

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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"BY the bones of the patriarchs, by the curses which Elijah hurled against the prophets of Baal, by the denunciations recorded by Moses in the Law, we excommunicate and execrate thee, Baruch Spinoza, and cast thee out for ever from the tents of Israel and from the abode of Jacob."

With these words the Jewish elders in Holland took leave of their erring brother, Baruch Spinoza; they remained children of Israel, whilst he became a child of modern Europe.

Thus an eminent liberal religious thinker described the official excommunication, in the mid-17th century, of the great philosopher, Baruch, or Benedict Spinoza, who went on to elaborate a system of pantheistic thought which many regard as the most scientific of all recorded systems of human thought and which places its persecuted author probably in the first half-dozen human thinkers. Indeed, with Spinoza, modern thought, secularist and free-thinking, freed from the dead hand of religious authority, may be said finally to have found its own proper feet.

To-day, in the current disintegration of the "modern" liberal culture which first arose in the era of the Renaissance and the Reformation some five centuries ago, the countrymen of Spinoza, as well as the ideas of that great thinker himself, are threatened with immediate persecution and with ultimate extinction. For the new forces which are seen to be emerging in our world of the mid-20th century are definitely hostile both to the Jewish community and to the liberal ideas which, alone, have freed the Jews from their medieval ghettos and which have made them full citizens of the modern world. For our age is one of an increasingly totalitarian character, and such ages have always been inimical to the Jews; both the Absolute State and the intolerant Church will always persecute the Israelite cuckoo in their exclusive nest. For "The Wandering Jew" represents the human cuckoo in the world of the "Total" State.

"Are the Jews a Race?" To this, what the lawyers would term "leading question," several answers could and would be given. At least, if the Jews are a people, it must be conceded that they are, indeed, a "peculiar people!" For both their composition and their history differ widely from those of any other known races. For the Jew is not limited even by the Colour Bar! There are "Black Jews" in Abyssinia, the Falasha, and a Queen Judith of this race is inscribed on the list of the "Kings of the Kings of Ethiopia." There are yellow Jews, Mongolian in appearance at least, in Chinese Turkistan, and according to a contemporary Jewish writer, blue eyes, fair hair, and white skins, in short, pure "Nordic" types, are common in the present-day State of Israel! Then, of course, there is, chiefly, it would seem, amongst the Jews of the Levant and the Middle East, the "classic" hook-nosed type, immortalised by Shylock who, at least if the author of

The Merchant of Venice was the traditional William Shakespeare, was drawn by a man who had probably never seen a Jew in the flesh (for, from about 1300 down to the Cromwellian era, all Jews were officially excluded from England). If the Jews are to be regarded as a race, you choose your district and take your choice!

However, the alternative designation of the Jew as a member, exclusively, of a religious community, of Judaism, is, actually, hardly less unsatisfactory. For there are, we should say, probably as many Jews alive to-day who are atheists or unbelievers as there are practising Jews. How, in any case, would one describe such famous

Jews as Spinoza himself whom the world, at least, regards, as an authentic Jew, even though he was "cut off from the tents of Israel and from the abode of Jacob" by rabbinical decree? Or Karl Marx, who proclaimed that religion, including Judaism, was "the opium of the people," or the professedly Christian, Disraeli? Or such modern heretics with relation to religious, including Jewish orthodoxy Freud and Einstein? Perhaps if we agreed upon a compromise solution and defined a bona fide Jew as one who conformed to a social code originally based on a Palestinian tribal religious cult, we should get as near to the definition of this vexed question as is at all possible?

However, whatever may be our precise definition of a Jew, at least, the enemies of the Jews if not always their friends, know a Jew when they see one! The long and hideous record of "anti-semitism" indicates this fact only too clearly. Moreover, from the age-long Golgotha of the Jews, which has lasted from the "conversion" of the formerly tolerant pagan Empire of Rome down to our own day, one recurring fact emerges with startling clarity: whenever society has assumed a totalitarian form the Jews have been differentiated against, ostracised and, finally, persecuted. It is only in a society that is liberal, secularist in outlook and tolerant of unpopular minorities; in a word, in a social order actuated by the basic principles of Freethought, that the Jewish minority can hope to live on terms of equality with the non-Jewish, the "Gentile" majority.

The briefest "outline of History" is sufficient to demonstrate this fact. All the authoritarian regimes in European History have had at least this one feature in common: they have all persecuted the Jews. The Christian Roman Empire created the Ghetto, and the medieval Catholic Church kept watch over its keys no less zealously than it kept watch over the "Keys of St. Peter." Every outburst of medieval religious fanaticism cost the lives of untold numbers of Jews. The Crusading hordes of "Peter the Hermit" massacred Jews wholesale on their bloody route to the Holy Land of the Jews! And when the Crusading armies finally took Jerusalem (1099) they honoured the Sepulchre of Christ with some

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

THE JEWISH QUESTION—1953

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

80,000 victims, including the entire Jewish community which was roasted alive in its synagogue.

"Jew-baiting" was the national sport of the Catholic "Ages of Faith." Whilst in more modern times, Torquemada and his Spanish Inquisition originally appeared as a permanent organ of anti-semitism and for three centuries incinerated with cold fanaticism the "murderers of Christ." In brief, the age-long dealings of Rome with the Jews may be summarised in the fanatical phrase of Anatole France's true-to-life Colonel.

"Wretched men, you have killed my God, and now I am going to kill you." Ever since the early Christian forger inserted into the Gospel of St. Matthew the pregnant words ascribed to the Jewish accusers of Christ: "His blood be upon us and upon our children"; the shadow of Christian fanaticism has lain heavily athwart the bloodstained path of "The Wandering Jew."

The Church of Rome, however, has not been the only persecutor of Israel. The rival "Orthodox" anti-Pope, the ruler of the also fanatical and totalitarian Russian Empire, also competed with his Roman rival in persecuting the Jews. The Russian "Holy Synod" often rivalled the Spanish "Holy Inquisition" in brutality. Whilst, to-day, we have the ironic spectacle of the Communist rulers of

Russia who claim to be the disciples of the Jew, Karl Marx, exhibiting an anti-semitic bias, which may not be racial, but is certainly political. Communism, like all "total" regimes does not love divided loyalties; it does not approve of its Jewish citizens sharing their loyalty to the Soviet "Fatherland" with the non-communist State of Israel! (This, at least, would seem to be the real motive behind the charges of "Zionism" in recent and present political trials behind "The Iron Curtain").

Nor does the above list exhaust the enemies of Israel. Fascism, past and present, is its deadly enemy. So, also, to-day, is the formerly friendly Mohammedan world in face of the victory of Israel over the Arabs.

Such is the current state of the "Jewish question" in the Year of Grace, 1953. "The National Home," Israel, is an object of hatred to every authoritarian regime in the world. "Anti-Zionism" is about the only thing on which the Catholic and Muslim worlds, Fascism and Communism, are agreed! The paradoxical moral to be drawn from all this is clear: the only hope for the former Jewish Theocracy is Secularism: it is only in a world based on Freedom of Thought, with its secular gospel of mutual toleration and full recognition of the rights of minorities that the former "chosen people" of God can hope to survive in our stormy and darkening world.

Humours of a Cathedral City

By A. R. WILLIAMS

NEAR the Guildhall, right across the street high above it hangs a canvas stretcher bearing in yard-deep letters the inscription: Welminster Youth For Christ. Smaller lettering gives details of meetings, perhaps attended by two hundred in a population of sixty thousand.

Except myself none passing underneath smiles. I laugh. Not that the majority take religion seriously, but they are so inured to periodical outpourings of religiosity as to ignore either its solemnities or its comic aspects.

Some sort of priest passes me. He is tall. On his head is a wide-brimmed hat. What face is visible appears old, highbeaked, tightlipped and square of jaw, as though hacked by an axe from a block of teak. A huge cloak with upturned collar envelopes him, under which black shoes shuffle. He is slightly humpbacked with one shoulder higher than the other. Total effect is an incarnation of the Spanish figurine in the wine-dealer's window advertising Sandeman's port.

Another strange figure is a young man vigorous of face and body. Bareheaded he wears a monkish robe or gown or cassock snuff-brown of colour, with a cord twisted about its waist. He stumps along in heavy sandals, beaming bluff Christian heartiness upon the world.

Parish priests, both city and county, are plentiful. They comprise all types, tall and short, fat and lean, red-faced and pale, shabby and dressy; and of countenance every expression from simple to faintly intellectual.

Rather pallid deacons and students hasten or loiter, always in two's or three's, talking nervously, trying to be at ease with the citizens by smiling somewhat inanely at them or affecting sternness which ill-befits their youth.

At the other end of the clerical scale are cathedral clergy, looking well-fed and self-satisfied, as they have reason to do. Occasionally the queer uniform of gaiters and laced hat and frock-coat emerges upon the street.

From the cathedral door issue women. Obviously village women most of them, many plump and homely. They are self-conscious now, more comfortable when they have dismantled and rolled up the Mothers' Union badged and patterned banners, bearing them away in the manner

of women more accustomed to handling rolling-pins and umbrellas. With evident relief they fall to gossip.

Noticeboard of an Anglo-Catholic church announces among other ceremonies Confessions, Pontifical High Mass and Low Mass, with names of officiating Reverend Fathers. One is tempted to parody:—

Oh, ye'll tak the High Mass,
And I'll tak the Low Mass,
And I'll be in heaven before ye.

At a local girls' school speech-day the headmistress announces she is trying to make the school a Christian one. Does she realise the implications of her statement of the possible results of her ambition?

By the content of her speech it appears she wishes the girls to be clean, honest, good-tempered, honourable, sympathetic, truthful, considerate, sincere; to practise standard social virtues. None of these has any particular connection with Christianity or is upheld by it. They are ethics of organised Society, necessities for associating with one's fellows, the oil on the running mechanism of the community. If adults practise them openly children will follow. The headmistress simply used it as a portmanteau term to save thinking or explanation or because she knows no better, having been too thoroughly indoctrinated with religion when young. Really she means humanism.

Or was she playing up to the presence of the assistant bishop? He advised the girls to seek the presence of God: queer advice to a crowd of lively energetic maidens.

His name is Crapple. Knowing the girls one imagines the puns and rhymes upon his name, mildest of which was erabapple.

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Soldiers of Christ

By C. G. L. DU CANN

THE modern soldiers of Christ seem to me a pretty cowardly lot. They pride themselves on being members of the "Church Militant here on Earth." But they better deserve the title of the Church Slothful or the Church Acquiescent.

Is there a genuine fighter for Truth or Goodness among the lot of them? I see none. It seems to me that England lost her last "Mr. Valiant-for-Truth," that old John Bunyan character, when Bernard Shaw died, and all the trumpets sounded for him "on the other side." Certainly no Christian has seized his sword to succeed him in his pilgrimage or his courage and skill "left to him that can get it."

Find me one that we may honour him! There are plenty of the contrary sort: Milton's "hireling shepherds" and "blind mouths" such as for their bellies' sake creep and climb. Every Christian Church is rotten with that type of ecclesiastic. These will not fight the good fight. They will do nothing except draw their pay and do what is conventional to be done.

That was a great inspiration of St. Ignatius Loyola's when he founded his soldierly "Company of Jesus" or the first Jesuits. Naturally human nature being what it is, the Jesuits became very quickly debased and degraded into what the whole world knows of them. Yet it is impossible not to admire the idea of Ignatius who must have been a great and exceptional spirit, and whose work even in its twisted and thwarted form survived to this very day and possibly saved the Roman Catholic Church from extinction. Certainly he and his fellow-soldiers have not lacked the fighting spirit.

Of course when soldiers do not believe that an enemy even exists, they can only indulge in mock-manœuvres and pretend to fight. That is what is the matter with the Christian Churches to-day. They no longer believe in Satan, Hell, and the Judgment Day. The Devil and his Angels are dead—they died of neglect. Everything—in England at any rate—is "all's well" as Browning's Pippa thought it was and "God's in His Heaven" and likely to remain there. So the priests may leave reform and human betterment to the politicians who talk so much about it and do so little about it. Only a faint political bleat comes from such men as Canon Collins, the Reverend Michael Scott or the Dean of Canterbury.

But in general what are the Christian clergy of all denominations doing? Do they denounce war as war? Never. Do they visit the prisoners and captives in our abominable over-crowded prisons? Not on your life! That is left to the Prison Chaplain, a paid disciplinary gentleman. Do they succour the solitary aged, for whom our State makes in this transitional time no provision? Ask the aged and poverty-stricken. Do they stand beside the wretched prisoner in the dock to comfort, console and advise him? No, indeed. One sits beside the Judge on the Bench—no place for Christ's soldier—and mutters "Amen" to a hanging sentence.

What a sorry and despicable lot of conscript-deserters they are! A disgrace to their uniforms, and their Captain, these soldiers of Christ. Listen to them singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" while they take care to mark time or move backward. Hark to them urging others to "Fight the Good Fight"—while they take care to keep unscathed and unsoiled by the beastliness of battle. Still they sing lustily:—

"O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold
Fight as Thy saints who nobly fought of old——"

If only they might! For there is plenty of fighting to be done in this world besides fighting for a livelihood, which is arduous enough for most of us. There is the languishing war against war; against greed; against corruption; against cruelty and exploitation; against inhumanity with its hydra-heads; against injustice and oppression of all kinds; against inertia, knavery and superstition—and a thousand other righteous conflicts. But these are left to you and me and the ordinary men and women of the world who bleed and suffer in them—while the so-called soldiers of Jesus are never seen within miles of the battlefields.

One can only look at them in dismay and disgust. One can only laugh at their mock-heroics and mimic warfare. Like the grand old Duke of York with his men, they march up hill and down again and affect to believe they have gained a glorious victory. But it is waste of words to denounce them. For no provocative word can sting these flabby and inert warriors to action. It is to the atheists, the agnostics, the secularists, and even to the indifferentists that the world must look for some willingness to fight the battles of humanity.

Like other organisations, the Christian Church bred fighters once. Even the Church of England bred a Bishop and a Dean or two worthy of respect for their combative quality; for example, you could hardly ignore a Jonathan Swift, a true soldier of the spirit. But this is the age of Christian pigmies. The Loyolas, the Luthers and the Wesleys are extinct.

To-day, while the soldiers of Christ smile, or snore, or shrink in fear and flight, the soldiers of humanity need more than ever to snatch up their weapons and enter the fray. Where are the young men, the legitimate heirs and successors of "Mr. Valiant-for-Truth?" The voice of one crying in the wilderness of this world for so long has been stilled at last, but its echoes have not died away and eagerly we listen for the advent of another.

Adam

When old Adam threw the onus,
Upon his good wife Eve,
And confessed he took the apple,
But she had made him thieve,
It showed what type of man he was,
To blame his little wife,
The miserable old coward,
He filled this earth with strife.
Now had he acted honestly,
And told the blessed truth,
Instead of growing stiff and old,
We'd have eternal youth.
'Tis sad to think this wretched man,
Who lived in perfect bliss,
Should steal an apple (like a child)
And bring us all to this.

PAUL VARNEY.

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This Believing World

A reverend gentleman called Dr. Sangster wants to know whether Britain still believes in God? Well, put in that way, we might say that Britain does not altogether believe in God—if by God is meant the Methodist God so earnestly prayed to every day by Methodists like Dr. Sangster. For one thing, the Jews do not believe that their God ever had a son called Jesus; and the Roman Catholic God has a Mother—the Mother of God, who is duly importuned on every possible occasion, particularly by celibate priests.

Then there is the Anglo-Catholic part of the Church of England which wants to have as little as possible to do with Protestants like Dr. Sangster, and which certainly does not believe in a Protestant God. Add to these the 168 other Christian sects who disagree with each other as violently as Anglo-Catholics disagree with Protestants, the "indifferentists" who are ready to swallow any God so long as the Almighty leaves them alone, the Agnostics and reverent Rationalists who appear too frightened to say that there isn't a God, and one is left with a small group of Freethinkers who, denying God, certainly do not represent Britain.

However, Dr. Sangster is going to put all this lamentable state of affairs right, and has already begun his Crusade for God—his God, of course, being a Methodist God who no doubt will be indignantly repudiated by Jews, Catholics Roman and Anglo, as well as by our Mormons, Christian Scientists, and Communists like the Red Dean. Dr. Sangster claims that while the churches are empty, the jails are full—but he does not say that there are so many religious criminals in jail, that jail chaplains have to be provided for them: while there are so few—if any at all—Freethinkers in jail, that the Home Office refuses even a Freethought visitor to be appointed.

On the other hand, we have the Rev. F. Martin, who strenuously denies in the *Sunday Graphic* that "we are now almost a heathen country." It is "completely untrue," he cries. We all have faith "deep down." There is "genuine prayer and trust in God" everywhere. But he wants everybody to write and tell him so—he wants particularly to find out "when you were quite sure God had taken a hand in your life." Even if your P.C. merely says "I believe," he will be satisfied.

Well, the readers of this journal anyway will never be quoted by Mr. Martin for none of them has ever found God anywhere. Even if they did find him, they would be at a loss to know what to do with him—a dilemma which might even bother the reverend gentleman himself. We are quite sure Mr. Martin has never found God at any time—but we'd dearly like to know what he would do with the Almighty? What can anyone do with a God these days?

Poor Jersey—it's full of die hards. Evolution is anathema to most of its primitive Christians like, for example, the Rev. S. Wheeler who looks with horror on any discovery which brings us nearer to the "missing link." A man like Prof. Julian Huxley, he contends, who believes in Evolution, should be shown up as deceiving the faithful followers of Christ Jesus. How can Evolution be true? "Man fallen by sin" despairingly cries Mr. Wheeler, must "be redeemed by Christ's blood" and "restored as sons of God." That is how Evolutionists should be answered.

However, if that is not enough, Mr. Wheeler brings us another true Christian, a Lt.-Col. L. M. Davies, D.Sc., Ph.D., F.R.S.E., F.G.S., who is particularly out for the (unredeemed) blood of Prof. Huxley. Both these earnest Christians are very angry that so far nobody of any note has paid the slightest attention to Col. Davies and his degrees, or the fact that he, like Mr. Wheeler, has been washed in the blood of Jesus. We do not propose to argue the case for Evolution here, but it is as well to point out that the theory has not only been accepted by 99 per cent. of our scientists, but almost every year sees additional confirmation. Mr. Wheeler and Col. Davies should join the Salvation Army—its Fundamentalist creed must be exactly what their passionate devotion to Christ Jesus requires.

Theatre

"The Merchant of Venice." By William Shakespeare.
The Old Vic Theatre.

Although one or two liberties have been taken with the dressing of this production, I consider it the best we have seen of *The Merchant of Venice* in recent years.

The play is accepted as a comedy, which it undoubtedly is as compared with Shakespeare's gory tragedies. It is lightly written and ends happily for everybody except poor Shylock. That Paul Rogers takes Shylock very seriously, and gives an earnest and accomplished performance of a rather unsympathetic Jew, is a great help in giving a contrasting character to the play. It is not intended that we should like Shylock, but we cannot help feeling for him as one who insists on keeping faithfully to the vows of his religion. If the Merchant Antonio (with good work by Douglas Campbell) accepts the terms of the bond involving a pound of his flesh, he should know what to expect by default. So Paul Rogers gives us what I consider to be a first-class Shylock.

Next outstanding is Irene Worth, who gives great spirit and character to Portia, and Jane Wenham as Nerissa is a good support. Claire Bloom as Jessica delivers her speeches with clarity, and it is only in her silent acting that she falls short of the mark. Her gestures are slightly overdone. The leading male parts are up to good standard.

Hugh Hunt's production gives much cause for discussion, and you may be startled to see one or two costumes and styles which are hardly likely to have been in use at the time Shakespeare died. For instance, the Prince of Aragon (played by John Warner) wears the elaborate wig of the late seventeenth century. Of course, owing to his position he might have been a forerunner of fashions to come, but Portia and Nerissa wear similar wigs (white) for their masquerade in the court scene. However, the ultimate effect of Mr. Hunt's production is remarkably pleasing, and from this angle it is the best production of the play I have known. Roger Furse's setting is ingenious, and the back projection of a Venetian view would be all the more successful if it were clearer. As it is, we can feel the proximity of the canals.

This would be a good play for foreign visitors to see in this coronation year, but with the Old Vic policy they are likely to be deprived of this pleasure.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

The cursing of the barren fig tree is termed by Woolston, "such an absurd, foolish and ridiculous, if not malicious and ill-natured act in Jesus, that I question whether for folly and absurdity it can be equalled in any instance of the life of a reputed wise man." St. Augustine very plainly says that this act, upon the supposition that it was done, was a foolish one. To curse the fig tree because one is hungry and vexed was as foolish and passionately done as for another man to throw the chairs and stools about the house because his dinner is not ready.

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

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Dr. MARJORIE WILSON, M.D., "Rehabilitation—all that it means."
Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 3, 7 p.m.: R. S. W. POLLARD, J.P., "Civil Liberties To-day."
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: MICHAEL HOWARD, "A People's World Government."
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: DEN CARTER, "My Psychic Experiences."
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: J. HUTTON HYND, "Inside America Now."
West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: L. EBURY, a Lecture.

Notes and News

Those who heard Mr. T. M. Mosley on "Freethought, Freewill and Determinism" at the West London Branch N.S.S. last Sunday were much impressed by the clarity of his exposition of no easy subject. Here was a working miner with a freethought outlook displaying wisdom of a high order on a topic that university professors with religious leanings rarely touch without talking nonsense. The lecture provoked many questions and an excellent discussion.

The Forty-Seventh Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society

If good cheer and good company are the requisites for the best of fellowships, then once again the N.S.S. scored a great success last Saturday at the Charing Cross Hotel. The hundred guests who foregathered there were, as usual, in the happiest of moods; and again old friendships were renewed and many new ones made. One missed some old familiar faces, as was inevitable, but life marches on, and a later generation was bound to fill the places so sadly relinquished. The many ladies present added a touch of colour and gaiety, and a most enjoyable dinner began our so much looked-forward-to annual event.

The guest of the evening was the veteran Mr. Joseph McCabe, than whom no living Freethinker has a higher or more universal reputation. We learnt during the evening that he had written 250 books, and when one adds to them the huge number of articles he has also written, as well as his countless lectures and debates, nearly all

"The Freethinker" Fund

Previously acknowledged, £52 9s. 6d.; A. E. Woodford, 1s.; Chester Branch, 10s.; G. A. Kirk, 10s. 6d.; W. B. Beck (Ohio), 10s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s. (7th don.). Total, £54 2s. 6d.

in propagating Freethought, one can only express wonder at such amazing industry. But it is even more than that—for Mr. McCabe has written works of great scholarship requiring enormous research. A book like his *History of the Popes* or his *Peter Abelard* puts him in the front rank of Freethought writers. It was indeed a happy thought to invite Mr. McCabe to the dinner.

All the speeches were enthusiastically applauded. The chair was worthily filled by the President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, whose witty comments were especially appreciated. He gave a brief epitome of Victorian Freethought with its scientific background, and insisted that we were not merely anti-religious but essentially a constructive movement.

The toast to the National Secular Society was then moved by Mr. McCabe, who has lost nothing of his trenchant approach and his keen grasp of modern problems with the passing of years. Like so many of us who were living at the turn of the century, he had great hopes for the future of civilisation with the decline of religion and theology and the tremendous advancement of science; and like those who have survived with him, he was appalled at the state of the world in this, the mid-century of our faith. The world was slipping back, but Mr. McCabe has always been an optimist, and it was always to Freethought and science that we had to turn for the fulfilment of our hopes. A burst of applause followed an excellent speech.

One of the younger generation, Mr. Colin McCall has achieved a great reputation in Manchester, and this was his first appearance at an N.S.S. dinner. It was not easy to follow Mr. McCabe, but Mr. McCall ably responded to the toast with a vigorous speech, excellent in delivery and matter. Following also in support was Mr. Len Ebury, a Vice-President of the N.S.S., whose many years of public speaking stands him in such good stead as an after-dinner speaker. Unlike other parties, he contended, we never had anything to apologise for in the N.S.S., and he made his points with telling emphasis.

After a brief introduction, Mr. Ridley proposed the toast to the World Union of Freethinkers, and Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, who is the President, responded with a short account of its beginnings and its world-wide influence and work. For the guests, Mr. P. Victor Morris, our Secretary, spoke briefly and warmly in his always cheery way, and the response was ably given by Mr. G. A. Kirk, who is the President of the Leicester Secular Society. Needless to add, all the speakers were warmly applauded and the toasts acclaimed.

The four artistes responsible for the lighter side of the proceedings added greatly to the enjoyment of the guests. Mr. Cater-Smith, at the piano, delighted all music lovers with his fine rendering of such classics as Debussy's "Claire de Lune," Tchaikovsky's most famous Piano Concerto, and the theme music to the French film "La Ronde." Mr. Arthur Richard's fine baritone voice filled the room with "Nut Brown Ale," "There is a lady sweet and kind," "Invictus" and, in duets with Miss Eileen Cusack, those two favourites, "Hear my Song" and the "Singing Lesson" from "Bitter Sweet." Miss Cusack should be called the N.S.S.'s "sweetheart," for her beautiful voice can never be better than when she is

(Continued on page 40)

Profane Swearing and Word Taboo

By P. G. ROY

SINCE times immemorial profane swearing and pornographic words have been used as a protestation against the strait-laced convention of "good society"; unconventional language—spread through infection and imitation—is mainly a means of expressing and releasing emotions. It is, therefore, a socially necessary "safety valve" for repressed feelings of all sorts to release boredom, inhibitions and even nervous tensions which otherwise could result in bloodshed. It seems that the more emotional an individual is, the greater is his need to use profanity as an outlet for his emotions, and many an ungodly curse may have saved lives. However, using the name or attributes of God in particular in a light and familiar manner by way of asseveration or emphasis has long been punished by severe penalties and is still an actionable offence in England under an Act of 1745.

Modern English-speaking peoples are comparatively modest in comparison to the invocations and obscene language as used in other lands, for instance by Slavonic and Romanic peoples of both sexes and every social class. Whilst it appears that coffee-drinkers (Germans, French, Czechs) prefer the excretory organs and functions for expletives, tea drinkers, such as the English and Russian, invoke the opposite parts, i.e., the procreative organs and functions.

Two days after the battle of Waterloo, in a Paris café, a clever journalist, Rougemont, wrote up the story how the Imperial Old Guard, though surrounded, shouted: "The Guard dies, but never surrenders." It was little use that Cambronne—to whom that tag was attributed—vehemently denied, in fact he had surrendered with his Guards. What he did exclaim in these circumstances was much shorter.

Even nowadays many people will call the term for defactory matter (or function) "obscene"—which, in fact, enables the swearer to shock a prudish listener. However, values are constantly shifting: the verb (cognate with "shoot") dates from about 1300, the noun from about 1500. The term was standard English in the sixteenth century, but in the nineteenth century it became an "indecent" word (so much so that even "shirt" for a time was taboo).

These and other "vulgarisms" can be found with Johnson and Swift; nor was the Irish Dean afraid of extensively using "bloody" as intensive. There is no man who can justify the social taboo laid upon that word; the explanation that it is an acrostic, somehow connected with "Our Lady," is too silly to be taken seriously. It just originated from the habit of the uneducated classes to exaggerate and use impressive, blood-curdling intensives such as: awful, terrible, thundering, stunning, particularly appealing to the imagination of a generation brought up in crime stories, murder films and the likes.

Now let us consider swearing as such.

A newly created citizen had to take the oath of allegiance. "I want to swear," he told the Commissioner of Oath.

"Go ahead, old man," was the reply, "but mind my girls!"

The double meaning of the term "to swear" is suggestive of its double application. In all religions sacred formulæ have been rigorously safeguarded, and the employment of them by others but authorised persons at the proper time and place has been regarded as constituting the "sin of profanity." "Thou shalt not

take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." That name (in Hebrew *shem*, in itself circumscribing "Jahveh") is much too forbidding to be pronounced without proper safeguards. Verbal formulæ for oaths are, like the wording of prayers, of somewhat artificial origin and supposedly magic effect. For extraordinary assertions the divine name may be invoked with the open alternative that in case of perjury the power of this name, thus wrongly used, will punish the foreswearer in this life and after death. He who deliberately undergoes this ordeal is thus prepared to face on this issue the terrible presence of the "Swear-God" (Hebr. *Eli-shebâh*, perpetuated in the host of our "Elizabeths" of all shades).

There is a simple safeguard to circumvent that risk. Alchemists and Kabbalists thought they could have as their servants gods and demons if they only knew the proper formula of incantation with the esoteric names (which they sought to unravel by manifold devices). If, on the other hand, you corrupt their proper names or appellatives, those transcendental forces are as harmless as properly insulated current. If you exclaim *Gad*, by *Golly*. *Gosh*, *Goodness*, no one can say that you profanate the Lord. Elizabethan English used many quaint conventionalisms, mostly modelled on the official formulæ, such as *Zounds* (God's wounds), *Odsbodkins* (God's body) or *Sdeath* (God'S-Death). Well known is the French substitutions of *bleu* for *dieu* (*morbleu*, *pardieu*, *sacrebleu*, etc.), in an effort of softening an oath by deliberate disguise. Other examples of corruption are: *Begorra* (by God), *Great Scott* (Great God) or *Great Guns*, by *George*, by *Jove* (cf. Ital. *Per Baccho!*) as elliptic abbreviations of an earlier affirmative oath (I swear) by God. *Blimey* is a contraction of Cockney *gorblimy*=(may) God blind me! *Oh, dear* just eliminates "God" whose place can be taken by any Saint's name: For the love of Mike, For Pete's sake, etc. Another mutilation is: *Gracious . . . me!* whilst the Yanks prefer expletive perversions such as *Dog-gone* (DOG=inversion of GOD). *Jesus* is mainly cut to *Gee*, *Crisake* is an assonant contraction, whilst a denatured variant of Christ is *cripes* (cf. *lawsy*, *lawdy*, etc. for Lord).

For a long time *Goddam* was a synonym for Britisher abroad. "Damn" is a legitimate theological term (from Latin *dammare*=condemn), surviving in the sterilized expletives *darn* and, possibly imitative of "smash"—*dash* (it all)! The Germans have many compounds with 'cross' and crucifixion, in English we have "Hang it!" or "I'll be hanged." *Blast* is corrupted "blessed" (cf. *blamed*; blister—blast it!). *Blow*=to swear.

A survival of the primitive belief that calling is tantamount to "calling forth" (the way God creates the world) is the warning: Don't talk of the devil if you don't wish him to appear (or in the affirmative: Talk of the devil and he'll appear); hence his many camouflaged appellations: bogy, bogle, brownie, Old Gentleman, Old Harry (=Horny), etc. *Dence*—merely an old Norman oath vulgarised—is an evasive euphemism (Germ. *der daus*), from Old French *deus* (Gall. *dussi*); as a matter of fact, a deity is always terrible, whether recommended for worship or otherwise. Blended with this form and, in addition, corrupted is *dickens* (cf. *Merry Wives*, III/2)—not from St. Nicholas, patron saint of thieves, but from Germ. *Nickel*=goblin, troll, sprite. Anglo-Saxon *nicor* was a water-sprite (Iceland *nykr*, a fabulous water goblin.

(Continued on page 39)

Geography of Hunger

By BAYARD SIMMONS

(Concluded from page 31)

THERE is an exact parallel between the tall Masai spearmen and the more cultured Kikuyu on the one hand, and on the other hand, the martial Sikhs and the Bengalis and Madrassis in British India. The Sikhs were employed as police all through the British colonies in Asia (even Hong Kong). I was not surprised to read in a London newspaper that the Kenya authorities were recruiting Masai to police the smaller Kikuyu.

To turn to a more pleasant subject illustrating the effects of hunger on animal life. I have seen with my own eyes in the Shetland Islands those delightful small horses known as Shetland ponies, and I had always assumed that they were a special breed of horses. That is not the case, Mr. de Castro tells us: I will let him tell an amusing story in his own words: "On the Shetland Islands," he says, "at the northern extremity of the British Isles, 60 degrees north latitude, grew the smallest horses in the world, hardly more than toys for children. It used to be thought that these Shetland ponies constituted a separate race of horses, stabilised by inbreeding—until some businessmen decided to supply the American market by raising ponies in the United States. To their great disappointment, the ponies born under these new conditions got bigger and bigger, generation after generation, until they were the same size as horses of other races. The fact is, there are no separate races of ponies. Shetland ponies are descendants of English horses, brought to the Shetlands from other parts of the British Isles; the extreme poverty of northern soil in certain minerals, and the consequent poverty of the pastures, led to a progressive deterioration of the species. Even after hundreds of generations, when the ponies were taken to areas with richer soil they regained the characteristics of their ancestors."

Unfortunately I must skip all comment on part three of this excellent book, in which the author puts forward certain solutions to the problem of subsistence and population. I do so because I wish to devote the final paragraph or two to the author's most revolutionary deduction from his investigations. It is nothing less than this: When men and animals are suffering complete hunger, as in famine conditions, or Nazi concentration-camp conditions, the torture of hunger leads man quickly to put aside his other desires, including even that "prime mover" his sexual nature. The Church knows this, for in its monasteries food is little better than prison fare. But if the population suffers only from chronic undernourishment, or deficiency hunger, there is a transfer of what the Freudians call the libido from mouth and stomach to the sexual organs. In other words lost palatal pleasure is "compensated." I cannot stop to debate such matters, but I can tell the reader that the one table in this book—the author wisely eschews tabulation—shows conclusively that those countries with the highest Birth Rate have the smallest daily consumption of animal proteins (meat and dairy products). Formosa, Malay States, India, and Japan (in that order) head the list of highest Birth Rate and Denmark, Australia, United States and Sweden (in that order) have the highest protein consumption and lowest Birth Rate.

I do not say that the author is correct in his surmise, but I do say his marshalled facts look very impressive. For my part I shall be very interested to see what the

neo-Malthusians have to say on this matter. But whatever may be the truth here, I can testify that it is many years since I read so interesting, fundamental, and, I would add, disturbing a book. The honesty of the Brazilian author is patent. As one who has always inclined to the diet of Shelley and Bernard Shaw, I find his emphasis on *animal* proteins disturbing, and I still hold that "in the long field" Malthus is right. But perhaps my main impression on closing the book, for which Mr. Victor Gollancz should be thanked for publishing, is that Leo Tolstoy was right. He wrote, "The rich will do everything for the poor, except get off their backs."

Holy Family

Oh, Daddy, don't sit in your study,
We know you work early and late
With overtime every Sunday—
It's the poor parish preacher's fixed fate.
We don't see you often on week-days,
You've "visits" to fill up your hours;
You've got to look after the "faithful"—
(The spirit which proves "Higher Powers").
When home you are locked in your study
(We children held silent and dumb);
While you sit there and copy from Spurgeon
The sermons you practice on Mum.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

(Concluded from page 38)

German: Nickelman, Nix, whilst the English have merely preserved the female nixie).

Nickel and Cobalt (Kobold=goblin) originally were nicknames given by Sudeten German miners to ores they did not know what to do with; such ore gave them a lot of trouble as it seemed to be worthless and had harmful effects on their health; it yielded no copper in spite of its appearance, and as it occurred in silver mines they believed the local goblin, or mischievous demon of the mine, to have stolen the silver and left in its stead that mineral changeling.

For the sake of better disguise often mere aspects of religious belief are used in cursing, such as: O hell! Go to blazes! Holy Smoke!

In our society certain themes of obvious psychological significance are taboo. It is in the nature of scatological slang and profanity that it is sought to overcome social and psychic repression; profanity, vulgarity and obscenity are used to offend the watchdogs of "decent" society, to strike a verbal blow; but at the same time a hearty curse is a flash that cleanses the air—hence many fancy expressions with labials, sibilants and explosives. However, by growing acceptance as general tender of words with genuinely "shocking associations," a gradual process of decolorisation takes place, as instanced by *bastard* in low colloquial and in dialect, as in the U.S., "bugger" has no offensive connotation whatever (similarly French "*un bon bougre*"—a good chap), though it originates from bug, then Anglo-Irish for an Englishman.

Consequently, the more we keep all this in mind, the less horrified will we be of hearing "forbidden words."

Correspondence

A FEW SUGGESTIONS

SIR,—To meet the exigencies of space the editor of *The Freethinker* has frequently requested contributors to shorten their articles or letters, and in a special note he says: "We are receiving far too many articles which require several issues." May I venture a few remarks on the point?

In the first place, is it not a little inconsistent that the issue in which the notice appears should contain two articles in contravention of it? I refer to the third article on "The Hibbert Journal," by Mr. H. Cutner, and the second article on "A Visit to Amsterdam," by Miss E. Belchambers. In both cases the subjects treated of might easily have been restricted within the desired limit, and have been none the worse for the curtailment. In fact, Miss Belchambers' article might have been omitted altogether as being more fit for the pages of a Guide-book than for those of *The Freethinker*.

Though entitled "The Hibbert Journal," Mr. Cutner's tripartite contribution might have been called "The Historicity of Jesus," for it is mainly devoted to combating the claims of those who believe in the existence of that elusive character. It has merely afforded Mr. C. an opportunity of dilating on a favourite theme—to no purpose. The question whether the Jesus of the Gospels be a myth or a reality has borne the severest scrutiny of scholarship without any definite result—it still remains, and is likely to remain, a matter of fruitless conjecture. Besides, there is another consideration. It is only on the Christian belief in his existence that Free-thought subsists. That there was such a person is the very *raison d'être* of the Freethinker. If it could be finally and unequivocally disproved, he would (as such) have nothing left to oppose—his "occupation," like Othello's, would be gone.

Might I suggest that much valuable space would be saved by omitting the effusions of a flock of versifiers who have found nests in the pages of *The Freethinker*?

Their chief merit lies in finding rhymes for stuff which, if expressed in plain prose, would not bear reading. It is curious the balderdash that will pass muster if embellished with a few rhymes.

Of course, this animadversion does not apply to the veteran versifier of Free-thought, Bayard Simmons; though some of his sentiments would be more effective if conveyed through the medium of his excellent prose.

The new feature, "The Theatre," might well be dispensed with in the interests of space. The writer gives us little more than the name of the theatre, the play and the author, with a bead-roll of the performers and their parts; in other words, a copy of the programme. Of dramatic criticism there is nothing worthy of the name. As by far the greater number of readers live at a distance from London that precludes any likelihood of their seeing the play, it can be of little interest to them.

As a reader of long standing, I have presumed to make a few frank suggestions which, if adopted, would, I believe, afford a larger amount of space for material in line with the aim and object of *The Freethinker*.

I would go even further and propose that a page or so be added to the paper at an increased subscription—say sixpence per copy. If *The Literary Guide* can sustain the extra charge, I am confident *The Freethinker* could.—Yours, etc.,

A. YATES.

PAINE ON THE B.B.C.

2.25. HISTORY II. Tom Paine (1737-1809): the doctrine of revolution is written, and the author becomes a marked man. Script by R. J. White.

SIR,—On Thursday, November 13, the B.B.C. gave a talk in the schools service on Thomas Paine, which seems to me worthy of mention. It was surely an innovation for the B.B.C., or anybody else, to bring Paine's personality and work so prominently to the notice of children. The speaker described chiefly the period of Paine's prosecution by the Government for writing and publishing "The Rights of Man," his election by the Calais citizens as their representative at the National Convention, his refusal to vote for the death of Louis XVI, his imprisonment, and narrow escape from the guillotine, and told of the writing of the "Age of Reason" in France; part two while he was in prison and expecting death at any moment.

As was, of course, to be expected, there was no indication of Paine's attitude to Bibliolatry and the Christian religion in the "Age of Reason," indeed the quotation of Paine's words, "I believe in God," would give a quite contrary impression to the young listeners.

But perhaps the editor of the *Radio Times* would like you to insert an advertisement of your edition of the "Age of Reason" in its pages.—Yours, etc.,

A. W. DAVIS.

MR. ROWLAND—A REPLY

SIR,—I did expect something more original from Mr. Rowland. Instead we get that miserable worn-out "negative" attitude, which says: "If all is well with the world, then it is due to Christian influence; but if all is wrong, then it is due to the decline of Christian influence." i.e., heads I win, tails you lose. We cannot argue with that attitude. Nevertheless, I completely repudiate the claim that Christian influence has declined. It is inevitable that with a creed in which the God that is worshipped is a monster, for who could have devised such a scheme as Hell; only a monster, that those who worship this monster, must themselves be "monsters." Thus, for example, we have generals, thanking their God for helping them, by the most horrible means to murder thousands of helpless human beings. As in Spain, China, Abyssinia, Malaya, etc. All this following immediately on the horrors of the Second World War; led by a fanatical child of the Roman Church. Not one word of protest came from any "Christian source" against any of the horrors. It may be convenient for Mr. Rowland to say Christian influence has declined. But, unhappily, it is not true. If it were true, these crimes could not have been inflicted on humanity.—Yours, etc.,

JIM FLANDERS.

A NEW VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY

SIR,—The writer of the letter published in your issue of December 14, under the title of "A New View of Christianity," would appear to be sadly in need of a new pair of spectacles for his mental vision. He presents such fantastic distortions of spiritual concepts that became part of various established faiths as cannot fail to damage the cause of genuine free thought. His premises are palpably incorrect, while being deliberately offensive, his deductions necessarily misleading, and his suggestions erroneous. In a long life-time of study of all religious faiths I have never come across a more objectionable expression of opinion.

When will a certain class of anti-Christian propagandist learn that to be violently offensive to the immense majority of believers can only result in a general feeling of disgust and the widespread loss of sympathy among those possessing any independence of judgment?—Yours, etc.,

F. VICTOR FISHER,
(Hon. Director, Society for the Study of Religions).

(Concluded from page 37)

with us. She sang "Wonderbar" and "This is my lovely day," and also "The End of the Day"—this with new words by Victor Morris, who has an uncanny knack of surprising us with such burst of lyricism.

As a variation, Mr. Gate Eastley caused roars of laughter with his "inconsequential" humour varied with particularly mystifying conjuring tricks. All the various items were keenly enjoyed by their appreciative audience.

There were many guests from the provinces; and from the Rationalist Press Association we noticed Mr. and Mrs. Fred Watts and its Secretary, Miss Constance Kerr, among others.

A word of thanks to Mr. Morris and those who worked with him to make this dinner such a success. Everything went smoothly, and all present will heartily re-echo the President's hope that we shall all meet again next year.

H. C.

Cremation

As we go to press we learn with great regret of the sudden death of Mr. Peter Shaw, son of Mr. E. W. Shaw, a member of the Executive of the N.S.S. A secular service will be held at Streatham Crematorium on Saturday, January 31, at 11.40 a.m.

REQUIRED by elderly Freethinker and wife, two or three rooms—unfurnished, in or near London. Write particulars to Wm. Vaughan, 7, Elcho Street, S.W. 11.

WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD? By C. G. I. Du Cann. An inquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 9d.; postage 1½d.

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