

# The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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ANOTHER Christmas has come and gone. The ancient Feast of the Sun, worshipped by primitive man probably since Neolithic times, has, once again, been celebrated what has now become the time-honoured but, to the student of comparative religion at least, extremely incongruous mixture of distinctively pagan and christian rites and customs. The crib and manger, with their retinue of adoring shepherds and acquiescent sheep, derived ultimately from the pastoral races of the ancient pagan East, mingle with the Christmas Tree, the Holly and the Sacred Mistletoe, which trace their origin to the gloomy Deities of the North and the sanguinary forest rites of the Druids.

Upon Christmas Day, upon the 25th of December of every succeeding year, all these diverse mythologies are combined into a single mythology; are, in short, "baptised into Christ."

A similar fortune has befallen the "Christmas Message" which is uttered from countless pulpits, and which is taken up with monotonous repetition by the simultaneous agency of Press, Stage, and, now, Radio—last but not least! (Presently, we assume, the Stable at Bethlehem, all complete with its shepherds and sheep attending the natal levee of the Divine Babe, will actually be regularly on view in Television.) The legends, all far older than Christianity, which are recounted in the opening chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke: the shepherds who "watched their flocks by night," and the "wise men" who, with, perhaps, more Faith than Wisdom, followed the perambulating star until it obligingly halted over Bethlehem; all these recur annually, related as historical facts without the omission of a comma; regularly every Christmas. Indeed, December 25 has now become the recurring date given over to our annual fairy-tale.

Fairy-tales, like other artistic creations of the human imagination, have their uses and their legitimate place in human culture, always, however, provided that they are regarded as fairy-tales. To mention another famous legendary hero, now somewhat artificially annexed to the annual Christmas routine; no one could object to the recitation, not even to the annual recitation, of the always diverting exploits of Mr. Pickwick. To say that Mr. Pickwick, or his colleagues, the admirable Sam Weller or the inimitable Sergeant Buzfuz, never actually trod this earth, is to do them no wrong. No one supposes that they ever did! But this in no way detracts from their recurring human fascination: they are "larger than life and twice as natural." They are, if we may be allowed the paradox, abstractions of reality. But it would be an altogether different matter if it were seriously maintained that, say, Sergeant Buzfuz, Q.C., actually appeared in such-and-such a court, upon such-and-such a date, before Mr. Justice So-and-So, in a case of which the details were definitely given. We know that he did not do so.

The same automatic differentiation between fact and

fiction; between what actually happened and what can only be appreciated on the assumption that it could never have happened, does not, unfortunately, prevail in the case of the Christmas legends of the Nativity. Contrarily, they are not put forward as charming fiction as, considered from a purely literary standpoint, they might well be regarded; nor are they considered even as poetic embellish-

ments of what is in itself a bona fide historical narrative. They are actually put forward as plain matters of fact: as untampered, unexpurgated versions of what actually took place at a given date, A.D. One; the Star was real, the Wise Men were real, the shepherds were real, and the

manger was real. A *real* Red Riding Hood, a *real* Cinderella, a *real* Jack and the Beanstalk, a *real* Dick Whittington and, no doubt, the fabled Cat of the future Lord Mayor of London was real also? He is no more improbable than the menagerie in the stable at Bethlehem!

One has only to put the Christian fairy-tales alongside others of the same literary genre to note their complete congruity with the fairy world of such masters as Anderson, Grimm, and Perault, and their utter absurdity as alleged historical facts. One might as well try to fit Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* into the contemporary chronology of the Victorian Era!

Whilst one would not gather it from the average Christmas sermon, none the less, some clergymen do seem to have an uneasy suspicion that the proper place for Christian fairy-tales is actually in a collection of fairy-tales. We recall once hearing that eloquent Christian apostle, Dr. Donald Soper, declare, in reply to a question at a public meeting at Christmas time, that, even supposing the Gospel stories of the Nativity were, as his critic suggested, fairy-tales, at least no one else could produce more impressively beautiful ones. As a statement of fact, this is a matter purely of literary opinion. But if, as we assume, the learned Doctor intended it as a serious defence of the truth of these legends, it was quite irrelevant, and Dr. Soper had better think again.

The literary or artistic quality of a legend has got absolutely nothing to do with its historical truth. Some of the most beautiful and impressive stories in human literature have gathered around the legend of the Holy Grail, but no one maintains that these prove the actual existence of King Arthur, or the literal reality of the fabulous deeds of Merlin and of the Knights of the Round Table. For that matter, one does not need to believe that there ever was either an historical Jesus or an actual Last Supper, to admit that Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of that alleged meal is a truly sublime artistic representation, even if it has no foundation in historical fact. If the Infant stories in our Gospels were a hundred times as effective as they are from a literary point of view, this would make absolutely no difference to their unhistorical character.

In present actuality, the incongruity of our Christmas

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## OUR ANNUAL FAIRY-TALE

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

flood of "tall stories" solemnly passed off as sober historical data, is actually indicated by the attitude of contemporary theological scholarship, even in professedly Christian circles, towards such obvious legends as are contained in our Gospels. We do not believe that there is a single Christian scholar with any reputation to lose, who would seriously assert that every detail in the Gospel stories of marvels and miracles, is historically and literally true precisely as written down by the Four Evangelists. The vast majority of even reputable Christian scholars would "explain" them as allegorical or symbolical—a polite way of saying that they never actually occurred. Indeed, the modern study of comparative Religion

definitely rules out any other explanation as absolutely inadmissible.

Written by considerable literary artists, as "Matthew" and "Luke" obviously were, and seen through a haze of poetic and artistic commentary, often very beautiful, the Legends of the Nativity of Christ, our annually recited Christmas fairy-tales, may eventually come to take their place amongst the great human fairy-tales of hallowed memory, which reflect and rejoice human children of all ages. Considered as sober historical fact, they belong inevitably to the pre-scientific childhood of the human race, and will, equally inevitably, pass out of existence along with it.

## Some Reflections on the Present Position of French Freethought

By G. MICHAUD

Translated by F. A. RIDLEY

(Concluded from page 10)

TO conclude, the present exhaustion of French Freethought, which represents a veritable decay if one considers it in relation to the gigantic expansion which it underwent between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, forms a parallel development with the exhaustion of the republican system that represented its authentic political and social expression. It is, to-day, absolutely necessary to impart a new vigour to this philosophy so that, ceasing to strive for mere survival, it goes on to reach its zenith—such a desirable consummation is a sheer impossibility without the co-operation of the younger generation. Unfortunately our current system of secular education, on account of its purely unemotional character, does not promote an expansion of the intellectual horizon beyond the conventional intellectual routine (which is often extremely limited in its approach to history and literature). We cannot wait until really liberating ideas shall be taught as part of the official curriculum, for even the very best intentions are often frustrated by mental habits, inherited from twenty centuries of a tradition which always rules us more or less consciously, and consequently propaganda remains our only effective instrument. But in this milieu it is impossible to put up an effective fight, for the clergy can dispose of too many counter-attractions, including the most spectacular, both to attract the interest of the young and to satisfy their intellectual needs; whereas in general, French Freethinkers dislike such showy methods which appear grotesque and unworthy of Rationalists. Moreover, they think that the decay of the Church will result from all this demagoguery, and that its present despairing efforts to gain, at all costs, the confidence of the masses will appear in all their absurdity and futility when scientific progress (not, be it noted, technical progress, but scientific which, let us not forget, has always been the creation of free inquiry) will prove so potent that religious practices and even the "religious instinct" will vanish automatically as a result of natural evolution itself, like the stone age and the feudal castles. It is to open the road for this mental liberation that the French Freethinkers now direct their efforts, relying on the collaboration of their eminent scientists, and with the use of the radio (fifteen minutes each month), as well as by their journal, *La Raison Militante*, edited by M. Cotereau; their declared objective being not simply a merely negative "anti" clericalism, but rather a comprehensive Humanist outlook, in its most complete sense: a science and philosophy purely human in inspiration. The aim is to

open new horizons and to enlarge the mental outlook by the acquisition of the most modern scientific outlook. "Our first duty is to enlighten the mind of man," once proclaimed our great Victor Hugo; that ideal representative of all that a militant Freethinker should strive to become. We must note in closing that if the results of this method over the last few years have not been all that they might have been, on account of the mental backwardness of the more ignorant elements, nonetheless they afford sufficient grounds on which to rest great hopes for the future.

### Review

THE British Animal Welfare Societies held a Convention, and a Report published by the National Canine Defence League, 10, Seymour Street, London, W. 1, at 2s. 6d., called "Angry Prayers," makes very interesting reading. If boys are caught being cruel to animals they are taken to court and punished and people say "how shocking," but a large amount of cruelty is being perpetrated every day by men in cruel sports, cruel trapping by claw-gripping instruments for furs or food, neglect of cats, useless repetition in vivisection, and other ways, and the cruel or thoughtless people "get away with it." Much cruelty could and should be stopped.

There are fascinating items in this little book such as Harry Williamson's account of his charming dog. Frank Swinnerton mentioned how guinea pigs are intelligent and affectionate.

We unbelievers in religion claim to be not only scientific but also humane, and wish to join with others in urging on public opinion and in our laws just and kind treatment to animals. Every reader must have seen photos of horses bumping in mid air and crashing down on legs, head or side; stumbling after the long jump, striking heads on ground.

This reviewer is always angry when the annual Grand National Steeplechase comes round, a disgusting exhibition of pleasure in others suffering, profitable money making, a bad example to other race-course owners. Let us hope that people with influence will be raised by our protests to make the jumps less cruel. I recommend this Report to animal lovers.

E. J. PAGE.

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY HANDBOOK.  
(General Information for Freethinkers.) Price 9d.  
postage 1½d.

# Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the Philosopher— Statesman of India

By ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM

[Our readers will, we are sure, be interested in this sketch of the new President of U.N.E.S.C.O., by an Indian publicist.—EDITOR.]

ON 13th May, 1952, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan took the oath of office as the first Vice-President of the Indian Union. The entry of a man like Dr. Radhakrishnan in the field of open politics as the Vice-President of the Republic, after his first successful ambassadorial mission in Moscow since July, 1949, is at least as significant as the continuance in office of old lawyers and veteran Congressmen. Is the idea of philosopher-statesmen only an utopian ideal on which Platos and Mores write and dream about, or is it a fact in history, in the lives of nations and peoples? The activities of our new Vice-President for the next few months will answer this question, as far as our country is concerned.

There are to-day a group of arm-chair academicians and professors and quasi-intellectuals who are annoyed or alarmed at the political career of our Philosopher, who is more precious for India than is Bertrand Russell or C. E. M. Joad for England, John Dewey for the United States, or Gentile and Croce for Italy. The present writer has heard some of these bookish scholars and academic professors asking: "Why is this Radhakrishnan after political power? Look at philosophers turning into politicians."

## PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

Dr. Radhakrishnan has entered politics because neither philosophy nor religion are compartmental. They form the very basis of sociology and politics. Dr. Radhakrishnan has never believed in divorcing politics from philosophy or religion. Here he is in perfect agreement with Gandhiji, who said:—

"If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics to-day encircle us like the coils of a snake from which one cannot get out no matter how one tries. I wish to wrestle with the snake. I am trying to introduce religion into politics."

Dr. Radhakrishnan has to-day an opportunity to bring philosophy into politics, a philosophy that impregnates economics, that comes down to the brass tacks of facing and solving the most crying needs of economic justice to the common man. When our new Vice-President was still known as a scholarly professor and fluent lecturer, at the time he wrote his book, *An Idealist View of Life*, he held the view that both religion and philosophy lose their savour and fragrance and purpose by isolating the Kingdom of God from the realm of Caesar. He wrote: "Religion has weakened man's social conscience and moral sensitivity by separating the things of God from those of Caesar."

The separation of the things of God from the things of Caesar, of religion from politics, of the Church from the State, violated the law of wholeness of life and the cohesive unity of the various spheres of human life. Organised religions, which had more vested interests to defend than promote the welfare of the people, perpetuated this cleavage between the spiritual and material interests of man. Power politicians were happy at this division, as it gave free hands for autocrats, megalomaniacs and unscrupulous power-mad dictators to weld the sceptre of authority in the way they liked. Organised religions

complacently blessed and canonised this division, for it safeguarded their vested interests, mostly in the form of large possessions, endowments, trusts and what not, which accrued to them as a result of organised traffic in religion. This cleavage between religion and politics should end, between philosophy and life. In this respect it is welcome that Dr. Radhakrishnan has now decided to break the vicious circle of the walled academic professors and has come in line with the path outlined by Marx, Lenin and Gandhiji, who, in theory and practice, laid philosophy at the basis of their politics.

## NATIONAL EDUCATION

Radhakrishnan, we may feel sure, has accepted the honour and responsibility of the Vice-President of the Union in order to place before the people his vast experiences, erudition, attainments, to improve the lot of the people. In India Radhakrishnan is the supreme authority regarding the educational problems of the country. Looking back to the educational career of our Vice-President, beginning as a humble professor of Philosophy at Presidency College, Madras, and then at the Mysore University, to holding Chairs as the Vice-Chancellor of Benares Hindu University (1939-48), Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics, at Oxford (1936-52), and George V Professor of Philosophy at Calcutta University (1921-39). The educational experience of Dr. Radhakrishnan is further enhanced and universalised by his holding the Chair of Upton Lecturer at Manchester College, Oxford, and the Hibbert Lecturer for the year 1929-30. He has also been a member of the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation (1931-39) and has led the Indian delegation to the U.N.E.S.C.O. in the years 1946, 1947 and 1948. Besides being the Chairman of the Executive Board of the U.N.E.S.C.O. in the year 1948, he was also the Chairman of the University Commission set up by the Government of India in the same year.

With such a unique educational experience behind, the citizens of India may rightly expect from our new Vice-President that he will throw his weight to energise the present Education Ministry of India to lay a solid foundation for the national education of the country, beginning from free, compulsory primary education to the highest grades of vocational and professional training.

(To be concluded)

## Lonely Man

Pale huddled wretch in icy darkness caught  
A-crouched in his cold cave in shuddering plight,  
Doomed listener to pitiless glaciers brought  
Along blind aeons of eternal night.  
Man's patient eyeless wandering here winds  
Chilled-clinging to his cornered refuge nigh.  
He sinks to the relentless earth, Mankind's  
Last breath exhales to the unfriendly sky.  
Now blunders blindly through the spacy fields  
The tearless planet jostling callously.  
Rough shells of cities where men schemed, nor yields  
Its frigid heart for them one moan, one sigh;  
Tatters of art and fossilised culture hurled  
About the vast cold cinder of man's world.

G. H. TAYLOR.

## This Believing World

Those who listened to an American broadcast during the Christmas holidays of a Negro Christian service would have heard what true Christianity really was. The hysterical screaming and idiotic frenzy which is supposed to constitute a reverent approach to the Almighty was, no doubt whatever, exactly the kind of thing the early Christians used to indulge in. It is a pity that more of these fantastically funny exhibitions are not more often broadcast; they would at least let people hear what a genuinely, sincere Christian service really was like in the Good Old Days.

**Stands Bonnie Scotland where it did?** Not on your life. The Church was at one time the whole life and centre of the community—and now? Recently, the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* commented on a statistical account just published of the County of Fife, which actually admitted that “the Church is no longer the focal point of interest,” and that this has been followed “by, if anything, a rise in moral standards.” There are also fewer unhappy marriages, and “there is more confidence and comradeship between parents and children.” All this must be a bitter blow to the Kirk—but it is good to get the truth at last. And it should not be forgotten, but rammed home on all occasions in both England and Scotland.

If it is true, as the Rev. F. House, who is the Director of Religious Broadcasting, maintains, that “about 12,000,000 people hear at least one religious broadcast on Sundays,” then it means that the task of Freethought is more formidable than ever. Certainly, we cannot relax an instant. Whether the Churches have gained through such a huge listening audience is another matter, for it is vital that people should attend their place of worship, but there can be no doubt that religion has gained a new lease of life.

On the other hand, if the people who listen to religious services, also listen to some of the scientific broadcasts—what can they say? The discovery that a fish which was supposed to have become extinct 60 million years ago, and which was in existence 400 million years ago, is still a living species, must have made even the most naïve Fundamentalist think a little. This coelacanth (as it is called) was, we were told, the “missing link” between fish and land reptiles—and perhaps even the remote ancestor of man. And if this is true, what becomes of the Biblical account of Creation? Both stories cannot be true, and no religious sermon, even if heard by 12 million people, can controvert such a prodigious scientific discovery.

When there is nothing else to attack, our Cardinals, Bishops, and Clergy generally, can always find good material for a sermon against Sunday newspapers or, at least, against some of them. Cardinal Griffin, for example, recently inveighed against one of “the monstrous publications sold on the day of worship,” and pointed with pride that in Ireland special editions have to be sent, otherwise they could not be sold. It's the same dear old Catholicism, the same love of censorship and, if possible, a censorship directed entirely by priests. We shudder to think what would happen to the people responsible for the “monstrous publication” if true Christianity, the Christianity of the Good Old Days, that is, the Christianity of Jesus Christ, were to run rampant again. Fortunately, that will never happen, for the Churches have been forced to civilise the religion they so stoutly advocate.

One of Jersey's newspapers—Jersey is very Catholic—wants to know who had the impudence first to write “Xmas” instead of “Christmas”? To write it this way is to “drop out” Christ—which would not be too terrible, for nobody can tell us exactly where Christ came in at all. There isn't a scrap of proof that he was born at Xmastime or, for that matter, that he was born at all. By writing “Xmas,” we are making it clear that it is a pagan holiday and was celebrated long before any Christian came on the scene. The Jersey writer thinks “Xmas” was first written by an Atheist, and if that could be proved, all honour to him. He deserves the George “X.”

## Book Review

“My Civilised Adventure.” By Jack McLaren. Published by Peter Nevill at 15s.

JACK McLAREN was born in Australia, the son of a Presbyterian minister. A highly cultured man (he spoke Chinese fluently), but in religious matters, a Fundamentalist, who believed firmly in the Gospel that “a religion without a Hell wasn't worth a damn.”

Even as a boy Jack McLaren tried to do his own thinking, and he finally decided that whatever the future held in store for him, it could not be more boring and soul-crushing than the life he was leading. So he bolted from home and got a job as cabin-boy on a sailing ship. His life there he describes very vividly in one of his earlier books, “Blood on the Deck.” This was the beginning of a life of varied experience and adventure.

Jack McLaren has been a labourer, a clerk, a trader, prospector, pearl-diver, and worked at dozens of other jobs, and for eight years he lived at the tip of Cape York, one of the most northern parts of Australia, with the Coral Sea on one side and New Guinea just ahead, amongst the most primitive people in the world and seldom seeing a white man. He has written over 40 books altogether, practically all of them dealing with the Pacific. His latest book is the story of his return to civilisation and the difficulties he found at first in adapting himself to life under civilised conditions. It is splendidly written; every chapter is practically a complete story in itself. The author has that rare gift of making a reader feel that he is talking to him, not merely writing for him. There is no striving after effect. It is a narrative full of interest and most varied, as one might expect from a man who has led a life so different from that of the ordinary town dweller.

Jack McLaren is also well known as a successful broadcaster, and he has included in his book a few of his outstanding talks. He is a keen observer, and his comments on all sorts of subjects show him to be a man who has a clear analytical mind.

A book well worth reading, and an excellent book to buy either to keep or give as a present to a friend.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

## “KING LEAR”

It is worth observing with what ease Shakespeare has arranged every detail of the play so as to give edge to his indictment of the forces that make sport of man's nothingness. The plot, which deliberately rejects the Christian interpretation of the universe, is set in a pagan environment. The heavens are invoked in a pagan terminology, as Nature, or under the names of the classic deities. Pains are taken, contrary to the usual disregard of anachronism in the plays, to avoid the introduction of Christian language or Christian sentiments.—E. K. CHAMBERS.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## To Correspondents

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every week-day, 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. SMMMS.

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: W. EGAN, "Religion and Crime."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 20, 7 p.m.: GUILFOYLE WILLIAMS, B.Sc., "The Problem of Mental Healing."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Onward Hall, 207, Deansgate).—Tuesday, January 20, 7-30 p.m.: W. COLLINS, "In the Beginning."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Rev. J. S. WRIGHT, "The Remarriage of Science."

Rationalist Press Association (Glasgow District) (Central Halls, 25, Bath Street, Glasgow).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: JOSEPH McCABE, "Science and Religion To-day."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: HECTOR HAWTON, "Ethics and Total War."

## Notes and News

A leaflet entitled "Quiz on a vital topic" has been inserted into this week's issue of *The Freethinker*. You are asked to give the leaflet away after reading it. By this and other means it is hoped that a wide distribution of the leaflet will be achieved amongst sensible, thinking people who at present know nothing about *The Freethinker* and the movement for which it speaks. It is also hoped that a worth-while proportion of those who read the leaflet will order the paper for a trial period. If this happens, the sale of *The Freethinker* should steadily increase during the coming year.

If Branches of the N.S.S. and speakers will distribute the leaflet at public meetings, and if individual readers will do likewise amongst their daily contacts, we shall soon know whether this method is a good one for gaining the paper the circulation that will make it self-supporting; and we shall not be slow to make the results public.

Meanwhile we should like it known that contributions to "The Freethinker Fund" will be spent to develop this Self-Help Plan. So the immediate need is the twofold one of helpers to distribute the leaflets quickly in the right quarters, and donations to ensure that all the leaflets asked for shall be available.

## "The Freethinker" Fund

We gratefully acknowledge the following donations to the above Fund: Previously acknowledged, £32 17s. 6d.; M. Cooper, £3 6s.; A. Hancock (5th donation), 1s.; South London and Lewisham Branch (proceeds of Christmas Raffle), £1 5s. 6d.; B. Dupree, £2 12s.; T. Roberts, 5s.; P. Shawe, 1s.; H. Beck, 10s.; T. Skeate, 16s.; Total to date: £41 14s.

The standard of the artistes engaged each year for the N.S.S. Dinner has always been high. This year Miss Eileen Cusack promises us "the best ever." Her own accomplished singing needs no praise here, nor does that of Mr. Arthur Richards, whose welcome return we are glad to announce. Newcomers to our entertainment will be Mr. Gate Eastley offering something out of the ordinary in humour, and Mr. Billy Cater-Smith at the piano.

This Sunday the West London Branch, N.S.S., has no indoor meeting, but next Sunday, 25th January, Mr. T. M. Mosley, of Nottingham, will be speaking at the "Laurie Arms." After attending the N.S.S. Annual Dinner the night before, he should be in good form.

## N.S.S. Executive Committee, 6th January, 1953

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Johnson, Hornibrook, Woodley, Shaw, Tiley, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Barker, Gibbins, Taylor, and the Secretary. It was reported that Mr. Ebury would have been present, but had telephoned that he had had to turn back after leaving home. His health was much better, but not yet up to the trudge to and from the station through the snow.

Application was made for permission to form a new branch at Edinburgh. This was granted and satisfaction expressed with the energetic propaganda being conducted in the area. Twenty-one members were admitted to the Parent, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Birmingham Branches.

It was reported that the paid-up membership for 1952 was 118 more than in 1951. Members who had been slow to renew following last year's change of President and Secretary were now to receive a special appeal to support the movement again, and the enrolment of new members would no doubt continue.

A letter drawn up by the President and sent to the Holborn Sponsoring Committee of the People's Peace Congress at Vienna was read. In terms in keeping with the principles of the N.S.S. it affirmed our support of the cause of peace. No acknowledgment had been received.

Mr. Taylor put forward a proposal from a correspondent that subscriptions to the Society be revised. It was decided to place this on the agenda of the next meeting. Final arrangements were reported by the Annual Dinner Sub-Committee, and approved.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

## Book now for a memorable evening

N.S.S. 47th

# ANNUAL DINNER

Saturday, 24th January, 1953

at the

Charing Cross Hotel, Strand

LONDON, W.C. 2

In the Chair :

MR. F. A. RIDLEY

Guest of Honour :

MR. JOSEPH McCABE

Come and enjoy a feast of good fare, lively talk, bright entertainment and congenial company. Send for tickets, 16s. each, to the Secretary, N.S.S., 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1

All Freethinkers are Welcome

# Religion in America

By LEON SPAIN

A BY-LINE appeared in the section devoted to religious notices in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Phila., Pa., U.S.A., November 15, 1952, which should be of more than passing interest to readers of *The Freethinker* since it reveals the censorship which has been foisted by the organized religionists, of the most powerful denominations, upon American newspaper publishers and their editors. The by-line, or quotation, which is most revealing, reads as follows: "The 'Inquirer' reserves the right to decline any advertisement which in its opinion can be construed as constituting an attack upon or an affront to any religious body or group whether or not the purpose is clearly apparent in the wording of the advertisement." The quotation proves beyond doubt, at least as far as *The Philadelphia Inquirer* is concerned, that some, if not most or all, American newspapers are no longer committed to the "conspiracy of silence" to which they have long adhered, in protecting and shielding the professions and pretensions of the numerous religious bodies in America, but openly avowing, as such, that they will not accept advertisements which can be construed, by various stretches of subtlety and ingenuity, as constituting an affront to any religious body. The instance just cited is a devastating exposure of the much-vaunted boast, in America, that "freedom of conscience" is a cardinal tenet of American political and religious life, since "freedom of conscience," if such it may be termed, is not countenanced when Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists, etc., desire to present their side of the case. It glaringly reveals, with the greatest degree of luminosity, that the channels of thought and the media for the interchange of ideas, in America, are rapidly freezing-up, and that various pressure groups are seeking to bring about a state of things synonymous with uniformity of thought. However, side by side with the quotation mentioned, there are titles of sermons advertised in bold type, which for sheer asininity and fatuity, are difficult to duplicate, for they reveal a feebleness of intellect.

Undoubtedly the Lords of the Press and their editors are heartily in accord with the sermon topics, since it will keep the uninstructed multitude preoccupied with matters of an other-worldly importance. The depths of imbecility have been plumbed when the following quotation has been read, which appeared, also in the November 15, 1952, issue of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The imbecilic quotation, appearing in the religious notices section, reads as follows: "The Pilgrim Bible Class of the Northminster Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, Md., U.S.A., is collecting 200 horns and trumpets for missionary work in Africa because the natives respond eagerly to brass music." Aye, verily, a sorry commentary indeed, if the natives are to be attracted by the blaring of horns and trumpets in order to make them amenable and receptive to the doctrine of salvation. Of course, any witticism directed to the contemplated activity of the Pilgrim Bible Class will be construed as an affront to that body. At all costs, their sacred and sublime mission must be defended from comments, caustic or mild.

To show the degree or, rather, the diametrically opposite stand, which Thomas Jefferson held with reference to religious criticism, and which should put to shame the publishers and editors of the so-called "free press," as boasted of in various places, Thomas Jefferson, writing to Peter Carr, from Paris, August 10, 1787, wrote as follows: "Question with boldness even the existence of a God;

because, if there be one, he must approve of the homage or reason, than that of blindfolded fear. You will naturally examine first the religion of your own country. Read the Bible, then, as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The foregoing is a bold expression of statement which any Rationalist would wholeheartedly endorse, since it is an expression of truth-seeking and would place all controversial issues before the tribunal of reason, to which nothing is sacred. In the same letter, Jefferson continues in the same vein: "The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature, you will receive on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy and Tacitus. . . . But those facts in the Bible which contradict the Laws of Nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from God. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong, as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the Laws of Nature, in the case he relates. For example, in the Book of Joshua, we are told, the sun stood still for several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy and Tacitus, we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of statues, beasts, etc. But it is said, the writer of that book was inspired. Examine, therefore, candidly, therefore what evidence there is of his having been inspired." These are bold and forthright declarations by Thomas Jefferson, one of the most prominent founding fathers of the U.S.A., a spokesman and advocate of The Rights of Man, and an outspoken opponent of ecclesiastical pretensions and the usurpations of political despots, which should make the publishers and editors of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the journalistic mainstay of conservatism and vested interests, blush with shame, for being the willing instruments of clerical interests. Further along, in the same letter to Peter Carr, Jefferson continues: "Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no God, you will find incitements to virtue in the comforts and pleasantness you feel in its exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. . . . In fine, I repeat, you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything, because any other persons, or description of persons, have rejected or believed it." Undoubtedly such professions of intellectual honesty, as evinced by Thomas Jefferson, are most unpalatable and difficult to digest for theologians, whose faiths have been enshrouded and nurtured in fraud, violence and deception. To-day, in America, with, at least, theoretical separation of Church and State, there is the ever-increasing menace of vested religious bodies who are trying to demolish that barrier. In America, while there is no established or endowed religious denominations, all denominations are seeking greater privileges.

It should be evident, in the light of past and present history, that ecclesiastical interests should be kept within proper bounds. The faith, so reverently spoken of by devotees, contains the malignant principle of intellectual stagnation and servitude and intolerance. By preventing the Theocrats from meddling in secular matters, we shall preserve human rights and keep the rivers of thought fluid.

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# The Pagan with the Bible

By JOHN O'HARE

THERE has never been anyone like George Borrow. Most of the great eccentrics of literature have had some resemblance to each other, but Borrow was unique—a lonely, striding figure, brother to the gypsy, pagan with a bible, hater, linguist, fighter, and creator. He was a contradiction, a man of superb physical presence, courage and energy, but with a mind of melancholy indolence. Arrogant, his humility was profound; lionlike, his timidity was of the mouse; with bibles in his saddlebags, there was unbelief in his heart. He was the loneliest man in the world. Women detested him. For him, there was only the wind on the heath.

The most tragic figure in this life is a poet without a voice. Such was Borrow. Burns says somewhere that, compared with the lives of the poets, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* is but a pleasant children's tale. It could not be otherwise, for whereas the ordinary man is protected from the ultimate vision of reality by a sentimental belief in shadows, the poet has no such protection. He must always face the world as it really is, with the added burden of knowing what it could be. Out of such mental conflict comes all poetry, which is a reason why no poet is poetical: only "poetry-lovers" are that. But when a poet is inarticulate, there is hell—or George Borrow. Lavengro—"word-master"—knew all the words. He could speak the major, and most of the bizarre tongues of men; but the words would never come in the sequence he desired. So he sneered at Byron's funeral, and went his way, lofty, proud, very self-sufficient, very high and mighty, but with despair in his heart, the untellable sorrow of the barren artist. Why, then, does he endure?—for endure he does. Even the B.B.C. gave Borrow an hour of its broadcasting time the other week, and the books about the Romany Rye (the Gypsy Gentleman) are added to steadily. Why does he endure? The answer lies in the few autobiographical books he wrote, wrote grudgingly and hatefully, wrote with curses, wrote with the "horrors" upon him. The answer lies in what the books reveal: the history of the mind of a man of genius.

In the thunderous July of 1803, George Henry Borrow was born at Dumpling's Green in Norfolk, the second child of a Cornish ranker-officer. He was a morose infant, black-eyed and swarthy, quite the opposite of his blue-eyed brother John. His childhood was the battered life of the tent and barracks. Napoleon was rampant, and the regiment went from pillar to post as the threats of invasion dictated. In Ireland, young George, marching with the soldiers, heard Irish spoken. His dormant mind quickened. In exchange for a pack of cards, he prevailed upon a slipshod Irish youth to teach him the old language, and the philologist was born. Back in England, he learned French, Spanish and Italian almost in passing, and simultaneously taught himself Welsh and Danish. He attended Nelson's old school in Norwich where he was acutely miserable. He could not mix. He was aloof, poles apart in interests from his fellows. Fits of abysmal depression, the "horrors," often possessed him, and, like Johnson, he was afflicted by *folie de toucher*. Then he met the gypsies, met Ambrose Smith—Petulengro—and found the people with whom he felt as one, and of course learned their speech. He dominated horses and snakes. Prize fights attracted him, at which he rubbed elbows with "Old Flare," John Thurtell, who became a notorious murderer. He acquired German, Latin and Greek. His father died; and George came up

to London, to Millman Street, a stone's-throw from where *The Freethinker* office now stands. In London he tried to sell his darling translations of the old Welsh and Danish ballads, starved, became suicidal, wrote acres of hack-work, quarrelled with his publisher, roamed England, fought the Flaming Tinman, lived with an Amazon in a dingle and tried to teach her Armenian, and returned desolately to his home.

Then his real Odyssey began. The Bible Society wanted an agent to go to St. Petersburg to translate the New Testament into Manchu. Borrow learned Manchu in three months, and got the job. Now, Borrow was an atheist and a violent hater of the Papacy. It was not the Bible he was interested in but the chance to travel, to escape from his secret frustration. In that mesmerising Russian city he worked like a superman alongside lethargic printers, bearded procrastinating officials, and did the impossible. Then came Spain—Spain, the citadel of his arch-enemy, war-ravaged Spain, flea-bitten, dangerous Spain. To this land of sleep and serenade came George Borrow, six-feet-three, at thirty-two as white-headed as an ancient, and for five years roamed on horseback through robber-haunted regions, planting his bibles, being thrown into prison, hating and being hated by the swarms of priests, but above all meeting the *gitanos*, the gypsies, and being one of them.

Out of his diaries and notes he wrote *The Bible in Spain*, and England proclaimed him a lion. But in Victorian England lions had to be respectable. Victoria and Albert had thrown the antimacassar over social blemishes, but there were interstices in the antimacassar through which disreputability sometimes seeped. Borrow leaped, shaking his mane free of the tea-stains, and contradicting the best people. He was not a stuffed lion. He offended the stuffed birds and blandness of the drawing-room. He was always too much aware of the devilry *behind* the salon to be a success in it. He became *persona non grata* with society, and returned to a pool's-edge in East Anglia, to the widow he married when he was thirty-seven and she forty-six, to his horse Sidi Habismilk, to his "horrors," to his ale-pots, to the heath and the lamenting wind. *Lavengro*, his masterpiece, took nine years in the writing, so hateful was the task to him. When it did appear, it was torn to pieces by the critics, as was *The Romany Rye*.

Sidi Habismilk died, his wife died, Petulengro died. Physical loneliness joined Borrow's lonely heart. With a great black hat and a green umbrella he made his rancorous way through the twilight. He lived long, he lived bitterly. No one saw him die. He yielded when he was seventy-eight, on Shaw's twenty-fifth birthday. The "horrors" were over. His life had been one long striving after the unattainable. He could not write poetry, so he wrote prose. It was the second-best bed for him. It is an absorbing place for all men interested in the complex simplicities of the human mind with its unending search for The Answer.

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# The Bishop's Magic

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

THE bishop looked at the young novice with considerable affection. "My child," he said, "you remind me of myself when young. Strangely enough, my bishop said the same thing to me when I was a novice; and he gave me his photograph. I always treasured it; and I will tell you why you ought to treasure mine.

"Well, some busybody made a lot of trouble; and it was thought diplomatic to pack me off, as a young priest, to the missions. That's how I woke up one night to find myself bound by the thick creepers which flourish in the tropics. Four husky blacks strung me to a pole and carried me off down a jungle path.

"It wasn't too inspiring; and then we arrived at a clearing. A fire, which poisoned the moonlight, burnt under a cauldron. The water was sizzling and moaning. I looked away quickly, and I spotted the temple throne, where a totem god had once reigned, and where there was now a new fetish—a box camera on a tripod. I almost laughed when I saw it; but my laughing didn't last long. I realised this camera must have belonged to an explorer who'd gone to pot—if you see what I mean.

"Then their head priest, in a hideous mask, started to prod me with a stick. It didn't tickle. After that, he slashed my bonds, none too gently. I hadn't a chance in a million of running away, and I suppose the idea in setting me loose was to give the cannibal tribe a laugh at my antics.

"But I didn't waste time. I let the high priest have it. I told him he was a selfish beast. Couldn't he see that his god wanted to eat me? How dare he try to grab the best bits for himself? And the high priest was taken by storm. He'd expected to gloat while I grovelled, and here I was giving him a sound telling off. And while I'd got him gaping I whipped the photo of my bishop from my pocket. Here, I lied, is what your god needs—my image. He wants to eat that, all of it, and not a bit left for you!

"I chanted off a lot of metaphysical stuff about the camera god ruling on the planes of images which, I said, has absolute control over the lesser world of reality. I told the priest to boil the photo in his cauldron, and then put the sodden mess inside the totem camera. Of course, I knew that primitive tribes have this idea of the image being more powerful than the object; but I piled it on. I said I'd withdraw to the jungle so the sacrifice could belong exclusively to the camera god with no goodness drained out of it through others enjoying the spectacle. I said it would be no use looking for me in the jungle, for I'd become a digested pulp as soon as the boiled photo was inside the camera. I told the priest to hurry, as the camera god was hungry, seeing how selfish they'd been in the past.

"Then I bolted into the bush. . . .

"So you see, dear boy, how very wise you'd be to treasure my photograph. And now don't you feel just a little bit indebted to your old bishop? What? How did the high priest come to accept my bishop's photograph as my picture? Why, my child, on that grim journey towards the interior—my hair had turned white over night. Does that give you a nice romantic feeling, boy, about my white hairs?"

# Correspondence

BERTRAND RUSSELL ON T.V.

SIR,—There may be room to criticise the B.B.C. and the Press for excessive orthodoxy, but if Bertrand Russell in Press Conference had a free hand he made poor use of it. Leading off with the doubtful postulation that the world of 1952 was no better than that of 1902, he failed to justify the statement. Questioned on his religious views, Lord Russell equivocated and prevaricated, instead of calling a spade a spade. Fine opportunities for putting over the truth were missed. And why the undue emphasis on "kindly feelings" as a panacea for all our ills? Kindly feelings would not carry us very far to the welfare or ideal State, unless backed by progressive legislation. The "smart Alec" reporters were allowed to get away with the old fallacies. Dr. Soper, with a bad case, was convincing; Prof. Russell, with the best case in the world, let his side down.—Yours, etc.,

J. S. REYNOLDS.

ESPERANTO CHAIN

SIR,—The suggestion of your Dutch correspondent, Mr. Lieder-mooy, that Esperanto be used by the World Union of Freethinkers must indeed win the approval of each one of us who feels the need for an intelligent approach to a solution of the language problem.

However, let none of us, whilst accepting the principle of an international auxiliary language, complacently lapse into a state of mind which assumes that with the adoption of Esperanto by the headquarters of a world Freethought organisation automatically all is well.

Esperanto, of course, belongs to individuals equally as much as to organisations, and it seems to me that one of the best ways for Freethinkers to utilise in a practical manner the benefits of an auxiliary language would be to themselves learn the language and link up with others of like mind throughout the world. Thus they would be able to play a key role in the interchange of progressive ideas within an international framework.

The mere fact that at present no knowledge of the language is possessed need in no way act as a deterrent, for Esperanto is able to be acquired in a fraction of the time necessary for any national language. The British Esperanto Association, 140, Holland Park Avenue, London, W.11, will be pleased to send you details of courses, free, on request.—Yours, etc.,

BASIL J. EDGEcombe.

WAR

SIR,—Whilst much amused by the heavy sarcasm of your correspondent, M. J. Barnes (December 21), I still think it is honourable to defend one's wife and home, Country and Empire, when the necessity arises. I assume that Mr. Barnes is a pacifist. Well, so am I—until attacked, then I count freedom too high a price for "peace."

Mr. Barnes infers that all who fought for freedom in the second World War, and all who are fighting so hard to-day in Malaya, Korea, etc., are in some way dishonourable. This I cannot believe. Does Mr. Barnes hold the soldier responsible for all the weapons devised by the scientist, and sanctioned by the politician? He seems particularly upset by the Allied use of Napalm. Agreed it is a terrible weapon, but things could be much worse. Had Russia beaten us to this discovery, American and British soldiers would be now suffering from the horrible effects of liquid fire.

No doubt the navigational error that Mr. Barnes suggests landed the Americans in Korea, is of the same order as that which brought Mr. Turner's friends, the Russians and Chinese to that same peninsula.—Yours, etc.,

R. D. MARRIOTT.

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