

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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THE year 1953 of the Christian era opens upon a scene which does but little credit to the epoch that is responsible for it. In an age of potential plenty the great majority of the human species goes short of the luxuries, of the comforts and, often enough, of the necessities which go to make up the standard of life that a civilised community might be expected to impart to its members. Indeed, in the majority of professedly civilised lands the only scientific product not in short supply is the armaments industry. Bigger and better death-dealing necessities, indeed, accumulate almost hourly. Their creators and apologists will, no doubt, plead that it is no necessity which is responsible for their constant multiplication, but this only shifts the blame on to those who are responsible for the state of things ultimately responsible for such a suicidal necessity.

Every day we hear of "wars and rumours of wars." Indeed, since 1914, the fact of retrogression has been increasingly manifest; crisis after crisis have burst upon our civilisation which, confronted with unprecedented problems, is obviously unable to find any satisfactory solution. The up-and-coming tide of evolutionary progress which gave such intensive satisfaction to an earlier century and which is mirrored in the writings that come down to us from "the century of stupendous progress," seems to have ended up in a blind alley and perhaps the most sinister fact of our sinister epoch is to be found in the indisputable fact that the very term "science," which once seemed to stand for the inevitable further progress of a Humanity liberated by knowledge, now stands with, apparently, an equal inevitability for the atomic bomb and its monstrous progeny and for the proximate suicide of our collective civilisations if not of mankind itself.

In such an age, what are the current prospects of the international Freethought movement? For, obviously, it would be the height of absurdity to apply the precise yardstick used to measure the problems of a bygone age to our present age of a so totally divergent character. If we may employ an industrial metaphor to measure the problems of our present atomic-jet plane age by, and in the terms of the coach-and-four, or even of the early railway age, would be the height of absurdity, people who reason in such an antiquated way, conclusively demonstrate thereby that by the term "evolution" they imply merely a verbal fetish and not a social fact.

In relation to organised religion, the immediate obstacle to a secular society, the retrograde character of the present era becomes strikingly manifest. This is demonstrated, in particular, when one compares the present attitude of the educated—or, rather, professedly educated classes in the world of Western civilisation towards the Churches as and when compared with that of their predecessors in the 18th and 19th centuries when modern Freethought first made its appearance and when the philosophy of secularism was first evolved in liberal circles. This fact can, at present, be seen most clearly upon the European Continent, where

ideas and ideologies are apt to be taken seriously. In particular, France, for two centuries the sensitive barometer in the climate of European ideologies, demonstrates this changed attitude with startling clarity; the French Bourgeoisie, the identical class which created both the "enlightenment" and the French Revolution, and which produced a host of world-famous Freethinkers of the

calibre of Voltaire, Diderot, Victor Hugo, Renan, Zola, and Anatole France, has now returned to the maternal bosom of the Holy Catholic Church. Indeed, the same social phenomenon is actually visible in most Western lands to-day.

The reasons for this social landslide seem to be

social rather than theological in character. For example, the French Bourgeoisie, who, yesterday, were Freethinkers almost to a man, have now decided that in the traditional phrase ascribed to Henry the Fourth of France (1589-1610) "Paris is worth a mass." Fear of social change, usually loosely described as "Communism," causes the conservative classes in contemporary Europe and the Americas to turn to the Church in its function of a kind of moral policeman to ensure the stability of the old social order, in which respect the capitalist-turned-Catholic demonstrates himself to be, despite verbal disclaimers, a quite orthodox Marxist. From his (or her) own angle, he endorses the aphorism of the Master, "religion is the opium of the people!" Obviously, belief in the Immaculate Conception or in the divine quality of current Papal utterances plays little part in such a conversion.

In contemporary England, traditionally averse from the pursuit of ideas as such, we observe the same fundamental process at work. The social link-up between Church and State, for the ultimate purpose of arresting fundamental social change is becoming increasingly obvious; here, in Britain, the role of religion assumes, more and more, the character of a policeman, of a guardian of law and order, rather than the indispensable guardian of theological truths necessary to everlasting salvation. In the Anglo-Saxon lands it is true that religion does not follow the sharply-defined political pattern which European Freethought has followed since the French Revolution, where the advocacy of militant Freethought has been confined virtually solely to the radical parties of social change. In England, contrarily, this state of things has not been so, at least since the established Church ceased to be "The Tory Party at Prayer." Here, political Radicalism does not automatically as on the European Continent signify anti-clerical policies; whilst Communism has never been a serious issue, and no mass Socialist Party exists—the Labour Party being a trade union party, with a not too appropriate Socialist label, rather than a Socialist party in the Continental or doctrinal sense. In any case, no English political party is anti-religious, or even anti-clerical. The Labour Party is as devout as the Tories; whilst even the Communist Party has its "Red Dean"!

However, despite this total lack of anti-clericalism in

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Freethought Faces the New Year

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

contemporary Britain, the official British attitude to religion is gradually changing, and changing, too, in a direction generally similar to that on the European Continent. That is, religion is no longer defended as true, but, rather, as *useful*, as a necessary ingredient in the current social order, the removal of which would entail ultimate disaster for our "Christian civilisation." For example, that staunch "Defender of the Faith," the B.B.C., is never weary of harping on this current theme and of comparing our essentially Christian "way of life" with the unknown but certain horrors of one based on atheism and materialism. Once abandon Christianity, and a *social* landslide will certainly follow. The obviously growing influence of Roman Catholicism in a once staunchly Protestant Britain represents a parallel evolution.

Some Reflections on the Present Position of French Freethought

By G. MICHAUD

Translated by F. A. Ridley

In the following article an eminent French Freethinker gives a lucid analysis, specially written for *The Freethinker*, of the contemporary role of the French Freethought Movement, which we are sure that English readers will find most informative.

THE present situation of the Freethought Movement in France inevitably arouses some anxiety, for it indicates an obvious retrogressive movement, and the Freethought organisations themselves run a considerable risk of disintegrating in the near future, despite the courageous efforts made by their adherents. This situation arises not, as one might imagine at first sight, as a direct result of the gains made by the Catholic Church thanks to the last war, particularly in intellectual circles; advantages so obvious that even the government is influenced by them. Actually the ground gained or, rather, regained, by the Church as a result of its persistent efforts since the beginning of this century is more apparent than real; and the revival of a superficial attachment to religious forms rather than a really deep faith amongst the population, cannot disguise, at least to an impartial observer, the fact that the masses follow simply traditional routine, and perhaps even a merely passing fashion, whilst remaining fundamentally indifferent. In actual fact, people are more concerned with their current material interests than with general principles or a genuine ideal.

This brings us to our first submission: the question of indifference. The current difficulty of making ends meet in an era of obvious economic crisis, even when one adds the numerous distractions of the modern world, does not really explain this in an epoch so fruitful in ideas and in every species of intellectual achievement—and we shall again reconsider this aspect in due course. Here we simply observe that this fundamental indifference to even the most elementary philosophical questions, which we find even among those professionally addicted to thought, is the special danger to contemporary Freethought. Mental inertia and the lack of any deep conviction even among believers (which, indeed, the Church herself admits publicly) finds its parallel in political indifference (as is proved periodically at elections by the large number of abstentions from the polls), and the intellectual indifference of numerous discontented people who ought logically to be interested in anything that would effect a genuine change in our way of life. There exists in France a very large number of actual Freethinkers (perhaps half of the

"After us, the deluge!" Should war eventually break out against the Eastern bloc, "the defence of Christian civilisation" will perhaps even more than that already worked to death slogan, "The defence of democracy" furnish the primary war slogan in Britain, as elsewhere such a phrase can only spring from a *social*, not from a theological attitude of mind.

Such are some essential facts of the year of Grace, 1953. How our Freethought movement can, and should, react to them would far exceed the limits of a short article. However, whatever line it eventually decides to adopt, must, to be effective, take into account the facts of the real world in 1953, and not only the traditions of the past, interpreted not as primers of evolutionary development, but as sacred and unalterable scriptures.

present population) who are yet not consciously so, despite the secular education which has been given them. They hold aloof from any Rationalist or Freethought organisation and refrain systematically from doing anything, in order to conserve their "independence" and to enjoy their egotistical "tranquility." One cannot but note in such an attitude the short-sighted individualism which characterises the French nation and which hinders the progress, in the very country whence all liberating ideas first arose, of all the practical steps to put them into effect, such as a co-operative system which seeks the realisation of true freedom and of genuine social progress.

In addition to the above causes, and this is our second fundamental proposition, the vitality of the Freethought Movement is seriously undermined by current political divisions, in particular since the rise of the Communist Party—which has resulted in splitting into two hostile and mutually implacable blocs the left wing movement, that is to say the large majority of the country formerly solidly united in the struggle against both religious obscurantism and the political reaction; the Communist Party, in its efforts to win mass support, has for a long time past put its atheistic philosophical principles, so to speak, into cold storage, so as not to cause offence to all those who, despite their social discontent, remain attached to religious traditions, at least as far as these affect the routine of family life. Unity must be realised whatever the price: first of all power must be secured by the adhesion of the masses, after which "the opium of the people"—[that is, religion in its Marxist definition—Translator] will be liquidated in due course. (However, we must immediately add that the Church firmly rejects the Communist overtures and, acting logically from its own point of view, remains the implacable foe of Communism). Furthermore, many members and sympathisers who adhere to this powerful party have severed their connection with the Freethought Movement, accusing it of possessing a sectarian tendency, besides dividing the working class; and there appears to be absolutely no chance of securing new, militant Freethinkers amongst the younger generation of Communists.

This serious outlook undergoes yet a further change for the worse when we note that the Socialists, who have formed in the past and who still form today, the majority of organised Freethinkers, have recently become discredited in the eyes of all, Communists and non-Communists alike, by the support that has been accorded

by them to "M.R.P.," that is, to the clerical party, ever since the last general election in June, 1951; with the avowed objective of keeping the Communists in check. This manœuvre having proved successful, resulted, as everyone knows, in the betrayal which eventuated in the anti-secularist laws (the laws named after MM. Marie and Baranges) which give state financial subsidies impartially to both the state schools [where religious teaching is excluded—Translator] and to the church-controlled schools.

The present result is that Socialists and Communists not only no longer collaborate within the circles devoted to Freethought, but also that some intractable Socialists who deplore the present line of their party (S.F.I.O.), in sharp disagreement with their party comrades, have provoked bitter scenes at Freethought social gatherings. They continually call in question the official position of the Socialist Party which, despite the efforts of Marceau Pivert [Socialist and anti-clerical politician, leader of the Paris Socialists—Translator] and of some others, has led to such a fundamental abandonment of revolutionary

(To be continued)

A Challenge for Rationalists

By HAROLD HILLMAN

NEARLY two thousand years ago, Christianity split off from Judaism. From a mere faction it has grown into the most numerous and economically powerful religion in the history of the world. Its strength may be said to have grown continually until after the First World War, when psychoanalysis entered the field of thought to challenge the motivation of morals. Since then it may be said to have been halted in the "Western" countries.

However, in backward countries all over the world, religion, and particularly Christianity, has not been stopped, only slowed. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been times of great advances in science, particularly medicine. This has provided the evangelical religions with a new and very powerful weapon.

All over the world medical missionaries have been sent to heal people in return for accepting their sponsor's religions. For "backward" peoples, fourteen million units of penicillin curing a person dying of pneumonia spells nothing but magic. Innumerable converts have been gained by the syringe and the dispensary, especially in Africa and India. These medical services have frequently been supplied free in areas which would attract no money-making doctors. The Governments of the various colonies having in mind the community of interest existing between the missions and themselves have not been slow to aid the medical missionaries in every respect. Furthermore, they were doing a much-needed service, frequently very efficiently. This, together with the "education" services given free by missionaries, have been the greatest social force aiding imperialism, and represents for the future a continuing area of expansion.

We see to-day that by diverse agencies, political and economic imperialism is tending to be replaced in the colonies. This process is only a matter of time. Yet there will, for a long time in the future, remain the need, even in free countries like India, for the medical services which missionaries so readily provide.

This fact presents a problem and a challenge to Rationalists all over the world. If we could organise a world "mission" consisting of medical and educational people who would be prepared to work under the same conditions as the religious ones, we could meet this challenge. What is needed is a body of rational

Socialist principles, under the pretext of forming an anti-Communist front. The whole question resolves itself into this: "Ought one to put Freethought or Socialism first?" Or even this: "Can one hope to promote Socialism efficiently if one is not first a Freethinker?" The above state of things leads to confusion, discord, futile discussions between people who are often sincere but who are incapable of formulating a philosophical outlook in accordance with which such conflicting outlooks can be reconciled. Also, many Socialists become tired and gradually drop out of their respective Freethought sections. Their appearances at Freethought gatherings get more and more infrequent and finally they become conspicuous only by their absence; alone the Anarchists (Libertaires) have remained unshaken, which results naturally from their fundamental belief which does not allow any room for compromise or for any kind of opportunism, and for whom a Rationalist outlook is fundamental to their philosophy as its unalterable foundation. They are the most active and the most influential at all gatherings but, alas, they only represent a small minority amongst Freethinkers.

professionals who could appeal to, and provide services for, the same people as do the missionaries. In return for these services, we would not expect "backward" peoples to accept what Freud called "the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind." An education system would have to be designed by rationalists and psychoanalysts to guard those "saved" from religion against the social conflicts for which religion provides a solution, albeit a neurotic one.

This task is surely an enormous one. We would be confronted all over the world by established religious systems, as well as economic vested interests. We have no money, and, indeed, very few personnel. Viewing the problem practically, I would suggest the following course of action.

Firstly, make a register in Western Europe and U.S.A. of educationalists and doctors who would be prepared to serve in the backward countries *as Rationalists*, and under working conditions not maximally attractive. Secondly, and equally important, advertise in newspapers, and by every way raise money to equip a small working party. I would suggest that a pilot scheme should be put under way first. This should be in a country like India, where the inroads of modern missionaries have been comparatively small, and where there is a healthy local Rationalist organisation already. Another consideration would be a country where Western civilisation is only now being introduced, so that we can acquaint people with Rationalism before they have experienced its full impact.

As readers will be able to see, I put forward a plan only in merest outline. But I think it would be a shame to allow the continued expansion of religion in the "colonies," when it has begun to wane in the West, just for want of trying.

We have a few copies of "The Rationalist Annual" for 1953. Brilliant articles by Lord Chorley, Sir A. Keith, Manhattan, Coates, etc. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

This Believing World

Our religious leaders are always given a magnificent opportunity at Christmas to peddle their wares and, by heck, they take every advantage of it. The Babe of Bethlehem, with the Wise Men of the East following His Star, and the Heavenly Angels lustily singing an enormous number of Christmas hymns with loud Hosannas, form the principal themes, and though perhaps Father Christmas almost ousts the Babe in popularity by reason of the secular presents he carries with him, yet who can resist the Crib with dear little Jesus dutifully surrounded by farm animals lying on some proletarian hay with Mum gazing fondly at her Divine Offspring? It is a pretty picture, and does more to rally the weakening forces of Christianity than a dozen Holy Pronouncements by the Pope.

Of course the B.B.C. shone dazzlingly in the reflected light of the Holy Babe. Working with untiring religious zeal, the pious Director of Religious Broadcasts grasped the occasion with both hands and provided a magnificent Feast of Religious Slush. Even the Third Programme devotees were not allowed to forget that their intellectual superiority was no excuse for unbelief. On Christmas Day, at 6 p.m., they got the Story of Jesus Christ sung by a choir, and this was followed by a Christmas sermon, as well as by some chamber music based on episodes in the life of Christ.

But let us be fair. There was any amount of Christmas "jollities" as well in which, thank heaven, the Babe took no part. On the TV, for example, there was a Christmas Party that might well have taken place under the most pagan auspices; and on Boxing Day there wasn't a whisper of the Sacred Birth at such a show as the Palace of Varieties.

As usual, there were many complaints from disgruntled religionists that our Christmas cards were hopelessly "pagan." Snow scenes, Pickwickian coaches, drinking scenes at inns, with such pagan accessories as ivy and holly, made people forget that primarily Christmas was a "sacred" festival in which gloom and gloom, accompanied with fervent prayers to God Almighty for his goodness in allowing us to live, should be prominent. The pious hate to see people enjoying themselves, for there is nothing like secular enjoyments to make them forget that there is a God who constantly needs adoring. Poor Almighty, he gets forgotten more and more!

Christians are actually complaining that the people who have taken the Mau Mau oath, and are "cleansed," are cleansed by a rigmarole of superstition which ought not to be encouraged by a Christian government. Just as if there was really very much difference between the two religions! A Christian bishop wears a hilariously funny helmet, shaped like a big fish head, an equally funny lace frock, and holds a crook stick. An African witch doctor wears a leopard skull on his head, a leopard skin on his back, and carries a knobkerrie. Armed in this way, they are both ready to pray for rain, bless their flocks, and exorcise evil spirits. In the confessional, a Christian priest is just as ready to cleanse anybody as the witch doctor is in the jungle.

Moreover, nothing that the witch doctor does is more credulous bunk than the changing of a wafer into a God Almighty. When it comes to sheer superstition and

credulity, Christians have nothing to learn from any savage. That is, of course, when they practise "true" Christianity. The pale, pink variety, watered down with a little science, and which is offered as the "Christian Hope" these days, would not dare to avow the real truth about the religion of Christ. It has to be adjusted to modern needs but the real thing is just as "savage" as anything in Africa.

Theatre

"Sweet Peril." By Mary Orr and Reginald Denham. St. James's Theatre.

THIS is a light and pleasant play about a married couple—Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray—who have retreated from London life to a primitive cottage in Cornwall. His former girl friend (Margot Stevenson) is a famous American actress now married to a publisher, played by Ron-Randell.

They come on a tour to Europe and visit the cottage. He is a publisher and Dulcie Gray a rising authoress, so the couples are mixed for purposes of ambition on her side and a flippant desire on his to test his former relationship with the publisher's wife. Much to his annoyance she is a loyal wife and he, with this blow to his vanity, takes a bottle of whisky to bed with him.

Briefly, the visit of these Americans is a test of the Cornish couple's marriage, and that it proves to strengthen it rather than break it may be quite unacceptable to any but those who like a story to end happily. The plot is slight and unambitious, but Laurence Irving's setting is pleasing to the eye and the acting—above all from Dulcie Gray and Michael Denison—is most acceptable. Margot Stevenson made an excellent effort with the part of the American actress, but she was not well cast.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

DECADENCE

My Grandpa used to howl the hymn with all his might
and main,
It rolled up to the arches and it echoed back again;
It winged through wide-flung windows, and found its way
outside,
And passers-by would pause, and gaze, and listen
open-eyed.
He'd pant at all the pauses, and puff through all the prayer,
And when they reached the final, his "Amen!" rent
the air;
And, above the furtive fumbings for the weekly
Heaven-bait,
You'd hear his door-keys jangling with the pennies on
the plate.
He'd grunt with pious anguish, as he bent his poor
old bones,
He'd rise up from the hassock, with the gruesomest
of groans;
His aches and pains were audible, to let the Dear
Lord know
That Saints still lived who'd suffer morbid martyrdom
and woe.
And what am I? I love it not: the Sermon, Song
and Psalm,
For week-long woes I do not find the Benison is Balm:
And Grandpa often says (at length) how Humankind's
decayed,
Now Sunday uproar's altered from the uproar Grandpa
made.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

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.

W. ENGLER (Zurich).—Thank you for your two books and kind wishes. Glad to hear that *The Freethinker* is appreciated in Zurich.

A. P. PERRIN.—Thank you for article which we hope to use shortly.

A. R. WILLIAMS.—We are always pleased to receive and use your articles.

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.

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

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 6, 7 p.m.: ROYSTON PIKE, "Thomas Hardy, the Man and his Books."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Miss BARBARA NIVEN, "William Morris, Artist and Socialist."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "Hopes and Fears for 1953."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: P. C. KING, "Rationalism and Space Travel."

Notes and News

THIS week we are commencing the publication of an important article on the present position of Freethought in France written specially for *The Freethinker* by M. G. Michaud, an eminent French Freethinker. Secularists and Rationalists all over the world cannot fail to follow with intense interest the fortunes of Rationalism in the land which may be regarded as the birthplace of Freethought and anti-clericalism in the modern world; the country of Voltaire, Diderot, and of the great "Encyclopædia." As is obvious from our contributor's article, all is not well in contemporary France. The battle against Clericalism, which has raged since the days of Voltaire, is still far from being finally won. We wish our French comrades "bon voyage" in their present struggle against the Catholic counter-offensive.

One of the most disquieting facts related by M. Michaud is that Freethought no longer commands the attention of

"The Freethinker" Fund

We gratefully acknowledge the following donations to the above Fund: Previously acknowledged, £9 7s. 6d.; W. Angus, £5 5s.; P. Turner, £1; A. Hancock, 1s.; O. M. Ford, 5s.; T. H. Laird, £1; J. Paterson, 5s.; H. Williams, 6s.; W. A. Batson, 5s.; A. Stephenson, 16s.

Total to date: £18 10s. 6d.

(continued from previous column)

the younger generation. This is a most serious matter. The importance of obtaining the support of the younger generation has been fully recognised by the forces of reaction, from Loyola to Hitler. Unfortunately, British Freethought is also none too successful in securing support amongst youth. We hope, in the near future, to bestir ourselves in this direction by starting a regular column written by young people from the point of view of the younger generation. The editor of *The Freethinker* would, in the meantime, be much obliged if any of our younger readers who would like to take part in such a youth column, will kindly write him indicating this and giving their ages, and also what subjects they would like to treat from the point of view of the younger generation. (Articles, in general, should not exceed 600 words). A movement confined to the old is—literally!—a dying movement, and this applies to Freethought, perhaps more than to anything else.

The Feast of the Sun (Son!) has come and gone. We sincerely hope that our readers enjoyed it. Now we stand face to face with a New Year which begins so quaintly on January 1 in the depth of winter. May it prove a propitious one to all and sundry, including especially our readers. An appropriate wish may perhaps be, despite the current war-mongering efforts of the disciples of the Prince of Peace, may 1953 end with a world still at peace!

To All the "Saints": A New Year's Wish

The New Year rises from the Old Year's grave,
The one true Resurrection ever known;
Above it may our Freethought banner wave,
And cease to be exclusively our own.
When, thinking freely, on the truth we dwell,
No hope of heaven have we, nor fear God's hell;
But are content, in England's pleasant land,
To be a comrade in that valiant band
Striving for Freethought and the Commonweal.

B.S.

Book now for a memorable evening

N.S.S. 47th

ANNUAL DINNER

Saturday, 24th January, 1953

at the
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In the Chair:

MR. F. A. RIDLEY

Guest of Honour:

MR. JOSEPH McCABE

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All Freethinkers are Welcome

This is the Faith

By P. C. KING

IN my childhood I was taught a piece of bombastic poetry having the title, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. The story was founded on an incident in the Crimean War, when, by a "mistake," a body of cavalry—six hundred men, according to the poet—were ordered to charge in face of a well-emplaced Russian battery. The action was militarily stupid and suicidal. The cavalry never even reached the guns and a mere scattered remnant was "all that was left, left of six hundred." The Russian morale must have been heartened by this unlooked-for victory and their powers of resistance fortified. From the military point of view the action was worse than useless, from the humanitarian it was an abominable sacrifice of five hundred young lives; intellectually speaking it was irrational and without point.

Yet this episode has been lauded up as a model of human behaviour at its noblest! And why? Because every human instinct was sacrificed to a god of Discipline. Because Reason was defied, thrust aside, and men acted as automata, not thinking, only blindly obeying. In the words of the poem, most often quoted: "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die."

When those who most loudly applaud the sentiments expressed in this effusion pretend bewilderment at Communist "trials" and "confessions," I admit to some impatience at their hypocrisy. For what, after all, did Messrs. Clementis, Slansky and Company do at Prague but mutter the old refrain: Ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die. They, too, were sacrificed in blind devotion on the altar of the Cause or Party, even if not to the tune of five hundred. True, the technique and the circumstances were slightly different; but then the Church of Moscow worships other gods than do those of Canterbury and Rome. The essential character of the one as of the other, however, is the acceptance of a set of dogmas and the call for blind obedience to the rules enframing them, of irrational faith rather than conviction from reason.

This irrational attitude is often commented on, in an interesting Penguin Special, entitled *The Communist Technique in Britain*, by Bob Darke. While the purpose of the book is mainly to warn trade unionists of the danger of Communism to the aims and principles of trade unionism, a subject outside the scope of this article, the author has some instructive things to say about their treatment of reason and fact. He gives numerous examples of how the Party's Disciplinary Committee works and the behaviour of members before it. He explains how members coming before this Party "court" do not argue or attempt to justify their actions; to apologise is considered "reactionary sentimentalism" and to call other comrades to bear witness in one's defence is to incur the charge of "fractionising," one of the major heresies. Bob Darke relates how a certain trade union official, acting on his own initiative, took a decision which proved to be the right one and to solve the problem. That, however, was beside the point, he had disobeyed a Party directive; his not to reason why, his but to toe the Party line! Being a well-trained Communist this man made no effort to justify his action, but admitted his errors and took his punishment. "This isn't a bourgeois court of law," used to exclaim Chief Inquisitor Peter Kerrigan, "you're a Party member before a Party court. Don't try and defend yourself as if you had a legal right to."

The irrational is constantly imposed in the name of Party discipline. It is not that Communists are without conscience, but that they have given it in pawn to the

Party. The member hands himself over to the Party when he joins, "abandoning all other spiritual aids, all other faiths. . . . It promises him the Revolution in return for his blind loyalty," as the Christian promises you Salvation if you but give up everything and follow their Christ.

In fact, the parallels between Communism and Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity, are quite remarkable. You can't argue with a Communist, writes Bob Darke, for he is right, and you are wrong, because you don't accept his faith, that the Marxist interpretation is the only true one, a claim that calls to mind that of the One True Catholic and Apostolic Church of Rome. Again, although the whole teaching of Marxist philosophy is against it, there is a fanatical worship of leading Communists among the rank and file, just as the Catholic, abhorring idolatry, has yet raised his Pope, his saints and priests, above ordinary mortals. There are no English, Russian or other distinctive Communists, there are only Communists; branches of the Party are the same here, there and everywhere, those of Nicaragua and Norwich following the same prototype, Moscow. In one of his books, the late Father Benson describes how he chanced to enter a small, shabby and out of the way Catholic chapel in Egypt, and how its uniformity with the great St. Peter's of Rome and every other Catholic church made a lasting impression on him. A similarity in judicial procedure is likewise apparent. In a recent lecture F. A. Ridley pointed out that in the Middle Ages a man would pay bribes or do anything to avoid coming before the Inquisitorial Court, for few who did appear before it ever escaped condemnation. In the same way a Communist who comes before a Party court, whether a local Disciplinary Committee or a Prague purge trial, is already prejudged.

Lenin can always be relied upon as saying something on any subject; as a fellow unionist put it to Bob Darke: "Blimey, Bob, did Lenin have an answer to *everything*?" How reminiscent of the Bible banger with his endless quotations from his Scriptures!

Finally, the Communist Party, too, has its *Index*. "Party members were always on dangerous ground when it came to non-Party reading. They could not actively enjoy the literature, that is left to the free choice of the average man. With his bookshelves under open scrutiny from visiting Party members, the Communist is always risking criticism of his deplorable taste in bourgeois authors."

Thus we see what started as a progressive idea, a fresh intellectual approach to social problems, hardening into set dogmas and rigid rules under hierarchical control, as has happened so often in the past, resorting more and more to force and less and less to reason. The old and the new, with their slogans, Patriotism and Party, Salvation and Revolution, do this and don't do that, Churches of Rome, Canterbury and Moscow, still they utter the old refrain: Yours not to reason why, yours but to do as we tell you and, perchance, to die.

A Christmas Hand-out

The following notice was prominently displayed outside St. Patrick's (R.C.) Church, Soho, London, W., during the Christmas season:—

"We urge our people to make every effort to receive Our Divine Lord in Holy Communion this Christmas.

We respectfully remind our people that their offerings at Christmas Masses are their personal gifts to the clergy."

Church and the B.B.C. Debunk Themselves

By GREGORY S. SMELTERS

CONFESSING to its highest duty, the search of truth, but actually following an incompatible, muddled policy of simultaneously preaching the gospel and debunking its credibility (c.f. "B.B.C., Beveridge and Us," in *The Literary Guide*, March, 1951), the B.B.C. made a striking turn towards (implicit) Freethought in its recent broadcast on religious topics. The talk in question was "Myth and Faith," by the leading Swiss professor of theology, Emil Brunner, of the German dialectical theology brand, which was both against liberal and orthodox varieties (*The Listener*, June 19, 1952).

The many admissions towards (implied) atheism, although imbedded in lots of allegedly neutralising rubbish of the traditional theology and metaphysics, are so far-reaching that it seemed to me urgent to elaborate their implications. Already the very wording of the title strikes at the core of the Christian muddle—the myth itself. As Professor Brunner points out, it was his colleague of the movement, Professor Bultmann, who had raised the demand to *demythologise* the Christian preaching and teaching; in plain words, *to debunk the basic Christian myth of incarnation and redemption*. And that was surely pure Freethought. No wonder the German Church, as we are told, was so frightened as to try to stigmatise Bultmann "as a heretic destroying the very substance of the Church"!

But in the perspective of historical development of the human mind, Professor Bultmann's move is one more example of the working of A. D. White's evolutionary law: *Whenever the literal meaning of the so-called sacred scriptures clashed with the progress of science and higher ethical standards, the theologians dismissed the literal meaning and, to save the infallibility of their sacred scriptures, sought refuge in less repellent interpretations.*

The Christian doctrine is again and again re-interpreted to suit a higher civilisation brought about by science and ethical development, but all these re-interpretations become, in their turn, again quite irrelevant (unbelieved) to the community life, as the people each time see through the new verbal camouflage the old original Christian myths of the pre-scientific stage, incompatible with their own times.

Dismissing fundamentalist or literalist interpretation of the biblical faith and admitting that there are mythological elements in the Scripture which can be no part of a modern Christian's belief, Professor Brunner winds up his freethinking avowal with the conclusion that *the debunking of myths is now inevitable*: "If there are myths in the Bible which a modern man . . . cannot accept as truth, the question does not seem any more whether demythologising is necessary, but merely how far it should go."

Another admission is the most amazing: *The myth of incarnation and redemption*, we are told, *is a god-history, and therefore a genuine myth*, a fable, in the solely proper and relevant sense of the term; and *this myth is the basic one of the Christian doctrine*. And apart from this central myth, we are further told, *there are other mythological elements in the Bible* about which Professor Brunner bluntly confesses: "They may be exposed as naïve and irrational expressions no better than certain pagan mythologies." Professor Brunner doesn't say it expressly, but we all know, nonetheless, that his *central* myth, too, is "no better than certain

pagan mythologies." So his final plea to stop short of debunking *it* will *not* do at all!

Professor Brunner implies that *all* ideas about the Christian tribal god Yahweh are self-contradictory: "We call God the father, knowing quite well that God is not a father as men are. We call him father in heaven, using another symbol to indicate that realm of being which the philosophers call transcendence. The biblical symbolism *always* has this *dual* character of personalism and absolutism or absolute personalism."

It is easy to see that "the realm of being called transcendence" is another pure self-contradiction. "Realm" means properly "somewhere," but transcendence, by a self-imposed definition, is *a negation of all space*. So *this* "realm of being" of the Christian theology is actually "a heavenly somewhere that is nowhere at all," another logically empty sentence, signifying or communicating nothing in the world! Now Professor Brunner calls these self-contradictions symbols. But that is surely a muddle, if not downright deception. A symbol (c.f. S. Ullmann, *Words and Their Use*, London, 1951, p. 13) which is a self-contradiction and thus communicates nothing actually corresponding, is NOT a symbol! The use of the term is thus illegitimate. And the "inadequacy" of the religious "symbols" on which Professor Brunner falls back as a subterfuge is not a practical (empirical) inadequacy, but a logical one, self-imposed by the retreating (from reality) theologians; that is, the religious "symbol" will *never* be anything less than a self-contradiction. Therein consists, I repeat, the illegitimacy of the theological use of the word "symbol." The same objection applies to another verbal subterfuge, the Christian basic term "truth." Professor Brunner correctly admits that the "truth" of the gospel is not what is ordinarily meant by truth, "is not truth of thought," but "*truth of grace and encounter . . . which comes in a person (Jesus)*." All *this* is again an irrelevant metaphor because, in this exact question of myths versus scientific explanations, the only relevant sense of truth is that which means a characteristic of (true) *proportional* meanings and therefore a truth must be meant here a *sentence*. As the German atheistic philosopher, D. Kerler, has long ago remarked: "If God is Truth, then God must be a sentence." Thus logical analysis shows that *all* this dual or self-contradictory "symbolism" of the Bible is so many empty words, signifying nothing that could exist.

To throw specious words and phrases around logical inanities is once more an example of the Christian medicine-man's ineradicable intellectual dishonesty.

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The Pioneer Press, during the holiday season, has placed the whole of its stocks of books and pamphlets at the disposal of "The Freethinker" Fund at half price. Send now 5s., 10s. or £1 for Special Double-Value Parcel of cloth and paper-bound works by Paine, Ingersoll, Cohen, Cutner, Ridley and others, all brand new; 13 items value 10s. for 5s., 21 items value £1 for 10s., 31 items value £2 for £1. Ideal for your bookshelves and as gifts. Just state "5s., 10s. or £1 Parcel," and it will be promptly despatched.

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Why the Christian Religion is Decaying

THE philosophy of Secularism has undoubtedly been a great factor in giving people a better understanding and outlook on life than religion and will always continue to do so. But there is another very important factor that must be taken into consideration, namely, the invention of the bicycle. Previous to its appearance Sunday was to thousands of people in England a day of dreariness. Chapel and Church was much in evidence and the public house was the only alternative. It was a "day of rest" and to dig the garden, chop a few sticks or even to shave oneself was looked upon as an unpardonable sin. A few "dare devils," tired of the Sunday monotony, seized the opportunity of mounting their bicycles with solid tyres and went to the country or seaside for the day. By and by, others followed and found great pleasure in doing so. Then came the tub trap, charabanc, bus, motor bike, motor car, and the railway train followed suit. The country awoke from their sleep and the churches and chapels felt the draught. Children failed to attend Sunday school—that was an awful shock—fathers and mothers became apathetic and found more pleasure at the seaside than kneeling in a badly ventilated church or chapel, shutting their eyes and offering prayers to the clouds.

And so it goes on to-day with its fun fairs, swings and roundabouts and Antonio with his ice-cream cornets for all and sundry. What a revolution the bicycle has caused, and even the cinema has superseded the panorama. Soon, cricket matches, tennis and hockey will be introduced and millions of spectators will breathe the fresh air. Why not? If golf is permissible on the Sabbath, surely cricket and other games should be. "Alas, alas, woe is me," says the parson, "the collection box is nowadays almost empty and if things don't improve—and there is little sign of them doing so—I'm afraid we'll have to close down the joss-house for want of trade." But do the makers of bicycles such as Dunlop, Raleigh and others care? Not a tinker's cuss.

So go on and prosper, is the sincere wish of Joseph Close.

Correspondence

A CLOSED SHOP SATAN

SIR,—The Bournemouth Satan is a fraudulent deceiver. With the fuel shortage I have been compelled to close Hell, temporarily, and am now domiciled on Clydeside.

The pay is poor. But results are good. Unfortunately, I have not so far converted the Scottish clergy *entirely* to my way of Life. But—all things come—!

For some length of time (an illusion, by the way, fostered by me)—I sojourned in the south. No doubt the Bournemouth fellow is wearing my old tail, or horns, as the case may be.

The Scots show promise of conversion. They have sense. But, gladly for me—no souls. However, their old bones will do my Hadish furnaces very well.

When I reopen the Place, that is. It is at present being re-decorated by Mr. Bernard Shaw, aided by Mr. H. G. Wells, and the late Archbishop of Canterbury.

That person complains *ceaselessly* about the absence of his clerical gaiters. Quite understandable.

I wish to point out to all wavering Freethinkers that to hesitate is to be lost. Either to Dr. Donald Soper. Or—myself.

I retain all Satanic copyrights. Any Bournemouthian or Harrovian found imitating Me, will be forced to assist Miss Kathleen Winsor to write her next book about Me. That last book of her's is extremely painful to Me. I am not muscular, but rather handsome. In a devilish way, of course.

I think I shall depart now for the headquarters of the Spiritualist Union. If Mr. Harry Price will just start my jet plane!—Yours, etc., "LUCIFER THE FIRST."

RELIGION IN YUGO-SLAVIA

SIR,—You have perhaps noticed how the Archbishop of Canterbury is joining his Catholic brethren in fomenting a chorus of hatred of Marshal Tito, in view of his visit to this country with stories of religious persecution, etc. My daughter, who is married to a Yugoslav and has spent three years in that country, says it is all lies. There is no such thing as religious persecution. Further, this saintly Archbishop Stepinac was undoubtedly a war criminal, and was tried and convicted as such and for no other reason. He was directly responsible for the murder of 60,000 Jews, and fully collaborated with the Nazis. It was because of that alone he was convicted and sentenced to 16 years. (He has only done five and is now released.)

Tito's régime may not be all we would like to see, but at any rate he fought and resisted the Germans. The Catholic Church is without question the most mischievous and evil institution in the world to-day, but I hope that the people of this country will not be led into anti-Tito feelings and demonstrations by the apostles of liars like the Archbishops of either Church. Furthermore, Tito has resisted Sovietism as defined by Russia. One thing is certain, the Press of this country with few exceptions will follow their usual practice of distorting the truth, but perhaps Anthony Eden will be too astute for the ecclesiastical hypocrisy and humbug. Acknowledgment in *The Freethinker* will be sufficient. Best wishes for now and always.—Yours, etc., FREDERICK E. PAPPS.

ESPERANTO

SIR,—I am writing to you because I am a Committee member of the Freethinkers' Society "De Dageraad" (The Dawn), Section Utrecht, a keen Esperantist, and also I am continually propagating for the Freethought Movement in Esperantist circles.

When I heard about the August, 1952, Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers in Brussels, I sent multilingual petitions to the Secretary in Louvain, Belgium, for the introduction of the international language Esperanto in the correspondence of the Union, and also for the use of this language during the Congress(es). At the same time I asked our Central Committee in Holland to give its support to my petition during the Congress; it agreed to do so (because there are already many Esperantists in the Freethinkers' organisation of our country) and, as you will know, it actually spoke in support of my proposal during the Congress.

Unfortunately (and surprisingly) the result was not great; although a favourable resolution was accepted, as follows: "The Congress agrees that a Universal Language, such as Esperanto, would facilitate international relations and understanding." However, its actual use in our Union (still?) has not been accepted.

In the opinion of Esperantist Freethinkers, Esperanto should undoubtedly be used by progressive organisations such as our World Union. Only backward groups will not accept it (an easily learned medium of communication) and continue with the bad, old methods of polyglotism and its inevitable interpreters, because many representatives at international conferences only know their mother-tongue! A dismal fact that even in this modern age, self-styled progressive groups still use such an old-fashioned expensive system.

During the course of time it has become evident that no one present-day national language will be universally accepted by all the peoples of the earth (look at U.N.O., for example):—

1. Because of the different kinds of pronunciation, for example, the English language as it is spoken in England, Australia, U.S.A., and South Africa.

2. Because of national pride for one's own language.

3. Because countries having a numerical superiority (Russia, China, etc.) certainly will never accept a "foreign" language as an international language.

4. Because the people whose language is chosen as an international language will always be able to use and speak it best because it is their mother-tongue and, thus, they would always have linguistic superiority.

Comrade Ridley, I read in "Sennaciulo" that you are sympathetic to our aims, e.g., that Esperanto should be used in the Union, instead of as present with different tongues. We, Esperantists, know that the language problem has already been solved: Esperanto has already proven its practicability in many ways. Every year international congresses are held in which, fluently and effectively, hundreds of people from many lands discuss and exchange views in *one language*, Esperanto, on all kinds of subjects. Therefore, Esperanto need be the only language for the World Union of Freethinkers.

If you are still not an Esperantist, may I suggest to you that you should learn the language? In England there are many Esperanto groups (also in other English-speaking countries).

In any case, please give us your support in the Union.

Hoping, therefore, that you will play your part in England in supporting the aims of (progressive) Esperantists: e.g., that this absolutely necessary language should be accepted on a world-wide scale by Freethinkers,—Yours, etc., J. LIEDERMOOY.