

The Freethinker

Vol. LXX III—No. 40

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Price Fourpence

HAVING been recently on the European Continent in connection with the meeting in Brussels of the Executive Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers, opportunity has not been lacking to observe at close quarters the European Freethought movement and to note its current preoccupations, personalities and problems. We hope that these impressions may prove of interest to the readers of *The Freethinker*.

The Belgian metropolis, the city of Brussels, where the World Congress of last year was held, and where this year's meeting of the Executive Committee was held, is one of the finest cities in Europe—besides being one of the most expensive! No one who was present at the municipal reception to the World Congress, which took place in the Town Hall, is ever likely to forget the interior of that splendid edifice, doubtless one of the most impressive buildings in Europe. Most of the Town Hall was rebuilt in the nineteenth century after a fire; but the magnificent Renaissance banqueting-hall of the Dukes of Burgundy, which dates from 1406 A.D., is still preserved unimpaired in its sombre splendour; a sight of overpowering grandeur. More massive, though less graceful than the Town Hall in its beautiful medieval square, is the majestic "Palace of Justice," the equivalent of our Law Courts; from the steps of which a splendid view, particularly impressive in the evening light, of the lower part of the city can be obtained.

The city of Brussels itself abounds in objects of historic and aesthetic interest. Of particular interest to Freethinkers is the statue erected by the Belgian Freethinkers in 1909 to the Spanish teacher and martyr, Francisco Ferrer, the "frame-up" and execution of whom by a Spanish court-martial, obviously instigated by the Catholic Church and by the clerical reaction, provoked a storm of indignation in Liberal circles in the Europe of that day, which, indeed, our older readers may possibly remember. We fear that it is scarcely a sign of progress that, in the contemporary Spain of Franco, similar barbarities nowadays pass almost without comment. Rather inappropriately, the statue of the Spanish martyr is flanked by a massive Catholic church; but, more appropriately in a Catholic land such as Belgium, the back of that self-same church faces an insalubrious slum, the most unsavoury-looking street of which bears the pious name of "Nom de Jésus"—"Name of Jesus"!

Our actual meeting place was in a centre of advanced study attached to the "Free" (Secular) University of Brussels. Our readers will recall that it was in another building of this famous seat of learning and of anti-clerical propaganda, that our World Congress was held last year. Created in deliberate opposition to the Catholic University of Louvain, the "Free" University of Brussels has had amongst its professorial staff such world-renowned savants as the eminent historian the late Prof. Henri Pirenne, and still, despite his daring escapades in the

heights of space and in the depths of the sea, happily in the land of the living, Prof. Auguste Picard of balloon and bathysphere fame, on whom his intrepid explorations of both the stratosphere above and the ocean floor below us, have bestowed world-wide fame. Both these eminent men rank as advanced Freethinkers.

The discussions of the Executive Committee—eleven wise persons and the present writer!—were mostly of a routine character not very relevant in the present context. Mostly, on this occasion, they were concerned with the forthcoming 154 World Congress at the ancient city of Luxemburg, to be held in the first week of

September, 1954, where, amongst others, we hope that a substantial deputation of Freethinkers from the British Isles will find it possible to be present. Such routine arrangements would scarcely make interesting reading; however, a glance at the principal personalities and problems of European Freethought may, we hope, be not without interest.

Amongst the members of the Executive Committee, pride of place must be accorded, *facile princeps*, as we think would be unanimously conceded by its members, to the Secretary, Mlle. P. H. Pardon, who undauntedly resides and carries on a life-long propaganda in that holy centre of Catholicism, the University centre of Louvain. Mlle. Pardon has now been Secretary of the World Union for, we seem to remember, close on a generation and, in that capacity will, no doubt, be remembered by many readers who attended the World Congress in London in 1938, which was so impressively presided over by her compatriot, the then President, the late Dr. M. Terwagne.

In appearance, an elderly lady of smallish size, Mlle. Pardon soon reveals herself in speech and action as a human whirlwind, a veritable dynamo of human energy and enthusiasm. One can say that this splendid veteran has made the study, advocacy and, in particular, the administration of Freethought and of the International Freethought movement her entire life work which she pursues with unflinching enthusiasm, particularly on the administrative side. We really do not know what the World Union would do without this remarkable lady. Mlle. Pardon is the sort of unassuming person who is so rapt up in her self-chosen task that she does not seek the limelight for herself, but she is the sort of person who makes the wheels of progress go round. The World Union is, indeed, fortunate in its Secretary.

To meet the leaders of European Freethought is, indeed, an interesting and rewarding experience as, representative of many nationalities and languages, they pursue their deliberations under the genial direction of the English President, Charles Bradlaugh's grandson, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, who presides over the modern Babel with remarkable linguistic abilities conjoined with a patience that must

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

A Visit to Brussels

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

cause the Patriarch Job to stir in his grave with envy! Discussions are carried on in French, a language in which it appears people do not, so much, talk, as deliver Ciceronian orations. In which field, as might be expected, the lead is held by those two eloquent Frenchmen, MM. Lorulot and Cotereau, respectively, Vice-President of the World Union and Editor of the French Rationalist journal *La Raison Militante*. Indeed, both these gentlemen, M. Cotereau in particular, talk French at such astonishing speed that they should be perfectly safe at the Day of Judgement, since the Recording Angel could not, even with angelic speed, possibly take down and "use in evidence against them" any heresies which they might express in the course of their celestial defence!

However, in Brussels, if not in Heaven, arrangements for translation are adequate for that barbaric minority, which, unfortunately, includes the present writer, who read the French language with some facility, but who have had little opportunity to acquaint themselves with the spoken word. After two days of scarcely interrupted

eloquence, we have no doubt at all that neither the English Cabinet nor the College of Cardinals can hold a candle in eloquence in comparison with the International Executive of the World Union of Freethinkers.

In subsequent articles we hope to deal with both the Freethought movement in Switzerland, which arsenal of democracy we visited subsequently, and also with the fundamental problems which confront the European Freethinkers in 1953. Here, we will merely add that preparations are now in hand for the World Congress in Luxembourg, 1954, from September 1-6, under the general title of: "The Churches and the Evolution of Modern Society." Our Luxembourg comrades, under the energetic leadership of M. Gremling, an M.P. of the Grand Duchy, are busily engaged already in the advance preparations, and we hope that the British Freethought movement will be worthily represented on what, we hope, will be a landmark in the evolution and current revival of European Freethought in face of the present counter-offensive of the Christian Churches.

Religion in English Life and Leisure

By GREGORY S. SMELTERS

"Convince a man that churchgoing is a waste of time, and he has a hundred other interests or recreations waiting to occupy the vacated hour. We want people to occupy their time better, not to leave it idle."—JOSEPH McCABE.

A NOVEL, startling social survey on the English behaviour appeared in the middle of 1951, was at once hailed by Press reviewers as a sociological document of first importance, and has since been apparently attracting increased attention from the reading public throughout the British Commonwealth, as reviews and references even in the Antipodal digests and editorials testify. It was *English Life and Leisure* (London: Longmans), written by two British sociologists, B. Seebohm Rowntree and G. R. Lavers. Its highly interesting general articles on the case histories of 220 typical persons, commercialised gambling, drink, smoking, sexual promiscuity, honesty, cinema, stage, broadcasting, reading habits, adult education, are crowned by a prominent chapter of 36 pages on religious beliefs and behaviour. The book of 482 pages closes with a special chapter on leisure-time activities in High Wycombe, and a comparative chapter on leisure-time pursuits in the Scandinavian countries.

Obviously, the chapter on English religion will be of prime interest to all rationalists. It confirms once more the general belief of the great decay of Christian superstition, as reported earlier—e.g., by the Gallup Poll on the faith of British men and women (*News Chronicle*, January 13, 1948), to the effect that 55 per cent of population were disbelievers in the personal God of the Churches, and 51 per cent. disbelieved in the immortality of soul. (Compare also the Gallup Poll on prayer, *ibidem*, February 9, 1950, p. 5.) The most striking fact disclosed by the present survey is a typical church attendance census in York: the authors found that "the attendance (sampled) which represented 35.5 per cent. of the adult population in 1901, fell to 17.7 per cent. in 1935, and to 13.0 per cent. in 1948. At this rate of decay, it seems that there will be no churchgoers in York in 1971. In questioning about 150 churchgoers on their immortality, only about 25.0 per cent. believed in the Christian personal survival.

The two sociologists had set themselves the following problem: (1) What influence does Christianity exert on the lives of English people (in England and Wales), and (2) What are the prospects for the future? To resolve

this problem they sub-divided it into three questions: (a) How far do people in Britain believe that Christianity is relevant to life in a scientific age? (b) Since the value of any religion depends upon the ethical dividend that it pays, what is happening to the character of the people of England and Wales to-day? Is it improving or deteriorating? (c) If their factual investigations support the general belief that there is a decline in the observance of the formalities of religion, such as churchgoing, how far does this decline represent a real deterioration of the nation's religious life? If it is a sign of real deterioration, how can it be reconciled with the growth of humanitarianism?

Let me state at once that the authors' attitude towards Christianity is that of "enlightened" believers in the Christian God, immortality, Jesus; in the "true" values of Christianity "shorn of embellishments and dogmatic assertions picked up from the time of its first revelation onwards."

This urging of the "great spiritual truths" has become already a big humbug. On their own showing, the value of the "spiritual truths" of any religion depends on the production of better social adjustment. But the writers already admit that the English people have vastly increased their social adjustment (humanitarianism) which the authors surprisingly identify with Christian ethic, only after they have rejected much of the Christian dogmas and churchgoing. Now either the authors are middleheaded, refusing to admit that, obviously, "the great spiritual truths" have become quite superfluous to a vast increase of humanitarianism, or they again pursue their semantical fallacy of the "true meaning" of Christianity, excluding by tacit assumption the fundamental (unbelieved) dogmas of a personal God and immortality from "the great spiritual truths" of Christianity, and so falsifying the whole assessment of the extent of religious decay. A remark of theirs, that "the inspiration and strength that men can draw from Jesus need not to be formalised by any dogma or interpreted by a priest" points to the "true meaning" fallacy, the true Christianity being tacitly assumed to be only Jesus's moral precepts that are acceptable to the authors, while all other disliked precepts about sword and war and threat of hellfire, all dogmas and even priests have been

JETTISONED! The amazing thing is that this surely amounts to a recommendation of *practical* atheism. But, explicitly, the authors dislike atheism, which they muddle-headedly bracket with totalitarian belief, thus fostering the false dilemma (much exploited by the sly pro-Catholic dilettantes) of "atheism and totalitarianism" versus "religion and democracy." This is an astounding confusion in a sociologist worthy of the name. According to them, atheists are no more than people who "have embraced atheistic creeds with the corresponding dogmas!" This proves that they are *completely ignorant* of what contemporary atheism stands for, both as a denial of validity of *pre-scientific* (mythological) thinking and a way of scientific social betterment (secularism).

To return to their interpretation of decay data, their confusion is supreme when they try to square the fact of obviously good standard of values to-day, which they approve, and the opposite fact of likewise obvious decay of Christian supernatural sanction for such standards. On the one hand, they say that "brutality . . . gives way readily through the 19th century as *Christian character develops*." Note the absurdity of the Christian character emerging *only* as the decay of supernaturalism was under way. Apparently, the *Christian* character was undeveloped during the preceding 15 centuries of faith! But on the next page we are assured that the modern standard of values existed for long periods in the past (and) were accepted as having the supernatural sanction of

Christianity as a revealed religion, and *that* is why, they claim, the present standard of values is *really* Christian ethic of the past. So all *because of a superimposed* label!

And, again, all this muddle only because Messrs. Rowntree and Lavers try to associate causally Christianity with democracy, and to reason that rejection of Christian superstitious precepts and taboos would involve rejection of democracy. But the social case of Britain and the Scandinavian countries, *voluntarily and spontaneously* the *most atheistic* countries in the world (a Gallup Poll: one atheist in three in Sweden, one in five in Denmark. *Truth Seeker*, September, 1947, p. 171), should have taught the authors the downright silliness of bracketing causally atheism with totalitarianism.

Finally, the gravest defect of the chapter is the deliberate omission of the statistics of the religious beliefs of the present 20,000 people in English prisons. This is obviously in line with the contemptible general conspiracy against the truth by all the pious rhetoricians.

But fortunately there is not, of course, all bunk in Messrs. Rowntree and Laver's *interpretation* of the decay of Christian superstition. The rich statistical and case material speaks plainly for itself. And there are some flashes of scientific insight which prompt me to imagine that the authors have—in the true Christian cant tradition—had their tongues in their cheeks when they were penning those sops to the "true" religion.

"Lilliburlero"

(Song of 1688)

H. G. Wells. CRUX ANSATA. An Indictment of the Roman Catholic Church. Published in Penguin Books, 1943.

Chapter: The Struggle for Britain. Page 79.

The last militant act of King James (II) as the skies blackened over him was to bring over drafts from the Catholic army Tyrconnell had raised for him. This produced among other things one of the best marching tunes in the British Army, "Lilliburlero." It was immensely popular. It was sung throughout the country. The tune is said to have been based upon an old Irish lullaby, but the words seem to have been put together in a pretended Irish brogue by Thomas Lord Wharton, and the air was made into what it still is, the most savagely thunderous and popular of British marching tunes, by no less a composer than Henry Purcell. He published and fathered it as a "New Irish Tune" in 1689 in his "Music's Handmaid."

There are endless versions of the words. People improvised and altered as it passed like a wind through the country. The general burthen ran very much after this fashion:—

Hol brother Teague, do you hear the decree?
Lilliburlero, bullen a-la,
That we are to have a new Deputy,
Lilliburlero, bullen a-la.
Lero, lero, lilliburlero, le-ero, le-ro, bullen a-la.
Le-ero, le-ero, lilliburlero-ero, le-ero, le-ero, bullen ala.
Hol by Saint Tyburn, it is the Talbote; lilliburlero bullen a-la.
And he shall cut the Englishman's throat. Lilliburlero bullen a-la.
Lero, lero, lilliburlero . . .
Though by my soul the English do prate,
The law's on their side and Christ knows what,
But if dispensation shall come from the Pope,

We'll hang Magna Carta and them in a rope.
All in France have taken a swear
That they will have no Protestant heir
(This easily became "No Protestants there").
There was an old prophecy found in a bog
That we shall be ruled by an ass and a dog.
("Dog" was Wharton's word, but the popular voice speedily changed it to "hog.")
And now is this prophecy coming to pass,
(Overwhelming Crescendo)
For Talbot's the hog and James is the ass.

Fantastically bitter doggerel, but it released the accumulating resentment of the country at the threatened return of Roman Catholic domination.

Thereafter came the "Glorious Revolution," which ultimately established the Protestant succession in England.

To a Shade

No child can suffer if he be not born,
Suffer no heartache, friendless and forlorn;
Nor yet grow up a bully and a cad
To a meek mother, or an irate dad;
My son is not, never can you grieve,
Nor your fond parents wilfully deceive;
To you, my boy, my unbegotten son,
I wave farewell, glad you were not begun.
—BAYARD SIMMONS.

JUST OUT—TENTH EDITION
The
BIBLE HANDBOOK
by G. W. FOOTE and W. P. BALL
Indispensable for all Freethinkers
Price 4s. — Postage 3d.

This Believing World

As it well known some of our finest Generals are as religious as was General Booth—with the same naive beliefs in Heaven and Angels, and Hell and its Devils. Here we have, for example, Lt.-General Sir G. Martel complaining very bitterly in the *Sunday Dispatch* about the influx of Communists into the Church of Christ. "Clear the Communists out of the Church," he almost despairingly cries, though it is by no means clear why. Does not the Church gladly receive Sinners? Is there not more whoopee in Heaven at the entry of a Sinner than a Saint? And if a believing Communist can find rest in the arms of Jesus, should not the Church—or even Churches—rejoice?

General Martel thinks that only about 10 per cent of our clergy are convinced Communists, but what a great chance they have of converting the other 90 per cent to accept both Christ and Marx. Our clergy often used to say that Bradlaugh was a Christian without knowing it, and they are no doubt saying the same thing of Marx. And after all, were not the first generations of Christians convinced Communists? Even if they knew nothing of the Materialistic Conception of History?

In his B.B.C. Broadcast on Christianity in Nigeria, Dr. Welsh, who is Professor of Religious Studies at its University College, had a very doleful tale to tell. Instead of the triumphant progress of Christ among the natives, it appears that those who have been educated by missionaries are, to put it bluntly, anxious to kick out all foreigners, including the missionaries who have educated them. And that is what will happen, Christ willing, or not. Of course, Dr. Welsh is certain that Christianity won't be kicked out—only it must not be the British version. It will have to be a version which the professor called "Universal Christianity," based on the needs of African Negroes. But we were not told clearly what is the difference between British and Universal Christianity—if there is any difference.

What will no doubt happen—it has always happened in history—Christianity in Nigeria will swallow most of its "pagan" ideas, and refurbish them as of Christ inspired. The "creator" of the world in West Africa is Osa whose emblem is a pole with a white cloth or a pot and is everywhere seen; and no doubt if another pole is put across Osa's emblem it will be called the Cross of Christ. In any case, even Dr. Welsh would have some difficulty in explaining away the difference between the Devils who people the Christian Hell and the Nigerian Evil Spirits who people the native forests.

We hate missing any marvellous cure especially if the cure was done without Spirit Guides, Indian or Chinese. The latest example comes from a correspondent to *John Bull*. He had a wart on his finger and it disappeared completely as soon as he let a black snail run over it and then impaled the unlucky snail with a thorn. We wonder how this can be explained by the 76,383 Spirit Healers in the country? Was the snail really a Spirit Doctor?

Why doesn't the good Lord answer prayers? This is a mystery not even the Pope can answer. St. Mary's Church, Peckham, for example, is without a curate because no house can be found for one. The vicar hoped his "prayers" would be answered that a flat or a house would "turn up," but God, it appears, did not bother to help one to turn up—a very sad, if Divine, Decision. But perhaps the vicar did not pray hard enough or he wafted the Almighty the wrong prayers.

The question of censoring "obscene" books once again came to the fore with the judgment passed recently against two novels considered "obscene" by our lynx-eyed police. There are many passages in God's Precious Word which, divorced from the reverent style of our Authorised Version, are as obscene as anything in literature; and no policeman would allow the Song of Solomon to be read out in schools openly translated—though he might find it a little difficult to bring either Solomon or the Lord into court. But, anyhow, are policemen the proper people to say whether a book is or is not obscene—do they know anything whatever about literature?

Theatre

Henry the Fourth, by Shakespeare, is the second of the present season of classical plays at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith.

It is noteworthy for the sincerity of Donald Wolfitt's production and also for his part as Sir John Falstaff. If you have seen him in this role in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* you cannot do better than see him for the first time in a part where the character is better developed. This is an impressive performance. The large cast do not all come up to even standard, but some of the other good performances were by David Oxley, who gives a vivid interpretation of Hotspur, Tom Criddle who is a dignified and strong Prince of Wales, and Lewis Casson who gives Glendower an almost majestic bearing.

Viewed in the light of modern play construction, Shakespeare has used some extraordinary methods. For who would to-day dare to introduce a farcical character like Falstaff into tragedy-comedy? For instance, when the Prince has killed Hotspur in combat—Falstaff finds the body and attempts to take the credit for killing him. This is done in comedy style applicable to the character, and the disjointed mixture of farcical comedy and grand battle scenes could not be reconciled with twentieth-century ideas.

But, being Shakespeare, all this is accepted. The King's Theatre is worthy of your attention for the valuable work the company are doing, and the season will continue with *Macbeth*, *As You Like It*, *Volpone* and *King Lear*.

Penelope—W. Somerset Maugham's play of 1908—has been staged at the Arts Theatre and produced by Walter Hudd.

It is impossible not to make comparisons with Shaw's earlier play *The Doctor's Dilemma*, for both are outspoken about the shortcomings of the medical profession. But whereas Shaw was to be taken seriously, *Penelope* is pure comedy. For all that, we can read a great deal of truth behind the great humour of this play, though most of the jokes at the expense of the medical profession are well known. We can at least realise that we are more free in our outlook since those days.

Pauline Jameson, who has something of Greer Garson, and Glynis Johns combined with her own personality, is well cast as the doctor's wife. Henzie Raeburn, as her mother, uttered the sentences she had to "recite" about polygamy with all the looks of shame becoming her Edwardian propriety. Michael Gwynn was charming as a doctor who sought an affair with his wife's friend. Mr. Hudd should either cut or speed up the last scene which is too slow.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION. By F. A. Ridley. Price 1s.; postage 1½d.

THE FREETHINKER

41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Telephone: Holborn 2601.

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.

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

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

L. CLAYTON'S Lectures.—Saturday, October 3, 6 p.m., Great Harwood; Sunday, October 4, 3 p.m., Haslingden (Market Place); Blackburn Market, 7 p.m.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. BARKER and MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields, a Lecture.

North London Branch (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute). — Sunday, October 4, 6-45 p.m.: P. VICTOR MORRIS, "Secularism, Humanism, Rationalism—a Comparison."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 6: O. R. MCGREGOR, "Can the Family Survive?"

Glasgow Secular Society, N.S.S. Branch (Grand Hotel, Central Hall, Bath Street).—Sunday, October 4, 3 p.m.: H. CUTNER and J. D. MACINDOE, a Debate, "Is Spiritualism True?"

Junior Discussion Group, South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, October 2, 7-15 p.m.: A. ESPANTOSO, "Spain as an Ally."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate). — Sunday, October 4, 6-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY (President, N.S.S.), "At the Cross-Roads of History."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1). — Sunday, October 4, 11 a.m.: ROYSTON PIKE, "Jehovah's Witnesses: Who they are and what they teach."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.). — Sunday, October 4, 7-15 p.m.: G. H. TAYLOR, "History and Prospects of the Secular Movement."

NOTES AND NEWS

The summer of 1953 or what it is conventional to call such, is now coming to an end, and falling leaves and a cold nip in the air remind us that winter is approaching, though some cynics might plausibly affirm that the actual difference between the seasons is becoming unpleasingly imperceptible! With the transition from the conditions of summer to the harsher climate of winter, there comes, concurrently, a change in the character and background of the propaganda of such organisations as the National Secular Society. Out of doors agitation gives way to indoor propaganda: lecture-syllabuses carefully prepared by hard-working branch secretaries replace the more informal open-air meetings held in the warmer weather. Noteworthy amongst these last in the summer season that is now passing, have been the whirlwind tours conducted around Lancashire by Mr. Jack Clayton, the consistent open-air work put in by Mr. H. Day, of Bradford, and the omnibus platform run in Hyde Park by the West London Branch, N.S.S., directly supported by Head

Office, a continuous all-weather campaign in which the vigorous efforts of the West London speakers, Messrs. O'Neill and Wood, were reinforced by speakers from other branches, *facile princeps*, easily first amongst whom was that ace agitator, Mr. Len Ebury, a notable feature of this year's out-door session in Hyde Park was the regular and successful sale, outside the park gates—commercial activities are forbidden under penalty in the sacred precincts of the park itself—of *The Freethinker* and other secularist literature. In this latter task, Mr. Harry Cleaver, the hard-working West London Secretary, and Mr. Frank Murrill, of North London Branch, were notably conspicuous, altogether, a sustained and successful effort.

With the arrival of October, N.S.S. activities switch to indoor platforms as in former years, the West London Branch is conducting a weekly series of lectures throughout the winter at that well-known hostelry, "The Laurie Arms," off the Edgware Road. In the country, Bradford Branch announce similar activities; their opening meeting being addressed next Sunday, by Mr. P. Victor Morris, General Secretary, N.S.S. Something extra special has been arranged by Glasgow Branch as an opening gambit for their winter session. The debate announced elsewhere in our columns between that redoubtable caster out of spooks, Mr. H. Cutner, and a leading Scottish spiritualist. This is Mr. Cutner's first visit, we believe, to the second city of the Empire, and we do not doubt that it will mark a notable event in the history of Scottish Secularism. Our experience of Glasgow audiences is that they like it "straight from the shoulder." We think that Mr. Cutner's hard-hitting style should go down well over the Border, and, whilst we do not doubt that his Scottish opponent will "call up from the vasty deep," many notable spirits from the land of the heather we very much doubt if either Robbie Bruce or Rabbie Burns, or even Willie Wallace will put in an appearance. Incidentally we think that our contributor has probably "debunked" more spirits than anyone since Jesus perpetrated the miracle of the Gadarene swine. Elsewhere, in Great Britain, the President of the N.S.S., Mr. F. A. Ridley, is opening the winter session for our friends of the Leicester Secular Society, the oldest surviving Secular Society in this country. In so doing, the present President of the N.S.S. occupies a platform distinguished in the past by the presence of an entire series of eminent men, including many world famous names in the history of advanced social and critical thought.

Our readers will, no doubt, remember the historic Flemish anti-clerical war song, edited with critical and historical notes by our Belgian comrade, J. J. Berckmans, which we published some little time back. Mr. Berckmans has now sent in the text of one of the most influential, though little-known songs in the English language. This time, the stormy theme originated in England during the religious wars of the Reformation, *Lilliburlero*, the text of which our learned contributor reproduces for us, was a satiric ballad, composed in 1688 during that stirring period immortalised by Macaulay, when the last of the Stuart Kings, James the Second, was attempting to restore the Church of Rome and to abolish the "Protestant succession," with the aid of an Irish army encamped on Hounslow Heath. The effect of the song in stirring up anti-Stuart and Protestant sentiment was such that it was actually said that *Lilliburlero* "whistled King James off the thrones of three kingdoms." In fact, this anonymous ballad may be described as both the forerunner of, and as an influential factor in, bringing about the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, and the simultaneous downfall in England of Roman Catholicism and of the Stuart dynasty. In fact, a landmark in our national history.

The Delusions of Spiritualism—1

By H. CUTNER

OF the many writers who have contributed to whatever success has been achieved by Spiritualism, Mr. J. Arthur Findlay must be one of the most notable. During the past twenty years, he has produced six works, two of them very big ones. Whether we agree with him or not, to write a book like *The Psychic Stream* which has 1,200 pages, or one like *The Curse of Ignorance* which has 1,169 pages, requires some doing, and I am bound to add that in his Spiritualistic belief, Mr. Findlay is thoroughly sincere. He really believes in his "Ethereic" world where we all have to go when we die, and where we wake up after death among friends who welcome us, and with whom we shall, if we are good, be able to spend the rest of eternity. For him, there is no more delightful prospect even if it is inevitable. For some of us, though, the idea of "for ever," however long that may be, with regard even to old friends, may not be so enticing.

For those readers who have not seen Mr. Findlay's beautifully produced books (he has been good enough to send me copies of two of them) a word or two in explanation is necessary. All he knows of his "Ethereic World" is what he has been told by mediums, and particularly by a Scotch working-man medium, Mr. John Campbell Sloan, who sat for many years for nothing. He was never paid, but gladly gave his services. Around him gathered a number of people who plied him when he was in a trance with questions. These questions and Mr. Sloan's replies were very faithfully recorded by a highly efficient lady in shorthand, and later very carefully typed. Thus one can depend on the "records"—unlike that of the famous R101 case which was certainly "made up."

Sloan was a trance medium with clairaudience and clairvoyance powers and, as far as I can make out, able to produce "apports." In other words, he was able to see what normal people cannot see, and hear what they cannot hear, from "Etheria." A striking example of this kind of power occurred when Sir A. Conan Doyle died. At the Memorial Service held in his honour at the Albert Hall, Mrs. Estelle Roberts was (I think) the medium and she saw the famous author sitting in the empty chair put on the platform for him—dressed in his best evening wear. Nobody else there saw Sir Arthur, of course, nor did they hear him speak; but Mrs. Roberts did. It may be very wrong of me, but I have always felt that anybody who believes this, can believe anything.

Sloane was what is called a "Direct Voice" medium—it was not he who actually did the speaking but various people who came, so to speak, to a microphone—the medium—each preserving his or her individuality. I have heard this kind of medium myself, but I must have been in a very unreceptive and irreverent mood for she only made me laugh.

On one occasion, Mr. Findlay got thirty separate voices from the same medium, all giving their correct names and addresses, all spoke on intimate family affairs and, as he insists, though it was in pitch darkness, "never once was a mistake made."

Like so many mediums, Sloan's Guide was an Indian called "Whitefeather" who, when alive, was a Red Indian Chief living in the Rocky Mountains. Nearly all Guides are Red Indians, and very few of them were of a lower rank than a Chief. It is much like the people who are sure they are "Reincarnations," not of former slaves, but almost always of Kings, Queens, or famous people. One would never have thought so, talking to them.

The mystery of "Indian" Guides is carefully explained

for us by Mr. Findlay. It appears that "this was because in earth life they (Indians) were Spiritualists and were in constant touch with departed spirits." An Indian Guide called Greentree is responsible for this wonderful bit of information which is accepted by Mr. Findlay as Gospel truth. As in so many other things, no "evidence" is given whatever for this—to me, preposterous—assertion. Where is the evidence that Indians are Spiritualists? Do they specialise in the Direct Voice, or in trance speeches, or automatic writing, or materialisations, or apports? Are Indians in constant touch with "departed spirits"?

Of course, Indians believe in a "spirit world" packed chockfull with spirits, and their "medicine men" can get in touch with them. So can our own medicine men who pray for rain exactly like Indian medicine men with exactly the same result. The religion of Red Indians is a mass of pure, unadulterated superstition and credulity. It teaches an after-life just like Christianity, with just as much evidence.

Now, I have purposely dealt with this point because anybody can test the statement of "Greentree," whereas it is just impossible to test statements made by Mr. Findlay on matters which deal with his own friends or relatives. That is why I do not intend to bother about them. I am sure he is certain that he has described such incidents correctly—but I am also certain that it is almost impossible to describe what happens in a seance held in the dark and strengthened by reverently singing very religious hymns—which is what Mr. Findlay appears to have done—so as to get the "right" atmosphere. The people who go to such seances are already believers, but if they ever wavered even a little, any well-known hymn sung with religious fervour will topple them right over safe in the arms of spirits.

As the Direct Voice gives, not the voice of the medium but that of the various departed people who want to get a message over, it is, we are always told, easily recognised. This reminds me of the way people were always able to recognise a "materialisation"—a small child, an old grannie, uncle George, or cousin Martha, though it may be the same India rubber balloon with the same face painted on it. Mr. Findlay, it is true, admits fraudulent mediums but Sloan was honest to a degree and everything he said just must be true. Yet a glance through *On the Edge of the Etheric* shows Mr. Findlay quoting some of the biggest swindlers in the history of Spiritualism. What about Dave Duguid, who was supposed to get spirits to paint pictures on bits of card while he was in a trance? What about the Gallagher sisters, who so completely fooled poor Dr. Crawford that he committed suicide? As for the "eminent" names sprinkled through the early chapters of this book, I can only say that a more incompetent set of "investigators" never existed. Crookes was constantly fooled by Florence Cook just as various other mediums bamboozled Conan Doyle. The case of Alfred Russel Wallace is pathetic beyond everything. S. J. Davey, who soon found out the secrets of spirit slate-writing, pretended that he was a medium and deliberately fooled Wallace to the utmost. Yet when Davey "confessed," Wallace refused to believe him and insisted that Davey was a genuine medium.

But I want more than anything else to analyse some of the accounts of "Etheria"—it used to be called "Summer"

(Continued on next page)

The Anarchist Curé

By ARTHUR W. ULOTH

[We are obliged to the Editorial Board of *Freedom* for permission to reprint this article.—EDITOR]

THE name of Jean Meslier is little known in this country, and even in France he does not occupy his true position in the evolution of libertarian thought. His reputation is that of an early anti-clerical, or freethinker. His views on the State, and his hatred for almost all forms of authority are not known. His "Testament" still finds readers, but it is a mutilated work only expressing a half of what was written in the original version.

Meslier was born in 1664 at Mazerny in the Duchy of Rethel. His parents were not poor, his father was a draper. The family had produced many ecclesiastics, some of whom had risen to high positions in the Church. But Meslier had no sense of vocation, and although not forced against his will, he had little enthusiasm for the priesthood. He allowed himself to be put into the Church to please his parents, as he tells us, and no doubt also because he shared with them the opinion that it was "a state of life softer, more peaceable, and more honoured, than that of most men."

He studied in the seminary of Rheims. He was ordained on December 18, 1683, and after several other posts was given the parish of Etrépiigny in December, 1688. He was then twenty-four. He remained there till his death in 1729. Had all gone well he should have enjoyed a pleasant comfortable and rather futile existence, and died and been forgotten like so many parish priests. He had a certain amount of money of his own, apart from his stipend, so he was for his class almost rich. But trouble was waiting round the corner.

At first all went well. We have a certain number of reports about him made by his superiors. For twenty years nothing but good was said of him. He fulfilled his duties correctly, he was even praised for having some excellent books in his library. There was only one fly in the ointment, but it caused very little concern. He had as his housekeeper a young cousin. She was twenty-three and he thirty-two. The housekeepers of priests should all be elderly women, but it was an easy-going age in some things, and nobody bothered Meslier about his little lapse.

Suddenly everything changed. Our hero is presented to us as "ignorant, presumptuous, very stubborn and opinionated, a wealthy man who neglects the Church because he has too much money. He interferes in things he does not understand and will not budge from his opinion once formed. He is very much concerned with his own private affairs and is infinitely negligent, but has a very devout exterior tending to Jansenism.* His church is in a pitiable condition."

This was in 1716. In 1710 Archbishop Le Tellier had died and his successor was not so friendly or indulgent to Meslier. But this would hardly be sufficient to explain such a change. There are several stories, a bitter quarrel with the lord of the manor, who seems to have been a spiteful and unpleasant person, though we only have the curé's version.

Voltaire says that the affair started with the maltreatment of some peasants by the seigneur de Touly, the local squire. Meslier took the side of the peasants and refused to recommend de Touly to the prayers of his parishioners, as was the custom then.

Another version describes the feud as having originated over a question of seating accommodation in the church. Whatever the cause the matter became a miniature war,

carried on, on de Touly's side at least, with all the bitterness of men who live in isolated communities, have too little to do, and in consequence see everything out of proportion. It was the kind of thing portrayed for us in the well-known novel "Clochemerle." A mixture of meanness and childishness which is almost too painful to be funny.

When the curé entered the pulpit one Sunday his voice was suddenly drowned by the raucous notes of hunting horns. De Touly had stationed his huntsmen just outside the church, with orders to keep on blowing till Meslier gave up trying to preach.

However, the huntsmen did not come the following Sunday and he took the opportunity of attacking the seigneur by name and then passing on to include the entire nobility in a splendid jeremiad. He declared moreover that he did not care what his superiors thought about his opinions.

De Touly took the affair to the bishop, but Meslier would not withdraw from his position. However, the nobleman knew his enemy was vulnerable. The cousin had departed, and the priest, now in his early fifties, had for a servant a young girl of eighteen. There was no doubt at all that she was his companion, and de Touly took great care to remind the bishop that Meslier was "living in sin." This cost the unfortunate man a month's "retreat" in the seminary, and eventually he had to send his little friend away.

His fury, as we can tell from his writings, was terrible, but he had no means of venting it publicly. He was not the kind of man who takes a fancy to martyrdom. He enjoyed his comforts, and in any case a man of fifty used to soft living and the pleasures of the flesh cannot suddenly uproot himself. Being a priest he was in that helpless condition described by McCabe in "Twelve Years in a Monastery."

"The decree of the Church goes forth against the 'apostate.' He is excommunicated—cursed in this life and the next—and socially ostracised, if not slandered. . . . He is cast out to recommence life, socially and financially, in middle age; perhaps he is homeless, friendless, and resourceless. . . ." He does not know how to earn his living in any way except as a priest. Meslier therefore had only one outlet open to him. He could write.

When he died his colleagues found among his possessions an enormous manuscript, with, on the paper in which it was wrapped, this uncompromising if somewhat long-winded title.

"Memories, thoughts and sentiments of Jean Meslier on a part of the errors and abuses of the conduct of the government of men, wherein one may see clear and evident demonstrations of the vanity and falseness of all the gods and of all the religions of the world, addressed to his parishioners after his death, and to serve as a witness to the truth to them and to all like them. *In testimonium illis et gentibus.* Math. X, 18."

(To be continued)

The Delusions of Spiritualism—1

(Continued from previous page)

land"—given by Sloan in answer to queries made by sitters at his seances. Whether death has terrors or not, I do not know, though I believe that "death ends all." But I certainly feel that it would be more than terror if the fantastic world described for us by Sloan and believed by Findlay to exist, really did exist.

* A fashionable heresy of the day.

Correspondence

ASCENSION OR ASSUMPTION?

SIR.—It seems that to be a "Freethinker" is to be in absolute liberty (which, incidentally, Freethinkers deny!) to think and say and write whatever comes to one's mind (brain?) without any control or checking on objective truth. These extravagances are quite a commonplace in your periodical, *The Freethinker*, whenever it deals with religious subjects, especially with Christianity.

An instance which I could not tolerate for its evident falsity is Mr. Wm. Augustus Vaughan's under the above title (*The Freethinker*, August 28, 1953, p. 280). Evidently, he quotes the Bible giving reins to his own imagination, most spuriously indeed. Pretending to quote Mark xvi, 19, he says: "Jesus ascended to Heaven from a room (sic!) in Jerusalem." What the text says is: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into Heaven." The word "after" does not imply that Jesus went to Heaven just from the same place where He had appeared unto the eleven (Mark, xvi, 14). St. Mark is the most concise of all the Evangelists, and usually connects one event with another without noting the interval and the change of circumstances between the two events. Mr. Vaughan's version is quite arbitrary, more so as he put his words in inverted commas.

Then to show what seemed to him a contradiction he quotes Luke, xxiv, 50. Thus: "Jesus ascended to Heaven from a mountain (not from a room!) in Bethany, during the same evening as his resurrection."* The text has: "And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven" (verses 50-51). The text does not say "when" He led them out. The apparition of Jesus to the twelve (verses 36-43), His instructions to them (verses 44-49), and His ascension (50-51) are only materially connected. St. Luke arranges his material with more concern about the sequence of ideas than about time and place. The way in which he here abbreviates the history of the forty days after the Resurrection is characteristic, and perhaps an indication of the fact that he intends to return to the subject. (See a "Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture," p. 970, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1953.)

With the intent of showing further contradictions, Mr. Vaughan quotes Acts 1, 3. Thus: "Jesus was seen walking around Jerusalem forty days after his resurrection, talking with Disciples, then again went up." These, of course, are not the words of the Bible. It is true, however, according to St. Luke (author of Acts), that Jesus, after His resurrection, was seen by the disciples forty days, and was seen by them going to Heaven, etc.

There are, therefore, no contradictions between Mark, Luke and the Acts about the place and time of the Lord's Ascension.

Mr. Vaughan concludes citing what the "brothers" (please read "cousins") of Jesus said of Him (not understanding Him, as many Freethinkers do not), that He was beside Himself, which (says Mr. Vaughan) in Hebrew means "thou fool." Yes, Mr. Vaughan, Freethinkers are in that category: they take Jesus for a fool, and consequently we Christians, more than one thousand millions in all are all fools! Only the handful of Freethinkers are enlightened. They only, who deny all truths and values of man's real dignity and destination. Mr. Vaughan would do well to read the series of articles on "What think ye of Christ" which are being published in *The Faith* (Malta).—Yours, etc.,

REV. G. M. PARIS.

* Italics mine.

MONEY

SIR.—Mr. Varney asks the trade unions and industrialists to be logical. To be logical they would have to cease to exist as such, therefore we cannot expect miracles. It is untrue to state the voters support the monetary system; the issue is never propounded at elections precisely because politicians have no desire to abolish a system of privilege.

The land, which is the source of all wealth, is in the hands of the "landlords." The "landlord," by virtue of his position, charges mankind for the right to live on it.

The producer of wealth is compelled to maintain his employer and the "landlord."

To demand more wages is merely to ask for a reward for energy. And so far there has been no limit to the productivity of man, only the restriction of consumption, and it does appear nonsensical to produce wealth and be unable to consume it because there is a shortage of cash.

Mr. Varney states the Government has to resort to printing notes, in other words—currency. If that were true why does the Government borrow money from the Bank of England and pay interest, even after nationalisation?

Whether the "notes" have an intrinsic value has nothing to do with the question, or whether they are as good as the real

thing. And what might be the "real thing?" It could only be backed by the volume of goods produced to have any real backing. There has never been enough "gold" in the world to circulate the goods produced, and how could "notes" depreciate if there is a corresponding amount of wealth production; for every normal act of production increases itself.

One potato becomes five, wire and screws become a radio set, and if it requires a penny to buy a potato which increases four times, then obviously it requires four times as much currency to circulate.

And if as he contends there is more money in circulation than goods, why are the shops and warehouses full, and the hire-purchase firms having a glorious time?

Lastly, if we are drawing £100 in wages, and it cost £110 to live, where do we get the other £10 from? In other words there is no shortage of production, there is no shortage of currency, if there were where does the Government get its money for armaments? The real shortage is with the consumer. To hell with money, and Church and State will cease to exist.—Yours, etc.,

J. SPOKESHAVI.

FREETHOUGHT

SIR.—It is curious to note the queer ideas some self-styled Freethinkers have on the subject of Freethinking. In his article "Rationalism and Tolerance" (September 4), Mr. W. H. Wood says: "If Freethinking means anything at all it must mean that every man shall enjoy the right to think as he chooses." Surely, we all enjoy the right to think as we choose; and this being so, the Christian, or other believer in the Supernatural, has, according to Mr. Wood's definition, as much right to the name as the sceptic.

Then we have the "lucid" exposition of another contributor, Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann, to wit, "Freethought is after all only thinking with one's own mind instead of with other peoples!" Can we do anything else but think with our own minds? Even if we adopt another person's view, we exercise our own judgment in doing so, otherwise, why do we adopt it?

What these writers fail to see is that Freethinking is not thinking "what we choose with our own minds"; we all do that—believers and unbelievers alike—but freedom to express our thoughts without let or hindrance by any authority.

If we are to extend the application of the term beyond its original anti-Christian sense, we should, at least, avoid muddled thinking.—Yours, etc.,

A. YATIS.

BELIEF IN GOD

SIR.—But for belief in God Man's belief in himself would have made this world O.K. for humans long ago so blame both world wars at least plus oceans of modern misery upon god-belief—the filthiest affair ever.—Yours, etc.,

HARRY FIDDIAN.

THEATRE

SIR.—Mr. M. W. Carter has rightly pointed out in his letter (September 11, 1953) that *Escapade* is now showing at the Strand Theatre and that there have been alterations in the cast.

My review was written when the play first opened at the Strand Theatre, but was not printed then owing to lack of space.

Generally, when this happens, it is referred to me if there is a long lapse of time so that it may be brought up to date. On this occasion, by some oversight, I was not told that it would be printed.

Thanks to Mr. Carter for his observance.—Yours, etc.,

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

BLASPHEMY ?

SIR.—It is an essential part of the faith of devout people of all nations but, alas, chiefly now among the less sophisticated communities, that earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, droughts, plagues, etc., are sent by their god, goddess or gods, white, yellow, brown or black, as a punishment for sin.

It is clearly the Divine intention that these offenders should suffer. Therefore, for anyone to attempt to frustrate this Divine intention by doing anything to alleviate these justly ordained sufferings is a tacit, but nevertheless a concrete expression of disapproval.

This disapproval of an Act of God (as it is legally classified in this country) is, of course, unspoken, since that might bring down trouble upon these helpers, but it is quite obviously implied, and this surely comes under any international definition of blasphemy.

Having recently posted a very inadequate contribution (see day's pension) to an earthquake relief fund I am now beginning to feel.—Yours, etc.,

"WORRIED."