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The Freethinker

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Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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THE various organisations into which the British Free-thought Movement is divided are, like their opposite numbers on the European Continent and elsewhere, affiliated to the World Union of Freethinkers. As the Free-thought Movement is a *World* Movement, and as its fundamental problems are, consequently *world* and not merely national problems, we think that it may be both relevant and useful in the present connection to direct a comprehensive glance at these world-wide problems and this is, precisely, what we propose to do in the following paragraphs. We regard this as, in fact, a necessary reminder to British Freethinkers who, from the fact that they live in, and on an island frequently tend, in consequence, to become somewhat insular in their mental outlook. It was no less a person that Jules Michelet, the eminent French historian and freethinker, who went on record with the classic observation that the history of England since the Reformation has been, essentially, that of an island and, in consequence, productive of an insular outlook.

The recent meeting at Brussels of the Executive Committee of the World Union was attended only by representatives of its European constituent bodies; its American, Australasian and Asiatic constituents were not represented there, presumably for reasons of time and expense. However, a fair view could be obtained from the discussions at Brussels of the world-wide problems of Freethought, and it is these, in addition to those proper to Europe, that we also propose to note here.

In Europe, and we gather in the Americas and Australia also, the fundamental problem before International Freethought is to be found in the present offensive of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the *political* sphere. What, indeed, we are witnessing at present is a new "counter-Reformation," and one on a world-wide scale, of the Church of the Vatican and of St. Ignatius of Loyola, compared with this current menace, other questions are secondary, where not insignificant. For neither Protestantism, Spiritualism nor any of the modern, chiefly American in origin, "fancy religions" can bear the most intense comparison with the sustained and terrific ferocity of the present Catholic counter-offensive, particularly in the political sphere, as and when compared with this sustained and ferocious drive towards future world-dominance, for, in the 20th century, the "Universal" (Catholic) Church really intends to be Universal!—the current activities of the Anglican and Protestant Churches are merely local and ephemeral irritants. Those misguided people who, misled by the Protestant past of this country, think that it is an exaggeration to describe the Vatican as the fundamental contemporary enemy of progress in general, and of Freethought in particular, ought to attend a meeting of our International Executive!

A glance at the *political map* of Europe fully bears out the above assertion: "The ghost of the Roman Empire," as

the Church of Rome has been classically termed, is now, since the war, more firmly established than ever. Germany, Austria, France, Holland, Belgium, Luxemburg, Italy, Spain and Portugal are all governed by Catholic political parties, either alone or in coalition. If it be objected that Catholicism is a *religion*, it is certainly a religion that uses politics for its own ultimately totalitarian purposes and is, actually, largely political in character. The present Pope, for example, was trained, not as a theologian, but as a *politician*, a professional diplomat in the Papal service. When, recently, the Chief Rabbi of Israel was received by His Holiness, we are informed by an atheistic relative of His

—VIEWS and OPINIONS— The Present Problems of World Freethought —By F. A. RIDLEY—

Eminence of Israel that the two holy men never mentioned either the Old or the New Testaments, but talked politics the whole time: it must have been an interesting conversation!

The Italian delegate at Brussels, Professor Crippa of Genoa, an astonishing personality who speaks with Ciceronian eloquence and Garibaldian fervour, informed us that the real ruler of Italy since the war has been Pope Pius the 12th, and that both the nominal heads of the Italian State, de Gasperi, the past, and Pella, the present Premier, are merely the Pope's secretarial assistants. Italy constitutes, no doubt, an extreme example, but it is indicative of the present sway of political Catholicism. In present-day Germany, for example, the segregation of the Protestant, Prussian, East behind the so-called "Iron Curtain" has indirectly but effectively strengthened the Catholic Church and has resulted in the present clerical-fascist regime of the pious Dr. Adenauer.

Another, very disquieting fact was also mentioned by the learned Professor Crippa: according to him—and we are afraid that recent events bear out his contention—the traditional anti-clericalism of the parties of the "Left" on the European Continent, whether Radical, Socialist or Communist, is now "traditional" only: all these parties, and the governments of which they often form part, have compromised heavily with political Catholicism and with the Church in general, in particular as recently in France, over the question of State-aid to Catholic schools, a direct violation of the professedly secular constitution of the French "Fourth Republic." However, in France and elsewhere, there are still people on the political "Left" who fight for the classic definition of the Frenchman, Tridon, that, "Socialism is republican in politics, communist in economics, and atheistic in matters of religion." Unfortunately, one has to add that such a point of view has never been that of *English* Socialism, a fact which the Vatican has not failed to note—and to exploit!

In fact, as far as Europe is concerned, Freethought is largely on the defensive. The organised Freethought bodies were greatly weakened by the dislocation and destruction caused by the war, and by the temporary Fascist regimes which were set up during the brief prevalence of Hitler's "New Order." However, signs of revival are not absent,

and sharp skirmishes take place between the rival forces. For example, the Swiss Catholic move to restore the Jesuits, to which we alluded last week, is being vigorously countered by our Swiss freethinking friends. In Luxemburg the small but extremely active Freethought movement, under the energetic leadership of a man of outstanding ability, the Luxemburg deputy (M.P.), M. Gremling, have initiated a measure in Parliament, which they are confident will soon become law, to legalise cremation in face of the unrelenting hostility of the Catholic Church. In Switzerland, the presence of crematoria is an unflinching indication of Protestantism, since this method of disposing of the dead is illegal in all Swiss Catholic cantons, as in all other Catholic lands. [Apparently, the "Resurrection of the Body" is possible from worms, but not from ashes, according to Catholic theology. But, with Omnipotence, are not *all* things possible?]

Outside our old continent, we note a strong secularist movement in Uruguay, Mexico and, perhaps, in other Latin American lands where, however, the Church still retains enormous power. In the U.S.A., Freethought, at any rate in its organised forms, appears to be extremely weak and is, further, divided into not too friendly groups. In Australia and New Zealand there are, also, affiliated Freethought societies. In all these lands Catholicism appears as the main enemy; though, even in McCarthy's U.S.A., there are, probably, more Protestants than Catholics. Outside the Christian world, our Indian friends have to face, concurrently, the lack of money and the organised hostility of Hinduism. In formerly Muhammedan lands such as Turkey, Muslim clericalism seems just now to be actively seeking to destroy the secular regime inaugurated by the late Ataturk. However, neither

Islam nor Hinduism have ever shown anything like the recuperative power indicated in the past and present by the Vatican.

A further point must be briefly noted. The organised European Freethought movement, like its old antagonists, the Christian Churches, suffers grievously from divisions. Nowadays, the World Union has few contacts with, and little knowledge of, the anti-religious movements in Russia and behind the so-called "Iron Curtain," who were formerly affiliated to it: may we hope that the present easing-up of the regimes behind the "curtain" may lead to some resumption of mutual information and, perhaps, of future collaboration? It is, further, still not altogether clear whether the newly-formed "Humanist" international movement is to be regarded primarily as an ally or as a competitor of, and with, our "World Union of Freethinkers." Certainly it was most unfortunate that, last year, the Freethought and Humanist World Congresses were held simultaneously, and in such close proximity as Brussels and Amsterdam.

All things considered, the general overall picture of the European scene, to-day, is rather similar to that of Europe in the era of the Protestant Reformation. Again, Rome launches a dangerous counter-offensive, this time on a world-wide scale, in both the religious and in the political spheres, a new "counter-reformation," with "Catholic Action," political Catholicism, playing much the same active role as the Jesuits played in the older movement. Only this time the defence is guided and led by the Secularist and Freethinking movement, instead of by the rival churches of Luther and Calvin. We shall hope, in the near future, to see the militant Freethinkers go over to the offensive—"audace, audace, et toujours l'audace!"

Eternal Vigilance

By EVELYN BELCHAMBERS

ONCE when Shaw had occasion to mention G. W. Foote, the Freethinker, he remarked that he had little use for any other sort of thinker. If thought is not free, then nothing else is likely to be, and unfree thinking can cause a varying amount of evil from Nazi or Communist authoritarianism at one end to mere genteel Victorian stuffiness at the other. That this latter can be nearly as detestable as the former I found out for myself when, some years ago, I was lodging with my family in a pious household, one of whose members asked my mother very seriously whether she wanted me influenced in any way. While appreciative of the well-meaning spirit of the query, I was struck dumb at the arrogance of anyone barely half a generation my own senior taking for granted her right to try to mould me.

We, as a nation and as a generation, have the good luck at present to be passably free from the more overt forms of thought-control: we have more or less got rid of Victorianism and its religious persecution and, by a mixture of luck and cunning, we have so far avoided anything resembling continental types of dictatorship. But this is not to say that we are not subjected to constant and insidious pressure from prevalent unchallenged assumptions on the part of our elders and rulers and teachers. The process begins right back at the nursery school and continues with steadily increasing strength through school proper—whether secondary or otherwise makes little difference, although if anything the pernicious humbug is stronger at the more snobbish schools—to college (if any) and right on into mature adult life. In everything that we do, hear, see, read, we have the same unchallenged assumptions, and I am not thinking solely or even mainly of religious assumption—religion is not very fashionable nowadays, and it is likely that children when they grow up and leave school

will slough off the religious dope that they have imbibed with less difficulty than they will shed the carefully inculcated imperialist nationalism, royalty-worship, sticky class-consciousness, "good form" and general acceptance and adulation of all that *is*. We are brought up to develop brains, but not critical intelligence, and whatever we do we must not question the excellence of the existing set-up: this may need a little tinkering here and there, but woe betide the child or adult who is bold enough to think that the whole thing is wrong.

Admittedly, it is not pleasant or comfortable for a normally healthy, cheerful young person to find that he has been born into a world where so much is wrong: it is not encouraging to realise that what is needed is a radical, vital alteration, a "remoulding nearer to the heart's desire," and that tinkering, though an attractive hobby, is worse than useless. But in each generation there are, one hopes (if not, then humanity is lost), a few stout-hearted ones "whom a thirst, ardent, unquenchable, fires" to hit out bravely and do their little bit to hasten on that remoulding. It is the job of freethinkers to encourage not only their own children but all other children or young people whom they may see or meet, if they show signs of the necessary natural intransigence of spirit (such an attitude of mind is largely born, not taught), to take a pleasure not in being aggressive or unpleasant but simply in being themselves and thinking their own thoughts and doing their own actions to the very utmost *as long as they do not interfere with other people's similar rights*.

There are subtle influences at work all around to undermine the mental stamina of all but the strongest. It may sound exaggerated, but the safest advice is to *mind your own business*.

nearly everything of what one reads and hears, at least from official sources. No sphere is exempt from mistrust: the scientists of to-day are often annoyingly cocksure and dogmatic, and their pronouncements are sometimes based on such narrow experience that the layman is justified in being sceptical. True freethinkers should exercise their freedom of thought in everything throughout life: it is so easy to scoff at the illusions of former ages but see nothing to question in those of our own. And, on the face of it, is it not likely that we moderns have at last reached a state of blessedness where we have no illusions left? I doubt it. So much do I doubt it that I even think we should be wise to concentrate our attention on what we think to be the modern illusions instead of devoting too much energy to bygone follies. Freethinkers will, of course, differ as to what are the modern illusions *par excellence*, but my own opinion is that they can be loosely described as scientific,

or, to borrow a useful term from the Personalists, scientific. I have no space here to go into details of what is meant by this, but briefly I think that the greatest of to-day's illusions is the illusion that science and mere factual knowledge can solve human problems that have baffled all previous generations. "When science has discovered something more, then we'll be happier than we were before," ran the rhyme of some impious modern heretic. This attitude I consider to be quite erroneously based. What we want is more commonsense and common humanity and kindness and decency, and less jargon about light-years and atoms. If only the ordinary, decent people could somehow be got to think for themselves instead of imbibing all the various attractive dopes that are handed out to them almost from the cradle, then perhaps we could get somewhere. But what we are up against is no less than what Charles Morgan has termed "intellectual gangsterism."

"Is Spiritualism True"

A REPORT by JAS. P. MORRISON

A DEBATE on the above subject was held on Sunday, October 4, 1953, at 3 p.m., in the Central Halls, Bath Street, Glasgow, and there was quite a good attendance.

The debate is an old one, but it still attracts quite a number of people who are interested. It took the usual form familiar to quite a number of N.S.S. members.

Mr. McIndoe, who represented the Spiritualists, started off with his assurance that there was physical and intellectual evidence for spiritualistic manifestations. He described shortly clairvoyance, spirit forms, clairaudience, psychic powers, the trance, controls and other media through which contact is made with the spirit world. He then went on to support his views by quoting the authorities of Alfred Russell Wallace, Sir Oliver Lodge, Robert Blatchford, James Hyslop, and asked the question why should we not accept the assurances of men of that intellectual calibre. He used the phrase which is popular in the spiritualistic movement, i.e., "investigate for yourself"; he added that no special knowledge was needed and that mediums were comparatively "cheap" and that it only required "common sense and sincerity" to approach the subject and find out the truth for oneself.

Mr. Cutner followed Mr. McIndoe in describing from his viewpoint the various explanations and suggestions raised, drawing attention to the common practice of carrying out investigations in the dark. He illustrated how easy it was for fraudulent persons to impose on "common sense and sincerity" of men like Alfred Russell Wallace, A. Conan Doyle and Professor William Crookes. Mr. Cutner pointed out how professors of science in one particular direction could quite easily be made dupes when taken out of their own spheres of intellectual activity: time and again it had been proved that mediums had adopted fraudulent procedures and bamboozling measures.

Mr. Robert Blatchford was held up by the spiritualists as one of the notable examples of conversion to spiritualism, but in the story of his life it was found that there was only one occasion on which Mr. Blatchford visited a seance, and Mr. Cutner was satisfied in his own mind that Mr. Blatchford was not spiritualistically minded in the latter portion of his life.

The manifestations of astral phenomena were taken from the spiritualistic works and other condemnation came mainly from their own authors and writers. Mr. Cutner did not need to add anything to his remarks outside the quotations from spiritualists themselves to condemn so many of the practices that were recognised as part and parcel of the spiritualist doctrine.

In this connection quotations were made from the histories and admissions of the Fox Sisters, Flammarion, Mrs. Piper and others. The question of dematerialisation was touched on by both speakers, and the name of Houdini came into the discussion quite frequently. Mr. Cutner pointed out that the wonderful things done by Houdini had all quite simple explanations.

The question of apport mediums was dealt with seriously by both speakers and while Mr. McIndoe considered the appearance of physical objects from nowhere as quite reasonable, Mr. Cutner rather debunked the idea.

The burden of Mr. McIndoe's case was simply that spiritualism had lasted "down through the ages" although it was not always called spiritualism and that while there were charlatans in every walk of life, there had been charlatans in the spiritualistic movement. The accumulated weight of evidence was sufficient for him, along with his personal experiences, to feel satisfied that spiritualism was true.

Mr. Cutner condemned spiritualism not so much by his own findings but from the literature and the statements made by those who had been fully engaged in spiritualistic performances. He stated that with regard to personal experience of individuals he could express no opinion, nor did he wish to interfere with religious beliefs, emphasising the fact that after many years of examining the evidence of spiritualism and the phenomena of spiritualism, there was not, to his mind, one scientific fact in support of it.

The Chairman, Mr. Oliver Brown, expressed the view that both debaters were most tolerant and friendly, and gave his hearty approval of the arrangements that had been made in connection with the debate. The audience, whatever their views afterwards, must have felt that they had heard both sides of the question fairly and strongly put, and the object of the N.S.S., which is, after all, public education, was accomplished.

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This Believing World

A former headmistress of Cheltenham Ladies' College has discovered that young people are, these days, perhaps more interested in sex than in any other question—though this is not very surprising when one remembers the long embraces one sees on the cinema screen. Still, it would prove interesting to learn of any period in history when sex was not of interest. However, she recognises that such things as hockey are no outlet for sex, and certainly not what she calls "sanctimonious" religion. But is religion—any religion—anything but sanctimonious?

We may add that when the author of *The Elements of Social Science* gave practical advice nearly 100 years ago on the subject, and said much the same as our headmistress, he was foully attacked by all Christians—as if the subject of sex was something loathsome. And Charles Bradlaugh, who recommended that the "beggarly" *Elements* (as all good Christians called the book) should at least be read, had to bear the brunt of these Christian attacks at their vilest. It must be pretty galling these days for the followers of "gentle" Jesus to realise that Bradlaugh was right and that they were wrong.

As is well known, dancing, which the Roman Church does allow under its own conditions—like other outlets of "sex"—is really only tolerated by the bishops, and there is quite a shindy in Eire about late dancing. It had been reported that the Irish Federation of Musicians intended to challenge "an edict by Irish bishops forbidding Catholics to attend dances continuing after midnight," but this has been hotly denied by the Federation. It is, of course, one thing for this Union—indeed any Union—in Eire to challenge the "bosses," so long as the bosses are secular ones. It is quite another to challenge the Roman Church, and though councils here and there in the country may grant licences to dance after midnight, most of them tremblingly agree to do what the Church orders.

The truth is that while Eire got rid of the hated British as far as politics are concerned, the country is in the far worse grip of intolerance at its worst. Eire is censored and bullied by the Roman Church—and the old cry of "Home Rule is Rome Rule" is proven up to the hilt. Still, if the people of Eire like it—what concern is it of ours?

That eminent Nonconformist, Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, though he has himself written a big book on Faith-healing, has never been too happy about it—outside the Church. It is one thing for a minister of Christ, duly appointed, to heal but quite another when it is some unknown and not particularly intelligent Spiritualist who performs "miracles" of healing which by right should only come from a genuine follower of Jesus. It is not surprising, therefore, to find him denouncing "certain types of healing missions" which risk "degenerating through mass emotion into yelling bedlams." But were not "yelling bedlams" the hall mark of all "revivals"? And were they any worse for that than the "mass emotion" so prevalent, not only at "healing" by Spiritualists, as by all-believing and very reverent Christian "pastors"?

In our hard-hitting contemporary, *The Word*, Mr. Guy Aldred (who is ever ready to challenge injustice, intolerance and hypocrisy) boldly defends the late Sir Roger Casement—who was hanged as a traitor during the first World War. Mr. Aldred is particularly angry with Mr. Justice Humphreys who was glad that "Casement had been hanged." "A nice Christian sentiment," comments

Mr. Aldred. "So exclaimed the enemies of mankind when they learned that Jesus had died on a gallows tree!"

It is a pity that Mr. Aldred lets his anger get the better of his history. Who were these "enemies of mankind"? Could he give us their names? Could he prove on evidence that they were the "enemies of mankind"? And where does it say in the Gospels that Jesus "died on a gallows tree"? Mr. Aldred has always had an intense admiration for Jesus—but we fancy he would be hard put to prove that there ever was a Jesus at all. It is extraordinary how lovers of Jesus seem to lose all sense of history and the laws of evidence—particularly unorthodox ones like Mr. Aldred.

A.B.C. of Peace

A's for Aggression, an action accurst,
When you win, it was "getting your own blow in first."
B's the Big Bomb, there are plenty of rumours,
We'll all have to pay—but, then, we're the consumers.
C means the Conference, rocks in a row,
Deadlock, until the old hand bellows: "No!"
D is Destruction, may make us all vapour,
Because someone tears up one small "scrap of paper."
E—Evolution of warmonger's will,
"Fit to survive, who is fittest to kill."
F for the Figures; 4—8—14
First crack for Consols, the stark spectres seen.
G stands for Glory, once proudly paraded,
Now, in a mushroom-cloud, finally faded.
H is the Horror each spokesman expresses,
Describing the enemy's fearful excesses.
I for Inventions, to give mankind hell,
But each Army's ordered its Blanco, as well.
J—"Journalism," with its wonders and signs,
Whooping up hatred, with horror headlines.
K is the "K" Bomb, the next on the list,
Hope the Earth's axis can stand a new twist!
L means the Lesson, History's vast one,
Beginning each new war by fighting the last one.
M for the Medal, that's pinned to the jacket;
Also for "Matches at tuppence per packet!"
N is Necrophily, worship of death,
Ling'ring Last Post, with the last man's last breath.
O for its Origin, where does it lie?
The Law: "Thou shalt eat one another, or die!"
P—Prince of Peace, it's the bitterest cup,
Once the war's on, he's the first one called up!
Q means the Quest for the Treasure of Peace,
We're still in the woods, and the search mustn't cease.
R stands for "Renegade," prisoned and pent,
Spoke out for Peace, as though that's what he meant.
S denotes Service, none like it before,
Bringing the Battlefield right to your door.
T is for Telepeace—new world-wide hook-up,
Now SEE the diplomat, cocking his snook up!
U for the Unsurly, the heroes of Peace,
Fighting the War-God, their wars never cease.
V—Secret Weapon—"Hush-hush!" likewise: "Hist!"
Top of the bill, but not yet on the list.
W's the Will that we've most of us made,
It's "Leave it to others," we're rather afraid.
X means the "X-bomb," it may prove "The Goods,"
Blowing Man back to the wild and the woods.
Y for the Yeast in the next Devil's Brew,
We're cooped in the cauldron, and what can we do?
Z's for the Last Word, lest any should doubt it,
See purple "peacemakers" rise up, and shout it!
—ARTHUR E. CARPENTER

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

RUPERT L. HUMPHRIS.—The four languages spoken in the Swiss Republic are German, French, Italian and Romansch, the last named is an old provencal dialect spoken in the south (e.g., the name of the mountain, "Pitz Palu" is in Romansch). There is no capital punishment in the Republic except for military offences, and for treason in war time.

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.

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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

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: This week, L. EBURY.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, October 18, 6-45 p.m.: W. SMITH, "The Universe—Plan or Accident?"

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 20: R. S. W. POLLARD, "The Future of Capital Punishment."

Junior Discussion Group, South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, October 16, 7-15 p.m.: Mrs. V. FLEMMING, "Basic Moral Development."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, October 18, 6-30 p.m.: A HANCOCK, "Logic and Belief."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, October 18, 2-30 p.m.: Mrs. E. M. WATSON, "Reforms Needed in our Divorce Laws."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 18, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "Science and Responsibility."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, October 18, 7-15 p.m.: PHILLIP SANSOM, "The Anarchist Way to Combat Religion."

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, Wanstead, 2 mins. Wanstead Station).—Thursday, October 22, 8 p.m., Open Meeting.

Notes and News

We were pleased to learn that the Glasgow Secular Society began its season with a crowded house to hear the debate between Mr. J. B. McIndoe and Mr. H. Cutner on Spiritualism. The G.S.S. has in Mr. J. Wilson an enthusiastic President, helped by an excellent committee; and in Mr. J. Barrowman a very energetic and hardworking secretary. With them is that other very hardworking "saint," Mr. Bob Hamilton, wise in age and experience,

and between them all the N.S.S. Glasgow branch should go far this season especially as it has a fine programme for the coming winter. Mr. Cutner wishes us to add how very much he appreciates the more than generous hospitality he received from Mr. and Mrs. Barrowman and Mr. and Miss Hamilton who went to no end of trouble to make his stay in Glasgow so memorable a one; as well as the very hearty welcome he received from other members and friends. With Mr. Hamilton, he explored the beauties of Edinburgh for the first time—a visit to what is perhaps the most beautiful city in Great Britain which he will never forget. A report of the debate is given in another column.

Some people positively *ask* for trouble! Amongst which troublesome but, at times, useful species must be counted Mr. P. Victor Morris, the indefatigable general secretary of the N.S.S. In pursuance of the time-honoured motto of the N.S.S., "We Seek for Truth," Mr. Morris's passionate quest for evidence, for, in particular, that elusive branch of knowledge—if that is the right word?—"Christian Evidence," took him recently to an advertised Christian meeting which announced that it would produce—for perhaps, the millionth time?—the "overwhelming" proof of "Our Lord's" Resurrection.

After the "overwhelming" proofs had yet once more been paraded, to be received in awe-struck silence by an already convinced audience, our esteemed colleague arose with his accustomed assurance and advanced a few obvious objections. For example, if the original evidence was so "overwhelming," why were not the Jews, who were, after all, the people for whom the miracle was originally worked and who were in the best position to judge the original evidence, unconvinced? A question, indeed, "hard to answer" as our Latin Grammar used to put it! After the meeting the chairman took the erring sheep in hand and pointed out to him that, in another twenty years or so, he would be compelled to give account of his Secularist Unbelief before a Higher Power.

However, we would like to assuage our erring colleague's alarm by pointing out that he has, we hope, many years in which to repent, and is there not "more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth" than over any number of clergymen already convinced that Jesus rose from the dead on the Third Day? In these unbelieving days the conversion of the general secretary, N.S.S., would, we imagine, be quite an event in clerical circles! But we very much fear that even the most ardent Resurrectionists will find the demon of unbelief in our general secretary harder to expel than they anticipated. Even the Master might find it difficult to cast out that one!

Congratulations to our contributor, Mr. J. B. O'Hare, whose poetic Muse is so warmly appreciated by our readers. Miss Margaret Rawlings, the talented actress, read one of Mr. O'Hare's poems on the Light Programme on Sunday evening last at 10-45 p.m. in her programme, *Hearts Ease*. We are confident that our gifted contributor will soon be recognised as one of our finest poets. More power to his pen and may he long continue to contribute to the columns of *The Freethinker*, as a worthy successor to the late Victor Neuberg, and to our veteran Bayard Simmons! A love of the arts has been bequeathed to *The Freethinker* by its Founder, that brilliant writer and critic of Literature, G. W. Foote. We are confident that Mr. O'Hare, who is a member of the North London Branch, N.S.S., will worthily continue this noble tradition of Freethought in our national literature.

Catholic Culture in Colombia

By J. A. M.

ONE morning in the month of June, 1951, I was awakened by a voice calling through my mesh-door: "Señor, se ha ocurrido algo espantoso. Casi le mataron al pobre Evangélico" (Sir, something frightful has happened. The poor Missionary has been almost killed). Hyperbole is inherent in the Colombian make-up, but this time I felt that something dreadful had really occurred and that poor Mr. Easton, a fellow Scot and the local Missionary in Mariquita, Tolima, Colombia, South America, must be in dire straits.

My fears were realised when I heard the facts a few hours later: Easton has been menaced with the most dreadful threats against his life for quite a considerable time previously by the local priest and his satraps, if he persisted in preaching the "word" according to Luther instead of the Pope of Rome and his predecessors. Quite fearlessly it must be said to his credit that he continued to do so, and now apparently the blow had fallen.

His flock, including his wife and little boy of eight years of age, were singing the Spanish equivalent of "Onward Christian Soldiers" (or some such Christian pæan) when a "posse" of local police arrived, armed with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets. They entered his "tabernacle," ordered him and his flock to stop singing and immediately began to belay him and three young Colombian "elders" with the butts of their Martini rifles. Blood commenced to flow and very soon the place resembled a charnel house. Easton and the young men were then practically dragged by brute force to the "Alcaldía" where they were transferred to the "calabozo" or prison. To describe the inside of a Colombian provincial prison, with all its unspeakable filth, degradation and horror, would require the pen of an Honoré de Balzac. The walls drip with slimy green moisture, scorpions, poisonous insects of all kinds and sometimes even snakes are at home in these precincts. There is no sanitation of any kind, and the town sewer runs openly through the middle of the cells. The stench baffles description.

The four men were told to strip. Then their night of torture began. They were ordered to drink each other's urine and to get down on their knees and drink the noisome poisonous stream running through the sewers. They were commanded to carry out several other unspeakable acts which I am ashamed to place on record. When they refused to obey these inhuman commands they were brutally beaten by the police, acting under the instructions of the Mayor and the Priest. Easton suffered a huge wound in his head, which he will carry to the grave, but this was nothing compared to the wounds—the infaceable wounds—to his mind. I saw him three days later. He was a nervous wreck of a man, unable to formulate articulate speech of any kind. His Colombian friends had displayed the greatest fortitude and courage. They refused to swear allegiance to the Pope of Rome and each refusal was accompanied by brutal blows and kicks. Their clothing was torn to shreds by the blows, and they will bear the marks all their lives.

By the greatest good fortune for Mr. Easton, one of my colleagues was Acting British Consul in Mariquita. Immediately he became acquainted with the facts he demanded the instant release of Mr. Easton. But for this fact my personal opinion is that he would have been killed.

A full account of this monstrous deed was sent to the British Ambassador in Bogota. Up to the time of my leaving Colombia in December, 1951, no redress had been

obtained by Mr. Easton, to the best of my knowledge, nor had the local priest been removed from his charge or even reprimanded.

There were political disturbances throughout Colombia during most of the two and a half years I spent there from April, 1949, until December, 1951. The President, Laureano Gomez, was literally a despotic dictator, steeped in the traditions of brutality and cruelty of his blood-brother, General Franco (after the Revolution of 1948 he escaped with his life and spent the ensuing period in Spain in the closest contact with General Franco). When he returned to Colombia the massacres commenced. Communism is practically unknown in Colombia. The only Opposition is Liberal and its adherents suffered beyond human description at the hands of Gomez and his dastards. Lidice and Oradour-sur-Glane were multiplied hundreds of times over. Villages and hamlets were razed to the ground and thousands of innocent people—men, women and children butchered, raped, tortured and mutilated. Back of all this terrible Reign of Terror and Destruction stood the "Eminence Grise," the Catholic Church, working in the closest collaboration with the Reactionaries of the Régime: the Big Industrialists, the Coffee interests and the Land-owners. Colombia is a microcosm of the Catholic Macrocism. Wealth beyond the dreams of human avarice, concentrated in the hands of the few, co-exists alongside the most abject poverty, disease, filth, ignorance and human misery.

Franco has recently signed a Concordat with Rome, making it an offence punishable by death or 30 years imprisonment to *criticise* the Catholic Church. In the backward countries of Latin America, reaction dispenses with Concordats. The Rifle butt, the murderous Machete and the Cross are the symbols of might and right in those parts. They will continue to molochise the people just so long as these poor creatures (most of them really worthy people) remain inarticulate and helpless as they are at present. To enlighten them would be a really worthy task for the United Nations.

CLERICAL CENSORSHIP

The concern of the clergy for safeguarding the reading of the young is simply a ruse to keep their flocks in innocence, and to render them as clay in their hands. If they were really sincere in the matter, they would realise that if an ordinary novel or magazine article will corrupt a young reader, their own sacred books would corrupt a regiment. No novelist, no writer, no playwright would dare to fill his pages with detailed accounts of incest, rape, and unnatural vice. Yet the clergy force the Christian Bible, which they know full well contains all these terrible things, more, into the hands of almost every child in the country. Bowdlerising books is repugnant to every lover of literature, but if ever there were any occasion for such drastic treatment it certainly should be directed against the coarseness of the Christian Bible. Unfortunately, if all the objectionable passages were deleted, this fetish-book would be so reduced as to be almost unrecognisable. Instead of prating, hypocritically, of indecent and undesirable literature, let the clergy, for once, set an example. Let them cease to force into the innocent hands of millions of little children a book which they dare no longer read aloud in its completeness to a mixed audience of adults.—*Mimmermus.*

The Anarchist Curé

By ARTHUR W. ULOTH

(Concluded from page 327)

HIS neglect of industry is all the more remarkable since there was already, a short distance from Etrépigny, the important drapery works of Sedan. Strikes broke out among the cloth cutters, in 1712, 1713, and 1729, the year of the death of Meslier. They made considerable stir. The most important was that of 1712, 12,000 workers found themselves out of work because of 400 cutters who were on strike. It seems probable that he identified towns with centralisation and the State which he so detested.

Anyway, there was no room for the State in the society he proposed. The only form of authority he would permit was the moral authority of older or more experienced people. That this authority could also be tyrannical he may have realised, but he thought it inevitable. Apart from this, however, his ideas would be considered too advanced even to-day by most people, except anarchists.

He was certainly too much for Voltaire who did humanity a great disservice by bowdlerising Meslier's book and even altering the sense of the excerpts he made. For Voltaire, as for the other "philosophers" the State was accepted as a matter of course. Most of them did not go as far as atheism either, Voltaire himself being a deist.

But what distinguishes Meslier's "Testament" from so many other social writings of the eighteenth century is his call for action, and for revolution. His book is addressed to his parishioners, and it invites them to act at once, to start the building of a free society without waiting for others to do it for them.

"Your salvation is in your own hands. Your deliverance does not depend on anyone but yourselves. . . . Unite then, peoples of the world, if you are wise; unite then, if you have any spirit, to deliver yourselves from your common miseries. Start first of all by communicating secretly your thoughts and desires. Spread everywhere and as cleverly as you can writings similar to this, for example, which may let all the world know the falseness of the errors and superstitions of Religion which makes for the odious tyrannical government of the Princes and Kings of the earth. Take into your own hands all these riches and all these goods that you make so abundantly in the sweat of your bodies, keep them for yourselves and those like you. Don't give anything to those proud and useless people, weaklings who do nothing useful in the world. . . ."

Here is no empty rhetorical outburst. Here is a plan for revolution. There is no question of taking over the State, but simply of pushing it on one side.

This anarchist message never got as far as the parishioners of Etrépigny, nor of anywhere else. The bourgeoisie who circulated the "Testament" took care to edit it to their taste. But Meslier was not deprived of his vengeance, and when the peasants, during the course of the Revolution, rose and destroyed for ever the power of the feudal lords, they obeyed without knowing it the call that he had wanted them to hear sixty years before.

What makes Meslier's "Testament" so attractive is that instead of starting off from philosophy, or from some idealised conception of man "in a state of nature," he based his theories on men as he knew them. He did not maintain that men were naturally possessed of a super-human goodness. He considered that certain men are by temperament inclined to "imperious and tyrannical domination," and that others are "wiser and better intentioned." But he also knew that the moral complexity of men need not prevent the life of the community from being

on the whole a happy one. This realistic view makes his book more convincing than most of the authoritarian utopias of his day, in which everyone being but a cog in the machine could hardly fail to be virtuous.

World Union of Freethinkers

The French Federation of Freethinkers held its annual congress under difficulties this year. The place was Toulouse, the time during the French strikes this August when no trains ran. However, the delegates made their way by all manner of means of locomotion. One came from Lille on a motor-scooter, another from beyond Paris on a pre-1914 motor-car (or so it was said). Toulouse, as may be remembered, was a centre of those Holy Heretics, the Cathari or Albigenses who were largely exterminated in the most savage manner in a crusade lasting fifty years preached by St. Dominic and led by Simon de Montfort the Elder, of Leicester, be it noted.

After an inspiring opening speech by M. Lorulot, the congress settled down to hard work, interrupted only by a Mayoral reception. M. Cotereau spoke with his usual erudition and fervour on "Freethought and International Problems," in the course of which he condemned present French policy in Viet-Nam, Madagascar and North Africa. Then came *les vœux*, one of which invited M. André Marie, the present Minister of Education, to put back in its place in the Ministerial waiting room the bust of Jules Ferry, who in 1879 was largely responsible for the present French system of secular education, a bust which had been replaced by one of Pope Clement VI. Later, Madame Michaud demonstrated that there could have been no Feminist Movement without Freethought; Rationalism emancipated women from the power of religion and of the priest. And so overcoming their difficulties our French friends held a thoroughly successful conference. May the Fédération Nationale des Libres Penseurs flourish!

C. B. B.

Theatre

Trial and Error, at the Vaudeville Theatre, is a farce by Kenneth Horne who has shown dramatic skill in retaining interest throughout the play and giving us a final act in which we are not spared the stimulus to laugh.

It hardly seems farcical that a wife, on her honeymoon night, confesses to her husband that she has been tried and acquitted on the charge of murdering her previous husband who, it was alleged, had been pushed overboard. But when the first husband reappears as a likeable black-guard in the form of Derek Farr the fun starts, for Naunton Wayne as the second husband is an upright, honourable and dithering Englishman. The contrast gives excellent results, although Mr. Farr works hard to give a less brilliantly written part more substance. Constance Cummings's performance is a little brittle. Nora Nicholson gave an excellent portrayal as a deaf aunt, and Nan Munro was a housekeeper who suffers, but not in silence.

Roy Rich's production does not manage to dispense with one or two dull moments.

The Boltions Revue, which can generally be relied upon for good entertainment, is Donald Monat's latest production at the Boltions Theatre.

Among the most interesting sketches are a satire on Sunday newspapers, another on television, and tuneful items which include a ballet entitled *The Devil to Pay* and a South African song-scena, *Leave it till To-morrow*. Phillipa Reid sings charmingly and June Blayne dances attractively. The music is arranged and performed by Brian Burke and Geoffrey Ghin's décor and costumes are noteworthy.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

Correspondence

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

SIR.—In a letter to *The Freethinker* published on September 25th, Mr. Basil Edgecombe shows that he has completely misunderstood the meaning of my article condemning the National Anthem.

He maintains that he stands to attention when the Anthem is played as a token of respect to the people of the country concerned. My whole contention was that the wording of our National Anthem was such that it shows no democratic respect whatsoever for the mass of the people of this country. It invokes God's good offices on behalf of only one individual of the realm.

Furthermore, I am deeply shocked to see that Mr. Edgecombe pays this respect to a State merely because of its sovereignty. I hope I will never live to see the day when a Freethinker voluntarily salutes the flags or sings the Anthems of such blood-drenched régimes as those of Russia, Spain or Kenya. That, sir, would be a travesty of everything sincere, rational or ethical.—Yours, etc.,
DAVID ALEXANDER.

A DEFENCE OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

SIR.—The other day somebody maintained that for religious reasons the British people wanted the abolition of the death penalty.

Consequently—I retorted—they ought to oppose wars, even wars against "Reds." If their religious conviction is strong enough to argue against the destruction of dangerous criminals, it seems to cause them no qualms to kill useful citizens of another country, creed, or colour of the skin. Why do they not refuse to be instrumental in the production of weapons and arms?

Quite naturally, I was asked whether I was for the retention of capital punishment. This was my reply:—

I am for the death penalty and for euthanasia; this means, I am not for the abolition but for the *extension* of capital punishment, but, at the same time, for a humanised form of extermination of those socially dangerous. Normally, no gardener would question the wisdom of eradicating weeds for the protection of useful plants. Why, then, do we put apart our human weed and keep it alive? This means a gross waste of prison buildings and tax money, as every criminal has to be fed and watched. We have to maintain an army of wardens to extend a rather useless life behind bars. If the prisoner escapes, society has to tremble with fear, since he treats his fellow-men without that mercy that is claimed for him in the name of an ill-conceived humanity. Fiendish crimes are perpetually committed, even against little children. True, the death penalty is no deterrent to crime, but it is a protection for the community who want to exist as a human community.

I have never been able to understand why drunkenness or lunacy ought to be a mitigating factor. If a person gets intoxicated and then, in addition, destroys other lives, it stands to reason that this is even more ineliminable. And lunacy—particularly if incurable—is a burden to the individual sufferer and a great danger to society. So euthanasia seems to be the only solution. The community has priority over the individual.

But to go to the root of our present-day crime wave and, in particular, juvenile delinquency, it would be necessary to ban all the Yankee rubbish which breeds degeneration; the comic strips, the jive maniacs and jitterbuggers, the Westerners and detective stories. This, however, runs counter to vested interests. And so long as these prove stronger than reason, I am all for putting to sleep dangerous criminals of any description—that means, common criminals, not political opponents—sane or insane, old and young. And if they are youngsters, I would punish their parents too.

Crime has got to be stripped of its glamour.—Yours, etc.,

A TAXPAYER.

WHO ARE THE WARMONGERS?

SIR.—I am not easily drawn into a political controversy, but a letter under the above heading from Mr. Warhurst just cannot be ignored. Here is a typical example of British Communism at work recklessly splashing itself into print with a complete disregard for factual truth and reason. Perhaps Mr. Warhurst cannot see straight because he has become so goggle-eyed looking for the hideous iniquities practised by the Western Powers. He says: "That huge slave camp called the British Empire will take some explaining away, a fact which must be uneasy on the conscience of all the inhabitants of Britain."

Surely, it is because there are no slave camps in our Empire that people like Mr. Warhurst can get away with this sort of stuff? If the British are such wicked monsters, then why, in the name of Karl Marx, doesn't he go and live in his beautiful Russian paradise? Let him become a naturalised Russian subject—then if he dares to criticise the Soviet regime he would very quickly

know the precise geographical locations of the Russian slave camps—because that is where he would find himself. Because we allow free-thought and free-speech in Britain he is free to blacken his own country and preserve his own tender skin at the same time; which, of course, is the reason he and his kind prefer to remain in the "huge slave camp called the British Empire."

Mr. Warhurst scoffs at the Allied Nations for not defeating North Korea, but he is careful not to mention the vast military and material aid of China and Russia. In his distorted mind he can only picture poor little North Korea defying the armed might of the West single-handed. Or is he deliberately trying to impress the ignorant?

Exactly what Mr. Warhurst means when he says "The recent floods on the East Coast are a sure warning of the perils ahead if we continue to follow the warmongers" Lenin only knows! I have yet to learn how any war-lords can control the wind and the rain. For his information let me add that I subscribe to no political ideology—because it is my opinion that all party and international politics are as crooked as a corkscrew. One *ism* is not much better than any other *ism*—but I do believe in true democracy, if there is such a thing! Unfortunately, too many who dabble in politics do so from selfish motives of greed and lust for power, baiting their hooks for any silly little fish to swallow.

Yours, etc.,
W. H. WOOD

FREETHOUGHT AND PROGRESS

SIR.—I was impressed by the article "Rationalism and Tolerance," which to me seems to be one of the sanest articles that has yet appeared under your editorship.

Surely, if language has a meaning, Freethought means precisely what the word says, and is not the religion that some "Freethinkers" would like it to be. The peevish, arping urge of some members of the movement to keep Freethought within a restricted area of their interpretation is religious fanaticism at its most fanatical. Gaslight and hansom cabs are no longer with us, much as their disappearance may be regretted by the conservative to whom all change is death; and the wish to keep the Freethought movement in the Victorian age is a long-term policy of suicidal distressing to see.

Is it not the desire of the N.S.S. to increase its membership? And should not that membership consist of all types, the orthodox as well as the orthodox? In a word, is not tolerance of other opinions, no matter how alien to our own, the very essence of Freethought? It is the essence of all healthy organisations. It is one thing to disagree, say, with Catholicism; it is quite another thing to condemn all Catholics as scoundrels—or Protestants as morons, or Salvationists as cretins, or even Churchmen of England members as two-faced money-grabbers. To disagree with any religion is an eminently reasonable thing to do; to condemn all religionists is preposterously unreasonable, tyrannical and what is more, self-destroying. You cannot win people over by vituperativeness; but you can easily isolate yourself.

I believe that the regeneration of the Freethought movement will come only when heavy sarcasm is eradicated, the porches opened, and a wider, more generous glimpse of the horizon obtained. All mankind is bound for an unknown destination with many differing charts for the voyage. Let our voyage be a proud one. Let us conduct ourselves with the noblest of courtesies. Let us have tolerance.—Yours, etc.,
JOHN O'HALL

MASS ADVERTISING

SIR.—Writing in the "Daily Telegraph" (June 17, 1953), Mr. Randolph Churchill contrasts the sponsored programmes of America with the B.B.C.'s "superb production" on Coronation Day. "The power of mass advertising," he writes, "through the medium of radio and television . . . tends towards the creation of a mass mind, with increasingly standardised tastes and appetites." Mr. Churchill, like his distinguished father, is a writer of brilliant, graphic prose. Even we could not better the above phrases of his—as a description of the Coronation Day programmes!—Yours, etc.,
ARTHUR C. CARPENTER

As we go to press we learn with regret of the death of Mr. J. W. H. Davis, a member of the National Secular Society, at the age of 68. He was Vice-President of the South London and Lewisham Branch of the N.S.S. and prominent in local affairs. A Secular Cremation Service will take place at Honor Oak Crematorium at 10-30 a.m. on Saturday, October 17.

A GRAMMAR OF FREETHOUGHT. By Chapman Cohen. Price, 4s. 3d.; postage 4d.
LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers. By William Kent. Price, cloth 6s., paper 4s. 3d.; postage 3d.