

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The Clerical Comeback

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

ONE proverbially finds the truth in strange places! One of such places, just at present, appears to be the Sunday press which, whatever may be its journalistic merits, has never, to our knowledge at least, enjoyed any very special reputation as the champion of advanced and unpopular causes. However, we live and learn, or at least some of us do! For our Beaverbrook contemporary, *The Sunday*

Express, published, a few weeks ago, the most outspoken attack on the present state of clerical intrigue that we have seen in the commercial press for many years. In this Tory organ of the pious Lord Beaverbrook, himself of clerical (Presbyterian) stock, its political commentator, who

writes regularly under the pseudonym of "Cross-Bencher,"* featured an article entitled "Cassock and Coronet Comeback" which made a violent attack on the startling restoration of both clerical and aristocratic privilege that is now taking place under the auspices of the present Tory Government, which ushers in what it is now the fashion to describe as the Second "Elizabethan" Age.

In his slashing attack of a forthright type, more common, in our own more easy-going age, "Cross-Bencher" indicts both the Church and the aristocracy, those ancient allies in the sanctification of snobbery and in the aggrandisement of superstition. The columns of *The Freethinker*, as we were reminded last week by the powerful article which we then published from the pen of its Founder and first editor, G. W. Foote, have always been open to the critique of hereditary privilege; and we go with "Cross-Bencher" all the way in his denunciations of that out-moded relic of feudalism, an hereditary Second Chamber. However, for the present we shall confine ourselves to that initial part of his article which deals with the "dead-Spiritual" and their current attempts to impose the "dead-hand" of the medieval past upon present-day society and upon the contemporary State; upon, in our intrepid author's own words, the "comeback" of the "cassock" rather than that of the "coronet."

"Cross-Bencher" begins his article with the uncommensurable assertion that: "The Church has gained immensely in power and prestige under the rule of the Tories." By the term "Church" our author, as is clear from his context, evidently means the State "Church of England," which was once described with apt humour as "The Tory Party at Prayer." Actually, "Cross-Bencher" could have found this clerical "comeback" of the Church of England predicted in this column as far back as last January, when we assumed the prophetic mantle and predicted that Coronation year, 1953, would be the Anglican "Holy Year"; and, if we may say so, we venture to demand the right to be considered at least a "minor prophet" in view of the striking fulfilment of our editorial prophecy upon June 2 of this year!

That day represented, of course, the great day of

the Church, when the clergy virtually monopolised Westminster Abbey, and when its Primate played a dominant role hardly inferior to that played by the Monarch herself. And, as "Cross-Bencher" truly affirms, it has been, pre-eminently, the Coronation that "increased the standing of the Church in the national life."

However, as our commentator goes on to point out, the Coronation represented only the first stage in a serial clerical strategy to obtain control over an inexperienced queen and a weak-kneed traditionalist Government: the defeat of "sponsored" television, and the present abandonment of its plans to enforce it by the present Government, was,

affirms "Cross-Bencher," "a big political victory" for the Church.

And there may be more to come. Writing with, no doubt, the memory of the abdication of the present Duke of Windsor in his mind—though he does not actually mention it—he goes on to deal with the present medievalist attitude of the Church towards divorce; particularly in relation to Royal personages who, after all, embody a medieval way of life. The Duke of Windsor may not, it seems, be the last member of the present dynasty to incur the intransigent opposition of the Church to a divorced person; there may be some mystery about the crop of rumours regarding Princess Margaret and a divorced air war ace, but there is no doubt where the Church would stand in such an eventuality.

Whilst no one will, we hope, accuse us of any particular partiality either to the Sunday press in general, or to the Beaverbrook press in particular, we cannot withhold our admiration from "Cross-Bencher." Whoever he is, and whatever bench he may sit on, he is a very brave man, and we felicitate him upon the rare moral courage which his *Sunday Express* article displays. Such modern "Davids" who fearlessly assail the "Goliaths" of privilege are few and far between in these degenerate days.

Moreover, as if it is not enough to incur the lasting rancour of that powerful and vindictive body which Thomas Carlyle once termed "the great lying Church," "Cross-Bencher" goes on to incur the wrath of the Tory Party, which also has never had the reputation of being over-indulgent to its enemies. For, after pointing out that "should the Cabinet advise against the marriage (of Princess Margaret), the rise in the authority of the Church could scarcely be questioned," he goes on to name the Tory Cabinet Ministers and M.P.s who have appeared in the divorce courts in one or another capacity. The list is a long one, and includes the Premier-designate, Mr. Eden, who, according to the strict Catholic view held by both

* We do not know precisely who "Cross-Bencher" may be, though rumour has it that his name is John Juror, and that he is a Liberal and an ex-Parliamentary candidate for, we believe, Dundee. All quotations in the ensuing paragraph are from the *Sunday Express*, July 12, 1953.

Roman and Anglo-Catholics, is, at present, actually "living in sin" with a niece of the present Prime Minister, since "the Church, of course, affirms that once married, you are always married."

Accordingly, one cannot but affirm with "Cross-Bencher": "I find the whole situation quite intolerable. I dislike the hypocrisy of men upholding an ecclesiastical law in public life which they do not obey in private life."

So much for the "cassock" part of the "comeback."

What is the remedy?

It is, of course, Secularism; that is, the separation of Church and State; the disestablishment of the Church and its concurrent disendowment. His commonsense view of the current situation inevitably brings "Cross-Bencher" to the self-same conclusion which Charles Bradlaugh and the early secularists reached a century back, and which the National Secular Society has been consistently advocating ever since its foundation in 1866. It is a triumph of logic, since, as far as we know, "Cross-Bencher" is not a reader of *The Freethinker*.

Be that as it may, his conclusions might come straight out of its pages. "The marriage of Church and State in England," he tells us, "was founded on a divorce [That of Henry VIII and of Catherine of Aragon in 1533—Editor] perhaps now it will founder on a divorce"; and he con-

cludes this anti-clerical section of his article by demanding that Church and State should be separated; that the same person should no longer be, simultaneously, the Head of both Church and State, and that the Bishops should no longer sit *ex officio* in the House of Lords. In brief, that England should become a secular State, conformably with the classical definition of such a State: "A Free Church in a Free State."

In support of this fundamental contention, "Cross-Bencher" makes the telling point that there could and would be no opposition from the Commonwealth, where, except in Scotland, all its member countries accept the principle of the complete separation of Church and State.

So much for "Cross-Bencher's" remarkable article. We hope that he sent a marked copy to the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is something of a red-letter day for secularism when such articles are permitted to appear in our national newspapers. We congratulate also the courageous editor who gave the "all clear" for such iconoclastic pronouncements. The National Secular Society would, we are sure, be proud to welcome "Cross-Bencher" into its ranks any time he cared to "cross the floor"! Meanwhile, we congratulate him on saying publicly what badly wanted saying. We hope that a more permanent form may be found for his newspaper article, and that he will give us many more in a similar vein.

Geuzenlied (The Beggars' Song)

Flemish Political anti-Catholic Song.

Also called "Van 't Ongediert" ("Of the vermin," "from the vermin").

(Sent in by J. J. BERCKMANS, with historical and explanatory notes.)

THE Flemish (North Belgium) "Geuzenlied," translated "Beggars' Song" or "Anthem of the Beggars" had its heyday from about 1885, when the "School War" was on in Belgium, that is, when the Liberal anti-Catholic and anti-religious Party was in power for many years off and on, one does not know which period precisely, and had either swept the priests out of the state-sponsored schools and religious instruction out of these schools, or had done away with grants to schools run by religious orders, or both.

Repeat: from about 1885 and until 1905-1910 and until the 1914 war, which was still a leisurely time enough to make pro-religious or anti-religious fight a radical and the main political issue in Belgium, apart from the Liberals' free trade principles, etc.

The main force of the anti-clerical and anti-religious Liberal Party in Flanders, that means from Ostend to the German border in North Belgium, was in the urban boroughs and suburbs round the towns of Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels, and many lesser towns and boroughs up and down the country. (The Walloon country had an honourable part in the advancement of Liberalism in the 1800's, but we are writing here of a Flemish political song, and therefore our attention is limited to the Flemish region.)

These Liberals have died out because their time was over; they evolved into Socialists of the Belgian Labour Party mainly after the war of 1914-18. These Liberals deserve our respect for what they were in their time; they fought for democracy and against clericalism, and for universal suffrage and against the plural vote to priests and people of the "ruling class," and they paved the way for more democracy to come. In 1919-1922 it was common to hear the old Liberal Party being accused by conservative-minded people as being the party that had bred and brought up Socialism.

The "Geuzen," or Beggars, are the political and perhaps Protestant-religious party in the 16th century (William the Silent of Orange) who fought heroically against Spain and the Inquisition, etc., during, for instance, the reign of Philippe II of Spain (the one who married Mary Tudor), and who under the name of Beggars, beat the Spaniards out of Holland in a heroic war as far as the Dutch were concerned.

About 1924 there was still in Germany a "Partei der Geusen" whose motto was "God's friend, the Papists' enemy" ("Gottes freund, der Pfaffen feind").

Bourbons.—There is something at the beginning of the song about: They who cause the lion to creep, (make) him creep, before Bourbons. This refers to the years when the French Republic sent away over its borders many nuns and monks, etc., by the thousands. The rural ignorant peasant population of Flanders started then a movement called "Flamingantism" which was aggressive towards anything French and boycotted the French language, etc., but these ignorant people were led, apart from parsons, by landed Catholic nobility which was French-speaking nearly in its totality, and by the Catholic Flemish bourgeoisie which, in its upper classes, was also for the largest part French speaking. They were servient to Popes and to those reactionary princes like Bourbons and Habsburgs and their hangers-on.

The *Lion of Flanders* is the black lion standing upright and clawing away to the sky on the ancient flag of the Flemish Commoners in their struggles against the despotism of the Kings of France about the times of the English Edwards I, II, III.

Well understood, this Beggars' Song of the Flemish Liberals and anti-clericals is a modern affair which cannot be much older than 1880.

The "Geuzenlied" or Beggars' Song of Holland is much older. It has a bit of the standing of a minor

Recollections of T. F. Palmer

By R. J. JACKSON

IT was with a shock that I heard of the passing of our old friend and scholarly contributor, T. F. Palmer. He stands out clearly in those early days of 1905 in the meetings held then at Regents Park (outside the Zoological Gardens) as one who helped to sow the seeds of critical thought in the mind of the present writer. I was listening one afternoon at a meeting at which Palmer was present, addressed by "Captain Fleetwood," a Christian Evidence speaker, when Palmer made the acid comment, "These random statements are very misleading." This impressed itself on my memory as the dawn of critical thinking. I was beginning to see that "freethought" meant, at any rate, the rejection of *random* judgments and beliefs.

Palmer was, in discussions, an ardent supporter and advocate of a *scientific philosophy* of "Evolution," which logically excluded the Christian doctrine of "Creation." "Evolution" was, by popular lecturers in those days, fiercely attacked as "atheistic"; which was only another way of saying that Archdeacon Paley and his design argument had been "killed" by Charles Darwin. I remember one "Christian Evidence" lecturer who tried to prove that the geological record of the rocks supported Genesis *against* Evolution.

But Palmer was much more than an anti-Christian; he was a constructive scientific thinker. He took a most interesting part in discussions on "Materialism" versus "Spiritualism" in debates on spiritualism and psychical research. Although he remained a convinced Materialist to the end, he was always a courteous and tolerant debater. In the clash of views and opinions nothing is more important than a tolerant spirit to help the enquirer to get a clear judgment. And Palmer never confused the "open mind" with the *empty* mind!

Palmer had a lifelong friend, Eager, so often seen together that Eager was called sometimes "Palmer's shadow." It was a great friendship: both were keen students and lovers of science.

On the question of Theism, Palmer rejected—like T. H. Huxley and Herbert Spencer—the God of the Bible, but he preferred to call himself an Agnostic. He was, like Dr. Julian Huxley's illustrious grandfather, an atheist in a *qualified* sense. Palmer's verdict on T. H. Huxley was, in a remark to the present writer: "A great man in a great age." No doubt with the new scientific horizons to-day modern *religious* ideas have moved forward among responsible thinkers since *this* passage was penned (T. H. Huxley is here attacking the idea that the Universe is controlled by a Personal Creator and proprietor):—

"Of all the senseless babble I have ever had occasion to read, the demonstration of those philosophers who undertake to tell us all about the nature of God would be the worst, if they were not surpassed by the still greater absurdities of those who try to prove that there is no God."

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national anthem. Radio-Oranje, from London, during the war 1942-44, used to play it at the beginning of its short programmes. It is a lively and martial affair and begins with a very historical quotation dating from the religious wars in Holland, 16th century—shall I rather say liberation war?—when the Dutch swept the Vatican and its harbour of Briel or Brielle, in Dutch Den Briel, by the Water Beggars, or Sea Beggars. I should be glad to know the year. The two first lines of this Holland-Dutch "Geuzenlied" are:—

In naam van Oranje, doet open de poort. De Watergeus komt om den Briel.	In name of Orange, do (make) open the gate. The Water Beggar comes for (comes to fetch) the Briel.
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This also was quite familiar in Antwerp before and still a bit after 1914-18, when Liberal societies with their music band had an outing in the street or assembled before their "locals."

Such a thing did not exist before the 1914 war and still in 1920-22, as a Liberal music band going out in the street without playing two or three times the Flemish Geuzenlied: one means, of course, in the Flemish towns of Antwerp and Ghent, and also Brussels and minor others, Antwerp and Ghent having a very old anti-clerical tradition, anti-clerical meaning there anti-religious.

But to distinguish between the two "Geuzenlieds," the Dutch and the Flemish, the Flemish Beggars' Song was often called "Van 't ongediert" ("Of the vermin," or more correctly "From the vermin," because of the well-known and famous chorus, "From the vermin of the Papists, deliver our Fatherland").

Breydel and De Coninck were two Flemish leaders or heroes in the struggle and wars of the Flemish Commoners against the Kings of France, period towards the death of Edward I of England (1307).

Van Artevelde, of course, is a known figure in English history. He was the leader of the wool merchants of Ghent in the period from which originates the Woolsack on which sits the Speaker of the Lords.

Leie en Schelde, Lys, the flax river, and Scheldt, are the two rivers who have their confluence in Ghent; therefore Ghent is the town of Leie en Schelde, also the town of Artevelde.

Klauwaerts (Claw-ards) was the name of the Flemish Commoners at war, because of the clawing lion on their standard. The French and their hangers-on were Lily-ards.

(To be concluded)

Life

Her hand in his affectionately lay
And for a moment felt his answering squeeze;
Then, suddenly, he snatched his hand away
To stifle a loud sneeze:
How oft, alack, the rude events of life
Sunder the sweet exchange of man and wife.

B. S.

The National Secular Society

The N.S.S. Annual Report adopted at the Whitsun Conference has now been issued in the form of a 16-page printed booklet, and copies have been sent to all members of the Parent Branch and to secretaries of other branches for distribution. It tells an interesting story of a year of work and progress. Non-members who would like to receive a complimentary copy can do so by writing to the Secretary at Headquarters for one.

This Believing World

Though it is quietly kept out of the nationalist Press, there appears to be a bit of a holy row in Christian circles as to whether the Church of England is Protestant or not. The Coronation Oath referred to it as Protestant—but the *Church Times* and many bishops hate the word almost as much as Roman Catholics. The Church of England is "Anglo-Catholic" and not Protestant, they maintain. But the fact remains that the Coronation Oath declared that the Queen was crowned to maintain the Protestant Faith and not the Anglo-Catholic one.

Actually, of course, it is mostly a war of mere words for, so long as the Church of England protests against the Pope, it must be "Protest"-ant and no amount of quibbling can alter that. But what matters it for Freethinkers how the Church or Churches are named? They all more or less believe in the same hotch-potch of twaddle—miracles, Hell, Virgin Birth, the resurrection of dead people, and so on. We are "saved" not by this conglomeration of credulity and primitive superstition but by modern science. And don't the Churches know it!

Whatever else the Mau Maus have done in Kenya, one thing is certain, and that is that the churches there have heavily suffered. Many have no Sunday services, others perform before congregations of two or three, and some of the mission stations have lost half their converts. Church finances are worse than ever, in fact, some of the clergy get now half their salaries and others nothing at all. Still, there are Kenya parsons quite sure that there "will emerge a purified Church" from all this. It is the opinion of the Rev. N. Langford Smith, though he does not explain why it is necessary to "purify" the Church through Mau Mau terrorism—or at all!

That fiery Revivalist, Billy Graham, who is going to send the whole of England back to Christ on its knees, is being forestalled in some measure by another fiery Revivalist, Jack Martz, and his Christian Wonder Daughter, Renée. This young lady, at the age of 13, has addressed meetings in Bolton and elsewhere, to save grown men and women from "sin" and to bring them, also on their knees, to Christ Jesus even with more alacrity than the great Spurgeon himself. It is true that a Bolton reporter claimed that she spoke so quickly as to be "either unheard or uncomprehended"—but surely that is the measure of all great revivalists. To be understood would be the death-knell of Revivalism.

Unfortunately, a great deal of the passionate outbursts of the young miracle-working Wonder Girl fell flat, because the platform was crowded with the sick, the halt, and the blind, all expecting God Almighty through Renée to heal them. Alas, the Lord must have been off colour when the Bolton reporter was there. "No one," he wrote, "threw away his crutches"—no one was cured. Everybody was disappointed—except perhaps the Martzes when they contemplated their collection boxes and added up the generous results.

But we must add that the poor reporter got it "in the neck" for his irreverent description of what happened in Bolton. The *Bolton Evening News* published a number of letters from shocked Christians aghast at his sly remarks—"Say Amen, said Jack Martz, and the audience with one voice obeyed unhesitatingly" was one of them—the idea that any mere reporter should tell the truth about such "a

deeply spiritual atmosphere" being highly resented. It looks as if the great Billy himself may have equally irreverent reports.

Although the Pope and his henchmen denounce birth control with fury, and all good Catholics respond—more or less—yet the supply of priests for the Roman Church appears to be no better than the supply for the other Churches. Catholics are increasing in numbers, but the call to minister unto them appears to descend on the shoulders of fewer and fewer young men. In other words, the privilege of serving God through prayer and celibacy, to say nothing of the lack of cash, appears to be less and less a "vocation." The Pope and Cardinal Griffin are tremendously disturbed at this lack of "the seriousness of the need" for more priests, but what can they do about it? Nothing at all. The priesthood is viewed with more and more disfavour by all healthy young men no matter how religiously they are brought up.

Theatre

By RAYMOND DOUGLAS

Tobias and the Angel, by James Bridie, is at the Arts Theatre. It may be described as a form of extravaganza based on the old Jewish legend, in which the story is told with the simplicity of a child's fairy tale. But the good fairy is none less than the archangel Raphael, and the bad fairy is the demon Asmodeus. Tobias is the simple-minded son of the good old Jew Tobit, who goes on a long journey in order to collect a debt and help restore some of his father's lost fortune.

Leaving this world of fantasy aside, there is much in the play to attract by virtue of the good production and notably by the acting of some of the leading parts. This is the first time I have seen what may be described as the ideal casting of David Kossoff in the part of Tobias for this is an interpretation where the Jew truly comes to life. Harold Kasket likewise gave another characteristic performance as his friend Raguel. Brian Forbes, as Tobias, succeeded in being as his wife described him—a nice little man. Maxine Audley, as his wife, gave some depth to the part. Sara Luzita, as Azorah, both looks and dances beautifully. Only Tobit's wife, Anna, could not quite leave the West End behind and submerge herself in the part.

It is a colourful play, amusing and witty, and cannot—of course—be taken seriously.

The Stars Slip Up

The stars have slipped up.

To the Diary there came this prediction from an astrologer: "There can be no peace truce in Korea until the planet Saturn, now in the Chinese sign of the Zodiac Libra, moves into Scorpio at the end of November. Being now conjunct of Neptune—the 'double-crossing' and Communistic planet—any chance of the armistice coming off before that date is practically nil."

(*The Sunday Express*, 26/7/53.)

To-day's Great Thought

It was always my belief that two religions are necessary for man, Christianity and Cricket. — Rev. T. Swinney, Vicar of St. James's Church, West Hartlepool. (*The Observer*, 26/7/53.)

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Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

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NOTES AND NEWS

We are very pleased to be able to publish in this issue of *The Freethinker* some reminiscences of our revered contributor, the late T. F. Palmer, whose recent death at the age of 82 has left, as we are sure that our readers will agree, an irreparable gap in our columns. When one looks around at the mediocrities and nonentities whose names clutter up the columns of *Who's Who* and who fill our popular journals with their superficial outpourings, and reflect that a man of the intellectual eminence and encyclopedic knowledge of T. F. Palmer was virtually unknown outside a limited Freethought circle, it, once again, makes one query the appellation, "Homo Sapiens." Why "Sapiens"? One seems, more and more, to be forced to the unwelcome conclusion that "progress" is a double-edged weapon: mankind's astonishing technical progress has not, unfortunately, been matched by his intellectual advance. The much-maligned "Victorians," whatever their shortcomings, did think things out, instead of, as seems to be increasingly the case to-day, merely "switching on" the wireless for the appropriate information. The "Victorian" Freethinkers were a notable band. We were reminded of that fact in, and by the hard-hitting article of the founder and first editor of *The Freethinker*, G. W. Fichte, which we republished last week. Until the last few months, when death cut short his fortnightly contributions, we were reminded of the same fact by T. F. Palmer's articles, always cogent, lucid, and replete with factual information. Throughout its seventy-one years' existence *The Freethinker* has commanded the unstinted service of a band of brilliant and devoted men, not least amongst whom was T. F. Palmer.

A few weeks back, our veteran contributor, Bayard Simmons, indicted Joseph McCarthy, the notorious "red-baiting" American senator, as the most dangerous contemporary menace to Freethought and to all that it represents. To judge from current reactions in the American Press and on the air, many people who could not, by any conceivable stretch of the imagination, be called Freethinkers, appear to be coming to much the same conclusion as our contributor regarding the activities of the aforesaid senator. In the B.B.C. series, "An American Looks at Europe," recently concluded, the well-known radio commentator, Joseph C. Harsch, made an outspoken attack on the senator. Almost simultaneously, the American Protestant churches, in the person of Methodist Bishop Oxman, reacted sharply to charges of pro-Communism levelled against them by McCarthy's myrmidons. Even the White House and its presidential occupant, General Eisenhower, appear to be getting restive at McCarthy's attempts to become, in effect, a kind of unofficial President. The fortunes of the Irish Catholic senator appear to have passed their zenith and to be on the decline.

One recent occurrence, in particular, leads us to this opinion. The Third Programme of the B.B.C. broadcast, twice, a talk on "The Right to Differ" by George F. Kennan, top-ranking American diplomat and recent Ambassador in Moscow, in which Mr. Kennan, without mentioning either McCarthy or his "Un-American Activities" Committee by name—we recall that he is a career diplomatist!—none-the-less made a slashing and unmistakable attack on their current activities, which the speaker denounced as, themselves, "Un-American." What made Mr. Kennan's speech particularly significant was the fact that he, too, is a Roman Catholic, and that his address was delivered at, and to, the Catholic University of Notre Dame. The Catholic Church has never had the reputation for putting all its eggs into one basket. Is it preparing to drop McCarthy as too much of a liability?

Elsewhere in this issue we are publishing a rather unusual feature, an old Flemish Protestant war song, reminiscent of the stirring days of the revolt of the Netherlands against Spain and the Inquisition, in the age of the first Elizabeth. This anti-Papist song of the "Sea Beggars" is translated for us, with explanatory and historical notes, by our learned contributor, Mr. J. J. Berckmans. Those of our readers who were present at the 1953 Annual Conference of the N.S.S., in Leicester, will remember Mr. Berckmans, an astonishing personality, on leave from the Congo. Mr. Berckmans, who joined the N.S.S. whilst in this country, has now returned to the Congo, whence we hope soon to hear from him again. Meanwhile, we do not doubt that he will continue to spread the light of Freethought in "Darkest Africa" and will prove a thorn in the side of witch-doctors of all creeds and colours by his hard-hitting attacks on superstition. We wish him "bon voyage" and every success during the next four years until he revisits us again.

We take this opportunity of congratulating Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Warner, of 35, Fairlop Road, London, E. 11, who celebrate their diamond wedding on August 1. For many years members of the West Ham Branch of the N.S.S., Mr. and Mrs. Warner have handed on their Freethought to a second and third generation, so that membership of the Society to-day includes nine other members of their family. Yet we are told that only religion preserves marriage and the family!

Robert Taylor

The Devil's Chaplain (1784-1844) By H. CUTNER

(Continued from page 239)

AS for the problem of the Essenes and the point that they had part of the gospel-story before the supposed time of Christ, this rests, as any reader of the *Diegesis* can see for himself, on far more than a comparison of a passage in Eusebius with one of Philo. Actually Taylor devotes over 50 pages to the question—but one would never think so from Hennell.

Moreover, Dupuis is hardly mentioned at all in the *Diegesis* though when Taylor came to deal with the Sun-myth theory he went to Dupuis, who is more often referred to in the *Devil's Pulpit*. The truth is, of course, that Hennell, who fully deserves the recognition he receives from Robertson, is almost forgotten these days.

We have gone past any work which attempts merely to rationalise the gospel story. Either Jesus was a God, or he did not exist as a person at all. There is no half-way. The story in the Gospels is that of a God, and not that of a man; and it was only a God who could have commanded the adoration of the first Christian communities. Had these people believed that Jesus was a man like themselves, there would have been no Christian religion. And history, it cannot too strongly be shown, knows nothing whatever of a man called Jesus, or of his mother, Mary, or of his (reputed) father, Joseph. As far as it goes Hennell's work is excellent; but Taylor was shrewd enough to see even without following Dupuis that "no God, no Jesus" was the true solution to the Christian riddle; and as he certainly did not believe that Jesus was God, he was forced to the conclusion that Jesus was a myth—like the pagan deities whom he so much resembled. In other words, Taylor's point of view has survived while that of Hennell's, like those of Renan and Strauss, is declining. Taylor, in fact, was too far ahead of his time; but that should be put to his credit. Perhaps he will one day be given his rightful place as one of the shrewdest and most far-seeing Free-thinkers in the history of the movement.

Apart from the foul-mouthed references to the *Diegesis* in the Preface to Pye Smith's *Answer*, there is a reply to the book entitled *Remarks on the Work of Robert Taylor, styled the 'Diegesis.'* Its author is anonymous but quite as Christian as Pye Smith, if not quite as foul-mouthed. It appears from this work that "Pride, hideous as it is, seems yet to be the most specious cause of infidelity." On the other hand, "Christian humility, proleptically speaking, has always been the characteristic of the wisest of mankind." There is a great deal of this kind of nonsense in the 50 pages of the pamphlet but no argument except abuse; and none worth even considering. It is pretty evident that the real scholars in the Church preferred the weapon of boycott rather than a disputation with a brilliant opponent, who was, after all, one of themselves. Besides they were likely to get the worst of the encounter.

In one of the famous Thomas Scott pamphlets, *The Mystical Element in Christianity*, by Ed. Vansittart Neale, will be found another and much more temperate reply to Taylor. Indeed, it is a treat to come across an answer to his work which is not disfigured by hate, malice, and venom. Mr. Neale's position is clearly and dispassionately stated. He will have nothing to do with any theory about the origin of Christianity which dismisses Jesus as a myth; and he coldly analyses, among others, Taylor's arguments against the authenticity of the well-known passage in Tacitus.

Most of Mr. Neale's objections are a matter of opinion;

and in any case, as has been already pointed out, the arguments against its authenticity have been very ably stated again in fuller detail by W. B. Smith, J. M. Robertson, and Hochart. And they had been also developed in a work published in 1876, entitled *Tacitus and Bracciolini*, by J. W. Ross. Ross's work received a very bad press; Christian reviewers were not at all likely to welcome any argument which deprived them of perhaps the only early reference in Roman literature to Jesus and Pontius Pilate. They had most reluctantly to give up the passage in Josephus as a palpable forgery though desperate attempts are even still being made to retain something in Josephus. But if the Tacitus passage had to go, it looked as if there was no reference anywhere in much later which could be used to prove the existence of Jesus, even as a man. And so Ross was allowed to fall into oblivion.

Mr. Neale refused to go beyond the position taken up by Renan, Strauss, and the author of the *English Life of Jesus* (Thomas Scott—helped by the Rev. Sir G. W. Cox) the "good, kind, noble, man" position. And naturally he tries very hard to show that Taylor has made mistakes. This is very likely—in one or two details; Taylor could have put them all right and his argument would not have been affected in the least. His broad generalisations remain and they are almost entirely in harmony with modern criticism.

In Taylor's next work, the *Devil's Pulpit*, the first volume of which was published in 1831 will be found the "Astronomico-Theological Discourses" which Taylor delivered, dressed in full canonicals, at the Rotunda in Blackfriar's Road and elsewhere during 1830 and 1831. They earned for him the title of the "Devil's Chaplain" and he took as his motto at the head of each reprint of the lectures: "And a bonnie pulpit it is."—Alan Cunningham.

To do anything like justice to this work in the pages of a pamphlet is quite impossible. The lectures are packed with detail and they deal with a much disputed point—exactly how much of the Bible are we to look upon as allegory, symbolism, myth, and how much as history, or if not history exactly, how much did the writers expect their readers to believe was actual history?

Even to-day, while a good many Rationalists have thrown over their former belief in the Bible, they can be found to argue that the Bible writers were giving us not allegory, but what they thought was real history. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, may not have lived, but they were meant to represent real men, and their story was never meant to be taken as allegory. It is here that Taylor and this particular type of Rationalist part company. For the *Devil's Pulpit* aims at explaining well-known stories in the Bible in terms of what is known as the Sun-myth theory.

What exactly is meant by this term? What did the ancients mean by it?

If one looks up at the sky on a clear dark night, it will be seen studded with stars, which at first appear dotted all over the heavens without method. But if the stars are more attentively examined certain well-defined shapes will be very clearly seen, and these shapes, in relation to the other shapes, never change though they may appear to do so in the sky itself caused by the movement of the earth round the sun.

The names given to the various clusters of stars are known to all who have studied a little astronomy—such as

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With the Rationalists at Sheffield

By P. VICTOR MORRIS, General Secretary, N.S.S.

WITH the approval of the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society, I attended the Annual Conference of the Rationalist Press Association held at Stephenson Hall, Sheffield University, from Friday to Tuesday, July 10 to 14. R.P.A. conferences bear little resemblance to those of the N.S.S., so well known to many of the readers of this journal, for they are not concerned with progress reports, the election of officers and committees, and the passing of motions. With the R.P.A. such matters are the business of an Annual General Meeting, and the Conference I took part in heard and discussed a series of lectures and papers on the theme, "The Impact of Religion on Daily Life."

Space does not allow for much more than the names of the speakers and their subjects to be given. Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, M.A., dealt with "Religion and Radio"; Vice-Admiral Sir Sheldon Dudley, until 1945 Medical Director-General of the Navy, with "Religion and Medicine"; Mr. Robert S. W. Pollard with "Religion and the Law"; Miss Winifred Taylor, M.A., with "Religion and Education"; Mr. Douglas Houghton, M.P. (of "Can I Help You?" fame) with "Religion and Politics"; Dr. H. S. Ferns, M.A., Ph.D., with "Religion and the Press"; while additional short papers were read by three younger R.P.A. members, "Rationalism in Birmingham University," by Mr. Thompson; "The So-Called Fight Against Religion," by Mr. Hopcutt, of Oxford University, and "The Tradition of Rationalism in Scotland," by Mr. Lindsay, of Glasgow.

All these contributions were thoughtful, well-documented pieces of work, and any good results from the impact of religion on daily life were conspicuous by their absence. We heard that the B.B.C. is now favouring religious dogmatism more than ever, notwithstanding organised efforts for many years to obtain fair treatment for unorthodox views; that religious opposition to medical progress finds new outlets to-day for the obscurantism that used to obstruct anatomical dissection and decry the relief of pain by anaesthetics; that similar pious objections now stood in the way of divorce law reform, freedom in private sex conduct, voluntary euthanasia for the incurable, and a humane attitude towards abortion; that teachers were more often giving their own views on religion to their pupils in the schools than an "Agreed Syllabus"; and that the best hope of finding a solution to problems due to religious differences would be found by tackling them in the teachers' training colleges; that organised religious bodies conducted effective campaigns, of intimidation to influence parliamentary action, and that M.P.s with small majorities were very susceptible to such pressure; that the religious Press of the country showed little concern with the practical issues of modern life, and that the lay Press was almost entirely opportunist, playing up to religious interests according to the need for increasing or maintaining circulations.

The lecturers, whose points of view are thus inadequately summarised, provided plenty of meat for those present to get their teeth into, and lengthy, but never dull, discussions followed every paper and speech. May I here state that the "reverent rationalism" of which we are occasionally reminded was very little in evidence, and that my personal part in the discussions for the purpose of stating the attitude of organised secularism to the questions under consideration was generously received?

and Mr. R. Speirs, of the N.S.S. Sheffield Branch, and Mr. O. Ford, of our Nottingham Branch. Other pleasant contacts made were with Mr. F. C. C. Watts, managing director of Watts & Co.; Miss Constance Kerr, secretary of the R.P.A.; Mr. Hector Hawton, editor of the *Literary Guide*; Miss McBride, secretary of the Glasgow R.P.A. Branch, which co-operates regularly with the Glasgow Secular Society; Sir Ernest Kennaway, known for his important cancer-research work; and Mr. J. W. Robertson Scott, founder and editor of that highly civilised quarterly magazine, *The Countryman*. When a party of us visited the works of the English Steel Corporation Ltd. this veteran of eighty-seven made a point of telling groups of steel workers encountered during a lengthy tour of the premises that the party consisted of rationalists. When I told him that I was at the Conference to represent secularism he told me with pride that he once met Charles Bradlaugh and shook his hand, and that he had known G. W. Foote. Hearing that I was thirty years his junior, he asked me if I had brought my marbles with me. I greatly enjoyed his company.

To sum up, I consider the contact with our rationalist friends at work and play during a long week-end well worth while. It was made clear to me that they were in full agreement with a policy of co-operation between the various sections of freethinking opinion. They include a considerable number of experts in the technique of modern research, whose work can be of great value to N.S.S. propagandists by means of the spoken word and the pen, and it will be to the advantage of secularism in its forward march if we take all the benefit from such effective ammunition that we can.

Book Review

By P. C. KING

"Searchlight on Morals." By F. A. Ryder. (Watts & Co.)

The title of this work is a misnomer; the author had more properly called it something like *A Peep at Sex Relations*, for it deals with nothing else. Though a passing reference is made to the moral questions of deceit and defamation, no attempt is made to elaborate them. Capital punishment, flogging, social rights and theft, imprisonment, censorship and the use of force—that is, the primary moral issues—are not even mentioned by Mr. Ryder. And even on his pet subject, sex, he does not deal with homosexuality, Lesbianism, incest, etc.

I have never been able to see the relevancy of sex and morals. The former is a purely biological function. It is as relevant, to my mind, to talk of a man being immoral because he goes to bed with a certain woman as to say he is immoral because he takes a certain purgative. Constipation and the sex urge are physical problems of biology. In common with other animals, man has four primary functions—to eat, to sleep, to excrete and to copulate. One cannot inhibit the first three without killing the animal; but the fourth, with the highest emotional content of all, can be canalised or even entirely frustrated.

It is just for this reason that all religions seize on sex relations and make them a moral question. It is the most obvious and easiest road to power, and what is religion but organising for power, its attainment and maintenance? Yet in his chapter on morals and religion Mr. Ryder makes no mention of this "first cause" of religion's interest in morals. Instead he dwells on trivial and ridiculous reasons

such as that monks develop sex restrictions to satisfy their mental and physical masturbation.

I do not understand why the author so constantly refers to Christian teaching or his predilection for quoting texts, since his book purports to be a work for study by rationalists. I am indifferent to the fact that the Bible does not prohibit divorce and am not interested in Matthew xix, 9. The really important point is that the Christian Churches, Catholic and Protestant, have prohibited divorce for reasons fundamental to their power concepts, only lifting up in important cases of State security, such as in the cases of Charlemagne, Henry VIII, the Elector and Napoleon, etc. Mr. Ryder, however, does in this case attach the charge of immorality where it belongs—on the churches with their pretence of a "natural law" of monogamy, to be forced on all and sundry, whether Christian adherents or not.

Some interesting statistics are quoted by the author, such as that 25 per cent. of husbands and 20 per cent. of wives in Great Britain are unfaithful, and that 37 per cent. of the male population in U.S.A. admit to some homosexual experience. Divorces in 1946 in Great Britain were 31,457, eight times those of a decade earlier or 7 per cent. of marriages in 1946; in the U.S.A. the figures were 620,000 divorces or 27 per cent. of the marriages in the same period. These increases, the author points out, are due to greater facilities in divorce and not to some deterioration in moral fibre, and that an infinitude of suffering was endured in the preceding century when the dissolution of marriages was so much more difficult. But I do suggest Mr. Ryder changes his misleading title.

Correspondence

"WHITHER FREETHOUGHT?"

SIR,—How often one finds that those who are "deadly serious" themselves are the first to accuse others of lack of humour—as a crime! I rather thought, though, that religion was a serious subject. . . . Yes, I am quite sure Mr. Cutner will demolish me completely—on paper—although he does not yet know what my arguments, much less my conclusions, are going to be. It is much easier to destroy than to build, and he can demolish anything; already I see him sharpening his knives. In fact, there is no end to the lethal arguments that can be used by both—by all—sides. The tragedy (or comedy?) is that he should *want* to!—want to crush at the outset any broader spirit of inquiry into certain fundamentals of existence which he has already decided are not worthy of notice.

It would seem that Mr. W. E. Huxley's prophecy of doom to the Freethought Party is already coming to pass if its "thinking" is thus no longer "free" but has to be a rigid, pre-determined line and if, as his letter suggests, he places more importance on the survival of the Rationalist Society and its journal than on the quest for a reasonable ideology (*not* hocus-pocus) that might come nearer to satisfying and strengthening the majority of men.

But, of course, our esteemed Editor will never allow his journal to become shackled to the past, however great and splendid, or to one materialistic set of ideas.

I fully approve Mr. Huxley's scheme for youthful P.S.A.s—and for the rest, my future articles will speak for themselves.—Yours, etc.,

KATHLEEN C. ALLPRESS.

P.S.—The above is a sad example of the un-Christian hostility roused by the Freethought type and tone of criticism against which I am inveighing. I am deeply ashamed and must endeavour next time to turn the other cheek either with silence or a more generous and courteous reply. But I am letting it stand in order to show how your methods work—and, of course, in self-defence.

DEMOCRACY AND MONARCHY

SIR,—Basil J. Edgcombe misses the fact that we rest upon our right, not upon any "benevolence" in speaking our freethoughts. Such rights were obtained by other than mere "armchair revolutionaries" and to-day vigilance is very seriously needed.—Yours, etc.,

HARRY FIDDION.

MCCARTHY

SIR,—Mr. Bayard Simmons's article, "Joseph McCarthy, Freethought's Greatest Menace," has but one flaw—its title. May I (with respect and affection for Bayard Simmons) suggest a different title?—i.e., "Joseph McCarthy—Freethought's Greatest Asset."

I still believe, optimistically, that you "can't fool all the people all the time." Barnum was well in advance of *his* time.—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

JESUS OR PAUL?

SIR,—It is obvious that Mr. Cutner and I must agree to differ on whether or not the words ascribed to Jesus, about which Mr. Cutner is so concerned, are figurative.

Who gave Christianity as we know it its characteristic stamp, I say Paul; but apparently Mr. Cutner thinks otherwise. Has he, I wonder, ever read John Langdon-Davies's "A Short History of Women," or Havelock Ellis's literary essays? If he has, he will hardly agree with them on the point at issue. I could quote at length from Ellis's essay "St. Francis and Others" (included in the Thinker's Library volume "Morals, Manners and Men") how the heavily Pauline theology overlays the simple utterances of the Nazarene. I must rest content with reproducing just one of Ellis's sentences:—

"Well-nigh everything that has ever been evil in Christianity, its temporal power, its accursed intolerance, its contempt for reason, for beautiful living, for every sweet and simple aspect of the world . . . flows directly from Paul." I hold no brief for Jesus; but while my atheism dates from my 18th year it has not made me rabidly anti-religious. I suggest that Mr. Cutner writes with a degree of emotion that is suspect in this case.—Yours, etc.,

G. I. BENNETT.

FREETHOUGHT IN THE MODERN WORLD

SIR,—I thoroughly welcome W. E. Huxley's letter in which he shows how we can use similar means to religion to organise and perpetuate ourselves.

Obviously we could have no place for hymns or prayers but we could adopt the following ideas:—

(1) A *creed* affirming our naturalist philosophy and ethics.
(2) A *regular liturgy and calendar*. The four cardinal events of the summer and winter solstices and the vernal and autumnal equinoxes should be used for appropriate seasonal festivities and also for stressing their astronomical and mythological significance. There should be a brief lesson of 20 minutes or so for each Sunday, designed to give over a complete year a very brief outline of the scientific picture of the universe, the evolution of man and society and the social and ethical principles of a naturalist philosophy.

(3) In ethics I suggest we put forward the deliberate creation of a pattern of culture as the highest expression of our human nature. I make social equality and mutual aid the basis of this particular pattern. (Perhaps Evelyn Belchambers may feel that this answers her demand for a genuine and worthy alternative to the religious pattern!)

(4) I suggest we claim to be a religion in regard to the law and claim similar privileges as other Churches, but we should not adopt a policy of studied belligerency, preferring rather to co-operate whenever possible for specific purposes with any organisation willing to treat us as equals.—Yours, etc.,

JAMES R. HOWES

PASSPORT TO PARADISE

CHICAGO.—Gravediggers at 17 Roman Catholic cemeteries in the Chicago area went on strike to-day for more pay.—*Daily Express*, July 21, 1953.

Robert Taylor (Continued from page 246)

Ursa Major, Auriga, Perseus, the Milky Way, the Pleiades and so on. But round these clusters the ancients, through centuries of observation, wove fantastic stories endowing the shapes with human and animal forms, and giving certain planets human attributes. From these wild but often beautiful fantasies came astrology, with its signs of the Zodiac, the imaginary "houses" or "places" in the sky where each month the sun appears to enter, and which in conjunction with other fanciful theories, are supposed to form the true character at birth of each human being.

(To be continued)