesday, 8 p.m.; (Deansgate Bomb Site), every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

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

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

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: HAROLD DAY, "Christians, Awake."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: TOM MOSLEY, "Christianity's Debt to Paganism."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Spain," a Lecture.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: H. L. BEALES, M.A., "Machine versus Man."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1). — Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: G. H. TAYLOR, "Types of Materialism."

Secularists who turn out regularly to sell *The Freethinker* in weather such as we have been having recently, display what the Church calls "heroic virtue" and are worthy of the highest praise. In London we have already remarked upon Mr. Harry Cleaver's Friday evening excursions to Piccadilly Circus for this purpose. Another stalwart is Mr. Frank Murrill, of the North London Branch, who unweariedly sells our paper every Sunday morning at White Stone Pond, Hampstead. It is to its tireless workers such as these that the N.S.S. owes its continued vitality.

On Sunday, January 18, 1953, Mr. Joseph McCabe will be speaking, under the auspices of the R.P.A. (Glasgow District), in the Central Halls, 25, Bath Street, Glasgow, at 3 p.m. Subject: "Science and Religion To-day."

Sugar Plums

Freethought is an international phenomenon. It has its adherents, open or concealed, in all lands. We are, accordingly, most happy to note that our English *Freethinker* is exercising an appreciable influence in, and over, the Freethought movements of other lands. In recent months many of our articles have been reproduced in Rationalist papers abroad. The American *Age of Reason* reproduced Mrs. R. Ta'houis's article on Copernicus, whilst the Australian *Rationalist* featured Mr. Du Cann's article on "The Religion of Somerset Maugham." Several of our Editorials have been reproduced in Australian and New Zealand Rationalist papers, and the Editor's account of his visit to the Brussels Congress was reproduced by the *Indian Rationalist*.

The R.P.A. has asked the Glasgow Secular Society to co-operate in honouring Mr. McCabe on this occasion of his visit by holding a social and musical evening in the Ca'Doro Restaurant on Saturday, January 17, 1953 (6 p.m. to 10 p.m.). High tea will be served, and the cost of the ticket is 7s. All members and friends interested in being present in honour of Mr. McCabe's visit are earnestly requested to reserve tickets by contacting the Glasgow Secular Society secretary, Mr. J. Barrowman, 53, Rampart Avenue, Glasgow, W.3, or R.P.A. secretary, Miss J. McBride, 4, Landressy Street, Glasgow, S.E., or at the public meetings of the two organisations to be held on December 21. This is necessary so that catering arrangements may be completed.

A Visit to Amsterdam

By EVELYN BELCHAMBERS

(Continued from page 399)

The Anglo-Dutch lady previously referred to travelled in the train with us from Hook of Holland to Amsterdam and she gave us some useful advice and helped us to get a taxi which she also shared with us. She told us among other things not to use the German language except in case of absolute necessity, as the Dutch were very anti-German since the war and they hated even to hear German. So we used English and found from the start that most people understood us well enough to answer us. My friend left to go to her hotel and the taxi took me to my humanist lodgings where a very friendly elderly lady was eagerly awaiting me, expecting to find me quite elderly! She did not however seem put out to find me young, and she gave me just the warm welcome that I needed after my buffeting on the sea. We soon became firm friends and as she was a widow living alone I think she appreciated having me there. She was a Jewess and, like most of the Dutch, and particularly the Jewish element, she was bitterly anti-German. Her husband died many years ago of an illness and one of her two sons was murdered together with his wife and child by the Germans during the war. The other son lives in U.S.A.; he says that he is not afraid of another war except in so far as it means starvation, and that he will not face again, for Holland was very badly short of food in the last war and he has painful recollections of being hungry in his adolescent years. Therefore, he has gone to U.S.A. to live and work, feeling sure of not starving out there. My hostess had thus had a tragic life and I felt very sorry for her and shared her bitterness towards the Germans, who seem so to lust after brutality for brutality's sake. She was very kind to me all the while I stayed with her (and I stayed beyond the Conference) and she refused to accept any payment for the comfortable room and very ample breakfasts (as well as a few odd lunches and dinners) that she provided for me. I gave her some flowers and have since sent her a book, but I still feel that I am very much in her debt!

While the Conference was on I had little time to explore except in Amsterdam itself, and I found the city with all its canals rather confusing until I got to know certain landmarks. The first time I tried to find my own way home from the university where the Conference was held, I got completely lost and it was as well for me, knowing no Dutch, that so many people understand a little English to direct me! The city is very handsome and clean as a new pin—so different from France in this respect. The streets are clean and spruce and the canals have no odour at all, for no rubbish is thrown into them. Houses are clean, too, and standards of sanitation, etc., are similar to our own, in fact much better where public facilities are concerned. Amsterdam is really a city built on many tiny islands, but one would never guess this to be the case. It has innumerable canals that have a semi-circular form and all start from the railway station and the harbour, a Y-shaped piece of water connected with the North Sea. Of course, bridges are frequent and most of these have a mechanism like that of our Tower Bridge and go up to let barges through. The canals are greatly used for transport of all sorts of commodities, and one sees barges full of anything, from old rusty scrap-iron to appetising-looking fresh vegetables. Flowers are just everywhere in Holland: dahlias, asters, zinnias, salvia, and all sorts of seasonable flowers. All the houses and

flats and even the barges have pretty window-boxes and flowers in pots, and the poorest housewife buys flowers as a matter of course with her weekly groceries. One day we visited a flower market: never did I see such a lovely mass of colour or such splendid individual blooms! They send flowers to all countries by air, and of course they sell bulbs. In the summer all the bulbs are of course over except the gladioli, and these make a fine show in the fields. The Dutch arrange flowers very well in vases, in fact I think they have a fine colour-sense—possibly they have developed this because of their monotonous landscape and their long grey winters! The countryside is very monotonous and dull, to one accustomed to hills as I am! I think most English people would find it irksome; personally I could not endure such flat country, and if I ever lived in the Netherlands it would have to be in a town! All the towns are pretty, whether new or old, and I have nothing but praise for the Dutch architecture. Some of the modern flats are as handsome as anything old, and all buildings are amply provided with huge windows, the private dwellings often having no curtains or blinds. They seem to love daylight and not to have our ridiculous objection to being open to view by artificial light! Amsterdam has its old parts, and we were told it had its "red light district" of prostitutes; but we failed to find anything that could be called a slum, and I think the so-called dirty parts must be so only by the very high standards!

As soon as time was available my friend and I began making excursions into the country, and our first was an afternoon trip to the fishing village of Volendam and the nearby island of Marken in the still undrained section of the Zuyder Zee. In 25 years, our guide told us, it will no longer be an island, for they are steadily draining more and more of this vast stretch of water. Volendam and Marken are both show-places where the people wear ugly and clumsy peasant costumes purely for the benefit of the visitors—and of their pockets! Nevertheless, they were pretty, colourful places to see, and on the way back to Amsterdam we had the opportunity to look over a model cheese farm which I found very interesting. The farm, barn and even the haystack have the same roof, so that everything is accessible under cover, which must be convenient in the winter. Everything was spotlessly clean, and, as I had read, even the cow-byre had pretty white curtains! Of course the cows were all out in the fields: they are milked out of doors all through the summer, but by electricity, as the Dutch have a portable electric apparatus that can be taken from cow to cow.

(To be concluded)

It was very pleasing to read the report in *The Freethinker* that there were many Christians joining the N.S.S. in various parts of the country. This is most excellent and it is hoped those new recruits will do their level best to persuade others to follow in their footsteps, to spread the Gospel of Freethought.

There must be hundreds of Freethinkers who have scores of back numbers stored away in the house which are virtually no use to them. Now I would like to suggest that if Freethinkers were to make up parcels of 30, 40 or 50 and send them to lecturers for distribution at their meetings they would certainly attract new readers and greatly enhance the circulation of *The Freethinker*.

If there is any doubt as to where to send the parcels a list of addresses could be had from our new Secretary, Mr. P. Victor Morris, who would be glad to give particulars. J. C.

Debate: The Consequences of Christianity

By P.V.M.

THE B.B.C. pretends that the broadcasting of Secularism by Secularists would be an affront to a large section of the listening public, and at the same time allows Professor Toynbee to present in his Reith Lectures a something he calls "a secular culture," which has not the slightest connection with Secularism, and which he has no difficulty in showing to be inadequate as a basis for a healthy social life. That intelligent sections of the public are not misled by such tactics is, however, plain, from the number of recent invitations to the National Secular Society to supply speakers to put its views to debating societies, discussion groups and university students' organisations.

The latest came from University House Debating Club in East London, *their* suggestion for a motion for debate being: "Christianity has brought more unhappiness and strife into the world than it has peace and contentment." The N.S.S. accepted the invitation and, on the 5th December, Mr. F. A. Ridley proposed this motion before members of the club and visitors. The opposer was Mr. T. E. Utley, a leader-writer of *The Times*.

Mr. Ridley said they were not there to discuss the truth of Christianity, which he defined as a dogmatic institutional religion and not merely a theory of the brotherhood of the human race nor a set of high moral precepts. Freethought's criticism of Christianity was not that it had never done any good at all; since the Christian Churches were made of human beings their actions could not be other than a mixture of good and bad; but the balance, as shown by history, was enough to establish the motion. The motives that Christianity set before believers were immoral and degrading. The churches possessing the power have always used it ruthlessly to suppress all opposition and to hold back modern science and knowledge.

Not satisfied with filling the world with unhappiness and strife by its methods and its dogmas, it held out the prospect for the vast majority of the human race of an eternity of damnation after death. This was the real Christian terrorism, beginning at death, and it had been the cause of untold human misery throughout the ages. What the world needed was a moral force to unite peoples everywhere, but Christianity had always divided one group against another.

Mr. Utley said that Heaven and Hell were irrelevant to the motion. The main motive of Christianity, which

Mr. Ridley had not mentioned, was Love of God. If Heaven and Hell be admitted as Christian incentive and deterrent, a secular philosophy needed honours on the one hand and prisons and the hangman on the other. The motion had to be considered both historically and mathematically. Historically he granted that in its days of power Christianity had opposed change, but this was not wrong unless it could be proved that the change resisted was good. Intolerance was not an exclusive possession of Christians; it belonged to everybody. While Christianity was ascendant in Europe, the Churches were the only channel through which moral principles could be conveyed. It set up chivalry, ended slavery and pagan sadistic practices, and, because of its commanding position in life, must be credited with all the cultural achievements of the West.

After a dozen or more of those present had shown opinion to be more or less equally divided, Mr. Utley wound up his case by a skilful appeal for a verdict of "Not proven," which would win him the debate. The violence and crime of the Ages of Faith could not be charged to Christianity unless it could be shown that they did not exist elsewhere in the non-Christian world. Christianity was not against all change, being itself the biggest change that ever occurred. Christianity did not persecute, but was persecuted; and it was still persecuted by "Rationalists with strong opinions." Christianity had brought in the idea of law upon which civilisation depended, and, if it was not capable of uniting the world, nothing else was.

Replying, Mr. Ridley said that there was no doubt that the Christian doctrine of Hell had caused endless misery in countless lives; and there was no doubt that Christianity introduced the very idea of persecution into Europe; no other religion developed an Inquisition. There was no parallel between Christianity and modern state totalitarianism, since the former had claimed, and still did, to represent absolute truth and right and to come straight from God Almighty. As such it could not evade responsibility for the actions of Christians and the Churches which had been so fruitful of human unhappiness and strife.

Voting was equal for and against the motion, and the Chairman said he was unable to decide the matter by giving his casting vote.

Decline of Christianity in Nigeria

By J. A. IWUNNA

I WRITE this article as a voice from Nigeria, a country which for a long time has faced a most formidable "Unholy Trinity" comprising the political, mercantile and religious powers. A country noted for its blamable generosity which has satisfied the strangers at its door in their economic quest of food, clothing and shelter.

For quite a long time the monster of ingratitude that has visited Nigeria is imported religion. It cannot be doubted that Nigeria has had its form of religion before the advent of religious imperialism. For quite a long time now the people have suffered spiritual intimidation. The priests of the Churches—the representatives of an almighty God as they call themselves—have divided the people into warring factions as a result of religion.

Year in and year out we are told the same story of a happy home in heaven where the angels will wash our clothes and where, after death, we shall sit and enjoy an

eternal bliss on condition that we swallow, hook, line and sinker, whatever the priests tell us and believe without questioning.

In order to go to the heaven to see God, one shall have to pay to God through these representatives, class fees, Sunday collections, annual levies and the like.

Thanks to Goodness the wave of nationalism and rationalism which is responsible for Nigeria's struggle for freedom is blowing the Bible and dogma into the River Niger there to drown for ever. To-day an average Nigerian has ceased to believe in the fabulous redemption by the death of a Jesus Christ. To-day he no longer believes that one woman—Eve—ate an apple and one God died. This is the myth of Christianity. Now that this myth is exploded, Christianity is declining, giving place to national awakening and rationalism.

Correspondence

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SATAN SPEAKS

SIR,—It gave me great pleasure to read the poem "Satan Speaks" in your issue of November 9. In these hard times it is becoming increasingly rare for me to receive the credit that is my due.

From the day many aeons ago, when I made Adam and Eve famous, down to the opening of the present century, I have worked in close co-operation with the firm of Jahveh, Jesus & Co., to our mutual benefit. In return I have obtained the honour and respect of a God.

In these degenerate times the spread of irreligion has made the honour and respect of which I speak to be in very short supply. To their eternal disgrace, Jahveh and his son, like the false-hearted Gods that they are, have attempted to appropriate the whole supply to themselves, and by a conspiracy of silence to make it appear that the destiny of the world is in their hands alone.

The result of these vain endeavours has only made matters worse. The old blunderer and his moonstruck child never could, and never will, prosper without my aid.

The Freethinker, being neutral in this matter, and never afraid to advocate an unpopular cause, will I hope call the attention of the public to the injustice that is being done me, so that I may once again enjoy my just deserts.—Yours, etc.,

SATAN.

WAR

SIR,—I do not wish to enter into the vulgar political brawl that has been waging in the correspondence columns of *The Freethinker* of late, yet I feel that your correspondent, R. D. Marriott, may be able, as it were, "to lighten my darkness." I have, poor misguided creature that I am, been labouring under the apparent delusion that honour left war with the broad-sword, and that the ultimate purpose of armies was to fight, and therefore kill, other armies.

I may well be wrong. R. D. Marriott's letter informs me that the military profession is an honourable one, and that to say otherwise is cheap and nasty. I would therefore be very much obliged if Mr. Marriott would explain to me in words of one syllable what exactly is honourable about burning the flesh from men's bones with liquid fire, shattering their bodies with shells and wiping their wives and children indiscriminately from the face of the earth; what exactly is honourable about slaughtering unseen men from great distances with the modern blessings known as scientific weapons, and what is honourable about pressing a button that will bring a terrible death to hundreds of safely remote strangers?

In my primitive ignorance I do not know, but Mr. Marriott will no doubt tell me.

Further, I am informed that it is "puerile nonsense to suggest that America would deliberately send troops to kill . . . ravage and destroy in Korea." Believe it or not, I have actually been stupid enough to imagine that that was what troops were paid to do, but I am now living in hopes that R. D. Marriott will bring forth conclusive proof to show that the advent of American troops into Korea was an accident due to bad navigation, and that the said troops have been engaged ever since in teaching the Communists how to play five-card poker and manufacture chewing-gum.

Please clarify these matters for me, Mr. Marriott, as I would hate to be unjust to an honourable profession.—Yours, etc.,

MICHAEL J. BARNES.

THE MOTHER OF GOD

SIR,—Concerning a review of "The Dead Sea Scrolls" by Prof. Dupont-Sommer, in which he insists is given support to the historical Jesus, may I remind him the first thing we have to do is to discover the mother of Jesus. If we cannot do this, the Christian story collapses.

We are given in the New Testament two contradictory genealogies leading up to Joseph, but of Mary, who is far more important in the Christian story, nothing is given.

This Mary is introduced to us as coming from nowhere. She pops up two or three times journeying to the end of the story and then fades away. No report of her death is given. So Mary comes as a myth and goes out as a myth; hence the Son is a myth.—Yours, etc.,

T. G. KIRKBY.

SCIENCE AND GOD

SIR,—If Freda Peckman has indeed "intelligence" she must have had a headache. Scientists spending endless effort studying natural forces have brought scientific method into every phase of living.

They are now told they know nothing. Naturally to understand their findings one has also to give considerable effort. It cannot be as simple as "God made it" and, if they were not too scared to proclaim it, the surest fact scientists have come by is that the idea of a god is idiotic.—Yours, etc.,

HARRY FIDDIAN.

TWO QUERIES

SIR,—(1) Would Mr. G. Whit Libby be good enough to give me chapter and verse, from a Christian authority, for his statements, "the doubtful Christian virtue of desire for revenge," and "Revenge, and away with humane treatment for criminals is the cry of the Christian." I always understood that Christian teaching was to give the other cheek.

(2) Would Mr. J. M. Alexander give us his authority, with chapter and verse, for his statement that the Book of Job is a "translation" of "The Dialogue of an Unhappy Man," and that Proverbs is a "rendering" of "The Wisdom of Amenemope."—Yours, etc.,

J. R. R.

LEAVE SHAW WHERE HE IS!

SIR,—The Spiritualists should leave Bernard Shaw alone. He had written all that his genius could sustain. He had no beliefs in heaven or hell. This world was the heaven or hell, he often said, and wrote.

I cannot see G.B.S. returning after death. Survival is abhorrent to both Freethinker and fatalist. All that Spiritualism has revealed, in dubious ways, is a pathetic ghost existence.

Every time a great person dies the S.N.U. resurrects him or her. There may be an *extension of Time*, i.e. Professor Dunne. That washes out coherent survival entirely. Life is a state of mind. The precept of Francis Bacon—editor of the Bible—is still correct: "As a man thinketh so is he."

There is no proof that if God did exist the next life would be better than this one! So far, it seems worse! Except for the absence of rates and taxes on those heavenly mansions!

The writer has known such men as Harry Price personally. Price was an orthodox Christian. He rejected the ghost-life of the Spiritualists. Like him, and Algernon Blackwood, I believe that a *natural* reservoir of physical power accumulates around us. Hence ghosts. Like an endless film, flickering at the scene of the so-called "Haunting."

But I cannot see men like Shaw and Wells having anything more to say. They were tired old men, weary of life. Everything is subject to the deceitful brain. The brain is man's deceiver.

Life after death is not desirable if Spiritualism were true. It is too tragic. And *this* life is a deep enough tragedy. Why not a message from Francis Bacon—greatest mind of his time?—Yours, etc.,

"VILLENEUVE."

Obituary

It is with deep regret that I have to record the death of Mrs. Alice Ballard at the age of 86. She had been a member of the Manchester Branch and had rendered much useful service during the pre-war years, and will be remembered by many of the older Manchester Freethinkers. Following a fall, she was admitted to hospital, where death occurred on December 5. At her request a Secular Service was conducted at the Manchester Crematorium by the undersigned. She is survived by a son and daughter-in-law, to whom our sympathies are extended.

W. COLLINS.

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