

The Freethinker

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CHAPMAN COHEN (1868—1954)

It is with profound regret that we have to announce the death of Mr. Chapman Cohen at the advanced age of eighty-five, on February 4.

To praise Chapman Cohen in the columns of *The Freethinker* would, indeed, be a flagrant case of "taking coals to Newcastle," of seeking to paint the rose or to gild the lily. For over fifty years, 1897 to 1950, Mr. Cohen was a regular contributor to *The Freethinker* and, of course, was its editor from 1915 to 1951. It is scarcely necessary here to remind, at least, the older readers of *The Freethinker* of Mr. Cohen's great qualities as a writer: a faultless lucidity both of mind and style perhaps may be said to summarise them. Next week we hope to record in more fitting detail the long career and outstanding services of this great man to humanity, to the philosophy of Freethought, and to the Secular movement, in particular.

To expect, in our current world of cant, convention and conformity, that this great thinker will receive any official posthumous recognition, such as is so freely accorded to every species of nonentity in Church and State, would, no doubt, be a futile expectation. As Mr. Cohen himself remarked about another eminent Freethinker, his were not the kind of services that humanity is usually in a hurry to reward!

As the eloquent and acute spokesman of the advanced minority upon which progress always ultimately depends, Mr. Cohen will be long held in honour. His fearless, razor-edged intellect dispelled the dark clouds of superstition wherever it turned its penetrating light. He was one of the last of a great generation which, also, we honour in honouring his memory.

F. A. RIDLEY,
Editor, *The Freethinker*.

VIEWES AND OPINIONS

By F. A. RIDLEY

Shade of Thomas a Becket!

IN the year A.D. 1170, Thomas a'Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, was slain before the High Altar in his own Cathedral at Canterbury. The murder, one of the most famous in English history, was the work of a band of knights, who alleged that they were acting under the orders of the King, Henry II (Plantaganet). Faced with the fury of the then all-powerful Catholic Church, Henry did humiliating penance at the tomb of the Martyred Archbishop, soon to be canonised as "St. Thomas of Canterbury." What were the actual circumstances behind this celebrated "taking-off" of the English Primate have never been fully revealed. The underlying motive for the murder is, however, transparently clear. Whether King Henry actually ordered the death of the Archbishop may or may not be true. What is not doubtful is that Becket fell ultimately in the struggle between Church and State for supremacy in the society of the Middle Ages. The Church eventually won that conflict, in England, thanks largely to Becket's "martyrdom," as the Church regarded his violent end.

The "Golden Age" of the Church

Another Henry, Henry Tudor, as prodigal with his executions as with his marriages, put an end to the Catholic mediaeval theocracy by methods as ruthless as, and much more effective than, the murder of Becket by his remote Plantaganet predecessor. It is, in fact, only in the present (20th) century that Roman Catholicism in Britain has begun to recover from the fatal blows of Henry Tudor. The Church of Rome, however, has a long memory! Despite its heavy defeats in the era of the Reformation, the Vatican has never lost sight of its dream: the restoration of the Golden "Age of Faith" in the Middle Ages, when "all

roads led to Rome," when the Church was, so to speak, the central sun, around which culture, politics, economics, in short, the whole life of the age, revolved. To-day, the Vatican still seeks to achieve this ambition, this time on a world-wide scale.

The Return of the Middle Ages?

In a notable article published recently in our American contemporary, *Progressive World*, the veteran Rationalist, Joseph McCabe, drew attention to the remarkable revival of, what we may term, political Catholicism in the course of the last half-century. Remarking that, at the turn of the century, Catholic political leaders were few and far between, McCabe went on to indicate what we, too, have often pointed out in this column, that the Catholic Church is now probably the most powerful political force in Western Europe, besides being almost equally powerful in the "New Worlds" of both America and Australasia. Nor, we may relevantly add, is there any reason to believe that the tenacious memory of the Vatican has lost sight of its ultimate goal: the ultimate restoration of the Mediaeval Theocracy, for which the mediaeval Church plotted and organised its crusades, and for the effective attainment of which the Inquisition lighted its fires, and Thomas a'Becket braved death at the hands of the secular powers.

Mediaeval Theocracy Returns to Spain

The modern world—fortunately for heretics like ourselves!—is not the world of the Middle Ages. To-day, Rome is compelled to proceed cautiously, "with all the inevitability of gradualness," in the classic phraseology of politics, and she has to show caution in showing her hand, and reticence in publishing her full mediaeval programme. Nevertheless, here as elsewhere, "straws show the way the

wind is blowing." Where at all possible the Church "stakes" her mediaeval claims. The best recent example of this is in Spain where the Concordat signed last August, between the Vatican and the Franco Regime, has virtually restored Spain to the former status which she enjoyed in the reign of Torquemada, Ignatius Loyola, and of her "Most Catholic" kings.

A Model Concordat

Napoleon, who was certainly not an orthodox Catholic, if, indeed, he was a Christian at all?—set the modern fashion in 1802, when he concluded the famous Concordat with the Vatican which re-established the Church in France after the Revolution. Napoleon, however, at least, got his share of concessions and remained the effective ruler in both Church and State. General Franco has been less fortunate. In return for a few more or less nominal concessions such as the clause which instructs the Spanish clergy to pray daily for the Head of the State (Franco), the Church now acquires virtually complete control both of education and of culture. Under this agreement, "Church inspectors have the right to investigate all forms of State or private teaching, and power to order the withdrawal of any book, publication or manual, or any material which they may consider contradictory to Catholic Dogma or Morality." When one considers that Spanish Catholicism is the most reactionary, probably, in the world, and that the *Ripalda Catechism* still in use, explicitly bans virtually every form of modern, social, scientific or political thought, it is evident that the effect of the Concordat is to return Spain to precisely mediaeval conditions of culture.

Back to the "Age of Faith"

What we may term the political and legal clauses of this concordat are equally startling: all Church property is freed from taxation—in one of the poorest lands in the Western World! The advertisement and public propa-

ganda of all rival religions, including all non-Roman forms of Christianity, is entirely forbidden under Draconian criminal penalties. Most mediaeval of all, in criminal cases involving priests or members of religious Orders, the Holy See allows [our emphasis—F.A.R.] the State to judge them in ordinary tribunals, but "with due secrecy to avoid any form of publicity." The accused must be treated "with all the consideration due to their status," and terms of imprisonment will be served "in ecclesiastical or religious houses." Shade of Thomas a'Becket! For it was the precise issue of the jurisdiction of secular courts over clerical criminals that seem to have played a leading role in bringing the mediaeval Archbishop to his violent end.

An English Commentary

In a temperate and closely-reasoned article our Sunday contemporary, the *Observer*, comments that, "General Franco has given the Roman Catholic Church such powers as it has not enjoyed even in Spain since the end of the 17th century." Our contemporary adds this relevant comment: "The Vatican has made it difficult for Roman Catholics throughout the world to deny that their Church favours liberty wherever she is in a minority, only to suppress it as soon as she attains full control of any country." Vatican policy in a sentence!

Towards a Mediaeval Europe?

A sorry business! But Spain, it may be said, is a backward land, enslaved for centuries by the Inquisition—is that "Holy Office" also scheduled for eventual restoration? However, the "Catholic" Church claims to be, not only Spanish but, equally, "Universal." Her aim is, undoubtedly, the final restoration of mediaevalism everywhere; is Spain not only a warning but a precedent? Do we see in a Catholic Spain to-day what we shall presently see in a Catholic Europe to-morrow? This is, no doubt, the hope of the Vatican.

The Divine Interpretation of Scripture

"The Divine Interpretation of Scripture: A Reply to Cardinal Manning," by "Saladin." Being a Paper read at the Cassadaga Conference, New York, by S. P. Putnam, Secretary, American Liberal League.

(Concluded from page 47)

All vocations were dead, save that of the priest. With husky voice, haggard mien, and supernatural wildness of gesticulation, the monk harangued the market place, and around him surged all that Terror and Death had spared. Nearer, nearer, and nearer came the end of the year, till only a few hours intervened between mankind and the Day of Judgment. Then the remnant of human beings crushed into the churches till they were filled to suffocation. Thousands clamoured in vain for admission at the gate of convent, cathedral, and abbey. Resolved that it would be better for their souls should they perish among the ruins of the house of God, they who could not obtain admission scrambled up to the roof, and mingled their chants and wails with the roll of the organ which ascended from within. Midnight on the 31st December was the utmost limit given but the beams of the true sun of righteousness have broken for the release of Satan; but it was held that the release might take place an hour or two before night's solemn noon. The great candles of the cathedral shone under groined arch and by fluted column over the pale and upturned faces of a convulsed and motley multitude. There were no clocks; but, at regular intervals, on the candles metal balls were fixed by inflammable strings, and as, hour after hour, the flame reached each string in succession, the ball fell into a

basin-shaped gong below, with a clang that, in the breathless suspense which waited upon the burning of each string, resounded to the loftiest turret, and reverberated among the graves under the flag-stones in the aisle. One by one, an eternity of suspense between them, fell the balls into the gong, and yet the end of the world did not come, and the winter morning dawned of the 1st of January, in the year 1001. The Holy Catholic Church had indeed interpreted the Scripture—interpreted it to replenish her own coffers and augment her own power. The world slowly slunk back into its old work-a-day ways, but without taking pains to resent its having been duped and hoaxed by the unscrupulous cunning of Rome. Shame, my Lord Cardinal! Remember, you are not addressing the illiterate vassalage of the Dark Ages. Your words reach those who can criticise them without favour and reject them without fear. When you come to speak of your Church being the only divine interpreter of Scripture, remember the twentieth chapter of Revelation and the year 1000 A.D., and be forever dumb.

Nay, my Lord Cardinal; the pretensions of your Church are going the way of all the earth. You yet manage to hobble along on two crutches—and mental apathy and moral credulity of mankind. But the earth swings round, and the gnome cast another shadow upon the dial of Time.

A race arises that cares neither for your book nor your infallible interpretation thereof. Address, if you will, the present-day spawn of the bats and owls of mediævalism; but the beams of the true sun of righteousness have now broken through the gloom of your censor smoke and your windows, dim with the effigies of saints. The perdition which has overtaken Zeus and Isis is overtaking you. Untold opulence, the romance of history, the wealth of erudition, and the subtlety of intellect are yet on your side; and I admit that even I, the "Infidel," immeasurably more pronounced than ten thousand "Infidels" you have tortured and burnt, have some feeling of sympathy with you as, girt with the cestus of the mighty memories of two thousand years of the irrevocable Past, you stand confronting your inevitable doom from the fiat of the merciless Future. Hater as I am of tyrants and tyranny, the tears have coursed down my face as I have figured my fathers at Culloden, amid ruin and rout, riven tartan and shivered Clullmore, perishing in the whirlwind that swept away the "divine right of kings." Like sympathy I extended to you and your Church, Cardinal Manning, standing between the sunset of the world's yesterday and the dawn of the world's tomorrow, defending the divine right of priests. But, like a spectre of the Brocken, your towers and citadels melt away into the viewless air. You have made a darkly interesting chapter in anthropology; but the race rises to the level of new developments and new æons, and, ere a long time pass, your censor will smoke no more, your Jesus will have taken his place with the obsolete gods, and the candles upon your altar shall burn no more forever. The same sun in the heavens that has looked down upon the waning altar-fires of the faiths of the world's hoary yesterday shall yet look down upon your altars, cold, deserted, and desolate. The altar of the future will be the concave of the sky overarching in glory the everlasting hills. The worship of the future, irrespective of teleological dogma, will be the reaching forward to stronger brain, purer morals, and a happier world. To further the event, my Lord Cardinal, of that nobler altar and grander worship, the Freethinkers of America are met to-day on the Cassadaga heights, and they permit me thus to shake hands with them over the "misty and mournful Atlantic," and add my feeble spark to the splendour of the coming day in a land where Romanism never had the mastery—on a continent of which your Jesus never heard.

The Virgin Mary—Fraud or Fiction?

In this day of scientific progress there are organisations actually proud of their unprogressiveness. One is a church that claims it never changes and that it espouses "truths" "revealed" in ancient times. The head of this church advertises for a fact that he has "seen" the "Virgin Mary" on numerous occasions during the past two years.

Only three explanations are possible: (1) The Pope is crazy, has paranoid psychosis and has degenerated to the point of hallucination. (2) The Pope is a fraud and is deliberately reporting for truth something he knows to be a lie. (3) The Pope has been drinking too much communion wine. Over-imbibing makes him "see" virgins instead of the standard pink elephants and snakes. No other explanation is possible. What man of sense wishes to be led by a lunatic, a liar, or sot?

Some may think we are unduly disrespectful of the Virgin Mary myth. Of them we ask: Do you honestly believe that a flesh and blood Mary actually ascended to heaven? If so, where and how high is heaven? What does she wear, eat, breathe? What does she sit on? Do you believe in face of the fact that science has found the space where heaven was thought to be to contain no air and to be intensely cold?—Circulated by the Twin City Rationalists. Office of the Secretary is at 1903, Walnut Street, St. Paul 8, Minn.

ROBERT TAYLOR. The Devil's Chaplain (1784-1844). By H. Cutner. A detailed account of a remarkable Freethinker and his work. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

"The Myth of Materialism"

By DOUGLAS V. MORGAN, Inter B.Sc. (Econ) (Lond.), A.I.L. (French), F.R.Ecom.S.

THE first thing which I would like you to note is that the adjective used to describe my idea of the concept of Materialism is "myth." That is to me precisely what Materialism connotes. And that is my purpose in writing this article. I shall do my best to show you—whom I take to be an adherent of Materialism—that you are not only on the wrong track—so to speak—but also to prove to you as clearly and as briefly as space allows *where* you are wrong. But first we must start from common ground and to me that common ground is to be found in the postulates of Materialism accepted by every school of philosophy. Now as a Materialist I take it that you will accept the postulates of your creed as laid down in that admirable little book by Chapman Cohen, "Materialism Restated." Here they are: (i) That on the Negative side Materialism denies the supernatural. It is a denial of a free and independent spiritual and mental agency in the universe. (ii) That on the positive side Materialism asserts that every event has a cause and that cause can be explained by science. That is to say, a philosophy of mechanism. (iii) That everything which exists in the universe can be reduced to matter.

Now, as I have said, this is common ground to all of us. And I will even come so far as to agree with you that what I have postulated was in its heyday in the 19th century. No doubt the Materialist thought that he was the cleverest man on earth. "And why not?" was his answer. "Just look, my friend," he would say, "Haeckel has written his 'Riddle of the Universe' and made a deep impression upon philosophy. Galileo and Newton have proved that the universe is a vast machine, and science has refuted and proved wrong everything that the Church, the Fathers and the Bible would have us believe."

What is my reply? That up to a point I cannot refute what the Materialist has said. But—and here I come to the core of my thesis, the purpose of my article—can you as a Materialist refute these postulates, the postulates of an Idealist.

(i) That the history of man has been the history of his quest for "cosmic unity." It is the spirituality of man which has given rise to his material progress. All men at all times in all places have sought the goal of St. Augustine—"My heart is restless till it finds rest in Thee."

(ii) That if Matter is all there to give an account of an oil painting or the works of Beethoven is simply to describe the oils of the painting and the notes of the music. So we do not want aesthetics do we?

(iii) That if every event has a cause we are not free to chase. We are machines. So we can dismiss logic and ethics.

(iv) That thoughts and the human mind are figments of the imagination. Epiphenamenalism does away with "Mind." Pavlov and Watson have "explained" all these things. These are some of the features which you as a Materialist want me to believe. I would willingly *but you take away the very ground on which you stand.* Why? you ask. I shall tell you—because every statement you have made, every effort you have expended to support your doctrine and refute mine as an Idealist you have used the very tool which you say does not exist—the Human Mind. That is where Materialism as a creed and philosophy will never find acceptance—you deny the Human Mind, you say it does not exist, but where is your proof?

In other words, you embrace Solipsism and Materialism. You cannot have it both ways, can you?

This Believing World

In the House of Lords the other day, Lord Douglas said, "The passion to regulate the lives of others is deep-seated and hard to root out. It is most dangerous and insidious when it arises, not from motives of personal gain, but from the desire to inflict benefit upon others." How true! He could not have described the antics of many of our sincere religious believers more thoroughly. And is it not a fact that the Churches want to "regulate" the whole of our lives and wish, as Lord Douglas added, "to impose on others a pattern of conduct" which they think best? It is only fair to say, however, that the noble Lord was not dealing with religion but with "research experts."

The Professor of Applied Mathematics of Oxford University, Prof. Coulson, gave children a broadcast talk recently on "The Scientific Interpretation of the Universe" in which he brilliantly expounded Astronomical Mathematics and showed how wonderfully everything was mathematical—and therefore subject to Mathematical Laws. And who gave us these Laws? Why, God Almighty, of course. He was the Great Mathematician—and very surprisingly we were not told that Jesus was the Greatest Mathematician the world has ever seen. Dr. Coulson no doubt feels that this honour belongs to his God.

Although the Design Argument has been blown to smithereens, it continually crops up in these school broadcasts. "God did it," is the unwearying cry. As no child is allowed to reply—even if he could—Prof. Coulson no doubt can happily continue his exploded theory: though we are pretty sure even his own colleagues must laugh at his childishness. There isn't a scrap of evidence that any "God did it," for neither Prof. Coulson nor any of his Christian brother professors could prove a "God" exists anywhere. Does he believe his God is "in the sky"?

Our very Christian Home Secretary—not more so than his predecessors—will, we are sure, have been highly gratified at the success of a Nativity Play in Dartmoor prison acted by the very religious inmates. The Rev. A. Rouse, who was "privileged" to see it, is most enthusiastic at the way the journey of the Three Wise Men to Bethlehem was acted by the old screws (or lags) and he claims that its presentation helped him and them "towards the altar of our Christmas Communion." We are quite sure it did, for week in and week out we have shown in these columns that most, if not all, "delinquents," young or old, are very religious. And therefore teaching religion in schools will never solve the problems of crime and crime waves.

This obvious truth will never be paraded by our contemporary *Picture Post*, which prefers to devote many pages to boosting up the Seventh Day Adventists, or giving us pictures of "the church that fills a theatre." We are told that "the minister who holds them there" is the Rev. S. Olford, and he is shown in a characteristic Christian attitude addressing a packed house. But the photograph lets out a precious secret. The congregation is mostly little children or women of various ages; although the church was packed, we could only count about half a dozen men. And that is the tragedy; for the stuff and nonsense of Hell and Heaven and their denizens frothed up with idiotic miracles appears now to appeal mostly to women and children—and we are grateful to *Picture Post* for such a striking proof of this fact.

Then we are told of another "great" missionary clergyman who is now in America, the Rev. A. Redpath, broad-

casting over "the church's own radio station" and "presenting New Testament principles of the Christian life which alone can adequately answer the challenge of materialism to-day." If this were true, why don't the "Christian" principles arrest the spread of materialism? Why are priests and parsons, bishops and cardinals, all heartbroken at the way materialism—that is, scientific materialism—is capturing most of our scientists to-day, so many of whom contemptuously reject Christianity—true Christianity, of course, and not the modern version which gives up entirely what all Christians believed almost up to 100 years ago? How many of them believe the Virgin Birth, and the story of Jesus cruising in space with a Devil? Do the editor and staff of *Picture Post* believe these things?

Why Esperanto?

By G. L. DICKENSON

I HAVE read with interest your recent articles on international language. I am especially interested in these articles as I myself have studied the problem for some twenty years. I was a Fellow of the British Esperanto Association in 1946, having studied the language for some years before then. I mention these personal details in case I may be accused of prejudice.

I oppose the choice of Esperanto as an international language for the following reasons:—

1. The grammar is arbitrary. (a) Esperanto insists that every noun must end in -o, every adjective in -a. English has long since proved that such grammatical categories are unnecessary. (b) Every adjective must agree with its noun (see the above remarks on English). (c) Nouns must take -n in the accusative case. This is a difficulty of major magnitude for English or American students, and totally unnecessary, as is again proved by the English language. (d) Adjectives also must take -n in the accusative. Esperanto is probably the only language which maintains this rule without exception. The tendency in modern European languages is again represented in English, away from synthetic grammar, especially in conversational usage. Compound tenses and old case-endings are now replaced by using simple words and prepositions. (e) Many of the affixes used in Esperanto are arbitrary. It has been proved by other attempts at international language that affixes borrowed from national languages are to be preferred.

2. The attitude of Esperanto is wrong. Esperantists say, in effect, "If the world will adopt our language as it is, with its defects, we are prepared to consider modifying it." This is flying in the face of facts. There are millions of people who know English and who have English as a mother tongue. These millions represent an inert mass which will not be moved by such an attitude. You have rightly said in a former article that the choice of international language lies between the adoption of English or some simple constructed language. My contention is that the constructed language *must* resemble English in ways which have made English so hegemonic, which are as follows: Anglo-Latin alphabet (Esperanto has letters which many printers do not possess); tendency to monosyllabism; verbal derivation from the perfect; plural by "s" (Esperanto uses "j," which exists in no other language); absence of agreement of adjective and noun and of case-endings generally.

English resembles Chinese in its ability to use words as adjective, noun or verb without any change in their appearance. Esperanto endeavours to make itself simple by restricting vocabulary. Here is another mistake. Words in themselves are not hard to learn; it is the relations between them which become hard by restrictive grammatical rules such as those in Esperanto.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

ERNEST SMEDLEY.—Thank you for your letter and good wishes, which we heartily reciprocate.

MALCOLM STUBBS.—Thank you for your contribution, which we hope to use shortly. We agree with you that Catholicism is, today, both more dangerous than Protestantism, and more likely to survive.

CHARLES A. SWEETMAN.—Thank you for your letter. The present fashion of "debunking" Thomas Hardy will, no doubt, prove ephemeral.

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

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.:

FRANK ROTHWELL.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every week-day, 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).—Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, February 14, 6-45 p.m.: J. M. PATERSON, H.P.A., H.G.A., "Diametics."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 16, 7 p.m.: ROYSTON PIKE, "Sex in Fiction: Fielding to Graham Greene."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 14, 6-30 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Science and Society."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, February 14, 2-30 p.m.: W. N. WARBEY, M.P., "Can Britain lead a third force?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C. 1).—Sunday, February 14, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "The Silence of the Night."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road).—Sunday, February 14, 7-15 p.m.: Debate: R. S. W. POLLARD (All.) L. EBURY (Neg.), "Is there any good in Christianity?"

Stop Press

This issue of *The Freethinker* will reach many readers before the Secular Cremation Service of its late editor, Chapman Cohen, is conducted by the Secretary of the National Secular Society, in accordance with the wishes of Mrs. Cohen and her son, Dr. Raymond Cohen. The Service will be at Golders Green Crematorium at 2-15 p.m. on Thursday, 11th February. A full report will appear next week.

For Your Bookshelf

Bound Complete

THE FREETHINKER, 1953

Volume 73

Green Cloth, Gold Lettered. Price 24s., postage 1s. 2d.

CHALLENGE TO RELIGION (a re-issue of four lectures delivered in the Secular Hall, Leicester). By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 1½d.

Chapman Cohen

A Fallen Comrade

For him we will not toll the bell,
Do things ecclesiastical;
Beat muffled drums our loss to tell,
Make funeral rites fantastical
For our dear comrade fallen at our side;
Such mummery he never could abide:
Why then should we? He simply died.

Died: but his voice carries beyond the tomb:
That voice that taught, exhorted, and inspired,
Proclaiming vile religion's doom:
With courage new he drooping hearts has fired.
We pause to utter words of love and praise,
Then gird us for new fights in sterner days.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

A Chronology of British Secularism

By G. H. TAYLOR. (Continued from page 19)

1884. A huge crowd of sympathisers awaits Foote outside Holloway gaol as he completes his year there. He is entertained to a luncheon at the Hall of Science, where two days later he speaks on "How I fell among thieves." He immediately resumes editorship of *The Freethinker*, and writes, "*The Freethinker* shall, as I promised from Holloway Gaol, be a greater terror than ever to priests and bigots; they shall hate it with the hatred of fear. I defy as I dispise their power, and I would rather return to the loathsome brick vault I have tenanted for a whole long year than suffer them to divert me a hair's breadth from the policy I have pursued since this journal was started." (March 9, 1884). In the next issue the blasphemous sketches were resumed, together with an open letter to the Catholic judge, and a copy of the paper, with a card and compliments, was left at his house by Foote himself. Aveling now leaves secularism for socialism, and the newly formed Fabian Society attracts several prominent secularists, who make it their first love. This leads to the death of the British Secular Union, whose leaders lose interest in it. Watts thereupon goes to Canada to take up a Rationalist pastorate, and the publishing business is carried on by his son, C. A. Watts, who ends its affiliation with the secular movement and publishes *Agnostic Journal*. *The Secular Review* of Watts is handed over to W. S. Ross (Saladin), who is anti-N.S.S. and anti-Malthusian; John M. Robertson goes to London as sub-editor of the *National Reformer* and is now writing and lecturing for the secular movement. Secular reform on a non-party basis is now centred exclusively on the N.S.S. and *The Freethinker*, and the attack on Christianity is carried on chiefly by Bradlaugh, Foote, Robertson, Symes and Moss. Foote is put on the committee of a People's League for abolishing the House of Lords, to which project the N.S.S. give assistance. Bradlaugh debates Socialism with Hyndman.

1885. Bradlaugh is again elected for Northampton. In his non-stop activity in many directions he is urging votes for women, drawing up a Radical programme, and serving as Vice-President of the Sunday League, which is being materially aided by the N.S.S. Bradlaugh is addressing overflowing meetings in the country, speaking on one occasion to 3,000 at Leicester. There are many attempts to discredit the secularist leader by slander and libel, including a libellous biography traced to W. S. Ross, who then withdraws it from circulation (though copies have, in fact, subsequently been sold in secondhand shops). N.S.S. membership is at a new peak; there are 102 branches and

five independent secular societies, and regular outdoor stations at 20 places in London alone. Mrs. Besant is now in the Fabian Society and is combining secularist with socialist activity. Robertson joins Bradlaugh in advocating neo-Malthusianism, and similarly rejects socialism, this being also the attitude of Moss, Foote and Ball. C. A. Watts projects the short-lived *Agnostic* and starts the more successful *Literary Guide*, price one penny.

1886. *Present Day* ceases. *Radical* appears. Bradlaugh finally takes his seat on oath, and being busily engaged in Parliament, allows much of the N.S.S. leadership to devolve on Foote, who is continually lecturing and debating, and who is especially occupied at this time in rebutting Christian lies about infidel deathbeds. Moss also writes and lectures over the extent of the secularist field, both on doctrinal and immediate matters. There is a re-statement of N.S.S. principles. A bill for the repeal of the blasphemy laws fails. There is increased agitation for disestablishment.

1887. Bradlaugh has become one of the most impressive speakers in the House, formidable in debate and commanding the respect of both sides. Of his conflicts with

Lord Randolph Churchill, *Punch* records that "Bradlaugh kept his temper when Grandolph lost his, meeting all contradictions and denials with inexorable Hansard. The more Grandolph wriggled, the more self-possessed and incisive Bradlaugh grew, and the more uproarious the merriment of the House. General impression that Grandolph had met something more than his match, and that Bradlaugh had scored off long-standing account." After several affirmation bills have failed Bradlaugh introduces one but it is blocked. He is also active on trading rights, land cultivation and royal grants. A Trafalgar Square meeting for Radical reform is interfered with: Bradlaugh fights the case in the courts and the government, frustrated, let the matter drop, and secularists raise money for Bradlaugh's expenses. He has epistolary debates on socialism with Belfort Bax and Mrs. Besant, and allows the latter to write for socialism in the *National Reformer*: to clarify the position she resigns as co-editor but continues to contribute; she also defends socialism against Foote. Wheeler is again writing and working for the N.S.S.

(To be continued)

"Should Murderers Hang?"

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

IN *Everybody's Weekly* Sir Travers Humphreys, P.C., referred to as "one of Britain's greatest criminal judges," has just had printed an article with the above title. Since "the abolition of capital punishment" is an "immediate practical object" of the National Secular Society, I have read his expression of views somewhat critically.

He defends hanging, and does so with considerable force, his contention, however, being open to the same suspicion as if it were put forward by a professional executioner. In the course of his career he has presided over many notable trials and has sentenced a number of murderers to the gallows. One could hardly expect him to admit that he was with the N.S.S. on this question. Still, I thought that he would examine the pros and cons of the matter in a judicial manner. Instead, the article is nothing but special pleading from start to finish.

Sir Travers begins by suggesting, as a definition of a murderer deserving to be hanged, "one who unlawfully and without excuse, intentionally causes grievous bodily harm to another, from which that other dies." He does not point out that this definition throws hanging overboard for all murders committed under provocation of various kinds—taunts, nagging, cruelty, marital infidelity and so on, while retaining it for murders resulting from robbery with violence, sexual aberrations and calculated attempts to hasten the acquisition of legacies under wills.

He is properly horrified by the dangers of setting at liberty, after a period of imprisonment, murderers convicted of the latter type of offences. Surely, however, the dangers are no less in the case of other killers released from prison after serving sentences, having been exempted from hanging because provocation had been proved. Are not their uncontrollable passions just as likely to result in crime as is the uncontrollable lawlessness of the murderers whom Sir Travers particularly loathes?

He compares the ease with which sympathy for "the poor man in the dock" is aroused with the absence of concern for the bereaved kin of the victim. Is it not plain to him that this lack of discrimination on the part of the public is directly due to the death penalty with which the accused is threatened, and that it would be immediately remedied were executions abolished?

He deplores the Home Secretary's "prerogative of mercy," as offering a loophole for the murderer to repeat

his crime on a future occasion, and he advocates capital punishment as a deterrent, while admitting that it is only so "to a very small extent." This half-hearted defence of what is usually put forward as the chief reason for retaining the fear of the gallows in our penal code is very striking. Sir Travers seems to be all for hanging, after having given up most of the reasons for which it has hitherto been adopted!

He refers to "individuals and even societies who are opposed to capital punishment for what in their opinion are good and sufficient reasons." But he leaves readers of *Everybody's Weekly* in the dark as to what these good and sufficient reasons are. It is no credit to any paper to be ready to publish so illogical and one-sided a presentation of a question of the most serious import to-day. A "distinguished jurist," as *Everybody's* describes its contributor, ought to know the case against capital punishment, and ought, when arguing for its retention, to face opposition fairly and squarely. Evasion is not only suspect; it is contemptible.

A majority of N.S.S. members call for the abolition of the death penalty because:—

- (1) It precludes reparation for a wrongful conviction.
- (2) It hampers preventive and remedial action.
- (3) It dares, rather than deters, the criminal.
- (4) It neglects the duty of reclamation.
- (5) It ignores social responsibility for crime.
- (6) It glamorises crime for the mentally unstable.
- (7) It creates morbid public tension.
- (8) It feeds a debased press with brutal material.
- (9) It breeds callous Counsel and Judges.
- (10) It necessitates the disgusting trade of executioner.

A minority of religious believers share our repugnance for this relic of the savage "eye-for-an-eye" law of primitive religion; but, in a country where Christian broadcasters daily reiterate the depravity of mankind and the futility of human efforts at self-reform, the views put forward by a hanging judge in the sensational press receive greater public endorsement than those of thoughtful and humane people. The latter will continue to press for society to renounce taking a spectacular revenge on the wrongdoer, and to seek out the causes of crime in order to eliminate them, and thus bring about a secure and peaceful social life for the whole community.

The City and the Whale

By J. O'H

EVERYTHING is in London. It is possible, during an evening, to pass through every century since the Romans came. There is always a stone which has darkened with the shadow of a splendid or baleful figure of our history; there is always a turning down which a king, a poet, a murderer, or a revolutionary has gone. At no point in the continent of London's central mazes can one stand and say, "nothing has happened here." Every twist and alley has a memory, every nook and cranny has a voice. To know London is to know man. And how few do know London—know it in all its savage and sombre, gay and resplendent moods, its ghosts, its shadows, its pettiness, its grandeur. How few can distinguish between the language of the Elephant and that of Rotherhithe, or tell a tale about every street—nay, every house in the street—or point out where Mr. Micawber gave young Copperfield his celebrated advice, or Bill Sykes met his death, or follow Crippen every inch from New Oxford Street to Camden Road, or show where Boswell first met Johnson, or where Goldsmith crept from in the dark when he had no shirt to his back, or put a finger on Sherlock Holmes's address, which is betwixt Mrs. Siddons's and Sheridan's. How few, in short, really know London—not the sprawling masses of brickwork and bus-queues, but the London of the lamplit night when one walks home in the quietness with every step of the way an adventure into "all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man," and on the pavement with the lone voyager walk kings and queens, scoundrels, heroes, the lowly and persecuted, the great and tyrannical, murder most foul, goodness beyond pearls, while the "still, sad music of humanity" ever breathes from the sleeping city.

Of the few men who know London, of a surety Mr. William Kent is one. All the literate world knows that. Therefore it is hardly necessary to say that his latest book about London—*London In The News* (Staples, 12s. 6d.)—is of very great interest. However, although unnecessary, let it be said: *It is*. This time Mr. Kent has collected cuttings from newspapers of the past three hundred years, all news of London, and out of them has made a consecutive reading of delight and maybe pause. The *good* old days? Here are not the polished periods of essayists carrying out the whim of a patron, but items of everyday news slapped out by the penny-a-liners of the time. Nothing startles so much as everyday news when it is seen in print long afterwards. For the one arresting fact about the ordinary events of yesteryear is that they are extraordinary. So is this book.

The best way to see a mountain is to get away from it. Unfortunately, this is also true of great literary men. Few people can recognise greatness when they are rubbing elbows with it, and only rarely is literary genius of the highest rank fully seen in its possessor's own day. Always is there a frog-chorus that deceives the contemporary ear into the belief that angels are abroad. When one looks at the literary papers of our own day, one could believe that we are hemmed in by geniuses ("Waur's ye Wullie Shakespeare noo?") and that we are in a golden age of literary creativeness. Look at those same journals of twenty, thirty, years ago and there's the same story—geniuses in every spring list; but where are they now—Eh, François—*ou sont les neiges?* This, however, is nothing at all new; it is very old. Ever since Caxton made it possible, for ignorance to be more widely-spread, the frog-pond has been in full blast. A hundred years ago, the greatest poet in England was one Alexander Smith, for all the critics said he was. Who can quote the bold Alex now?

A hundred years ago the greatest American writer was mightily derided when he had the presumption to write one of the world's great novels. Trash!—oh, but what trash this guy scrawls, to be sure. The man was Herman Melville and the book he wrote was *Moby Dick*. The greatest American writer? Yes, *American*. Poe and Hawthorne are great writers, but in the European tradition. Melville was the first great American writer who wrote, as it were, out of his American-ness. His was a truly native genius.

The plot, or theme, of *Moby Dick* is simple and tremendous. Ahab, the sea-captain, has had a leg bitten off by a great white whale, Moby Dick. Thenceforward it is the consuming purpose of his life to find the whale again and avenge himself. The whole story, narrated by Ishmael, is a massive movement towards a mighty end. All the characters in it are larger than life, like all great literary creations; for men can be revealed fully only by being larger than the man in the street (Quixote, Lear, Raskolnikoff, can never be seen completely in life, only glimpsed aspects of them). It is a book of the elements and of titans, pervaded by the savage ocean and the more savage purpose of man. It sprawls, flounders, rises, and reaches a majesty of utterance that atones for all imperfections and leaves the mind exhilarated.

An interesting introduction to Melville, for those not yet acquainted with that dominant figure, is *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* by C. L. R. James, a monograph published by the author in New York City, but copies of which can be obtained from Mr. Charles Lahr, the bookseller, at 6 Woburn Walk, N.W.

Mr. James, perhaps, sees more *intention* in Melville's work than Melville himself had. A literary artist at his greatest is never conscious of all the implications in his work; indeed he is at his greatest when he is most unaware. To believe, for instance, that Shakespeare knew as much about the character and nature of Hamlet as does a Shakespearean commentator is to betray an imperfect understanding of the creative volition. Shakespeare himself was merely writing a play, and Melville himself was merely writing a story. That they were building better than they knew is simply to say that they were, in their separate ways, poets, great literary artists—not dissectors, not scientists, no philosophers, not politicians, but artists creating a shape, a unity, out of the turmoil of their imagination.

However, that is a matter which requires a paper to itself. Let it be said here that Mr. James's little book should appeal to all men who can appreciate a major figure in literary history. Ironically enough maybe, Mr. James, admirer of the American giant, has fallen foul of the American pigmy. McCarthyism has shaken its peasant head at him. There is a supplement at the end of his Melville study which gives an account of Mr. James's sojourn on Ellis Island. Ah, my masters, is the Piltdown skull really a fake? Or is it sadly with us under many an official hat?

Veteran propagandist Mr. A. Samms, of Sheffield, secured a valuable opportunity of carrying the Freethought message to the uninitiated when he was invited to speak, on January 12, at the Wisewood Community Centre. His subject was "Is Belief in God or Gods necessary?". Mr. Samms has been dealing with this question for so long and so frequently on the local N.S.S. platform that we are glad he made the best use of this occasion.

Reply to a Critic

READERS may remember a comment we made some weeks ago on a remark by Mr. Guy Aldred. He said, writing on the execution of Sir Roger Casement as a traitor during World War I, and what Mr. Justice Humphreys said, that it recalled the attitude of "the enemies of mankind when they learned that Jesus had died on a gallows tree"—and we asked him to tell us the names of these "enemies of mankind." And we asked him also to tell us where does it say that Jesus died on a gallows tree? We did not expect any definite answer—knowing our Aldred. We knew perfectly well that his answer could mean anything—as it did. We are told in the Jan. *Word* that the "enemies of mankind" were "the upholders of Caesar and militarism; the renegade Jews who pandered to Caesar and put him as a God," etc., etc. Mr. Aldred is a master of a kind of writing which, in the ultimate, is more often than not bubble and froth. But we know "the Jews," or the "renegade Jews" (quite unnamed) would come in somewhere. For they always do when any Jesus lover gets on the rampage. In the end, however, the "enemies of mankind" are "the ruling classes of society" whose interests "make it impossible for them to speak the truth." Mr. Aldred gets angrier and angrier—and so we can leave him on this point as he did *not* give us any names.

On the "gallows tree" reference, of course Mr. Aldred laughs us to scorn. He didn't mean "gallows tree," he meant "execution." And this proves our "want of humour"—a quality which some of us at least have never so far found particularly conspicuous in Mr. Aldred's "fiery" make-up. In any case, it appears that he has read "all the authentic critics on Jesus being a myth." The operative word here is "all." He has read Robert Taylor and J. M. Robertson and Joseph McCabe and Kautsky and Dietzgen. There are a few more he might have mentioned but, anyway, he knows "the mythological argument from A to Z," and that settles it. We, who are upholders of the Myth Theory, advance it because we "evade facing the economic explanation." And Mr. Aldred is going to deal "thoroughly" with the question of the "historic" Jesus. After which, no doubt, I, in particular, should hold my head down in shame. I won't.

Needless to add, Mr. Aldred throws down a challenge. He wants to meet anyone who has the temerity to say that Jesus is a "sun myth." Why he wants to confine the argument in this way, I am not clear. But he can rest assured that there is at least one advocate of the Myth Theory who is quite ready to meet any bluff, bubble and froth, on the platform (or elsewhere) emanating from Mr. Guy Aldred.

H. CUTNER.

Correspondence

WHAT SHOULD FREETHINKERS DISCUSS?

SIR.—I welcome Mrs. G. Matson's plea for discussion among Freethinkers.

Though admitting that *The Freethinker* is not a political paper, I understand freethought as embracing the *whole*. If politics creep in now and again, this obviously cannot be left out. My personal need for political discussion *now* is necessary for the ultimate goal of a society without the *need* of "fashionable" politics.

Agreed, Mrs. Matson, there *are* . . . "more serious and important problems to discuss," and the seemingly haranguing, and engendering of hatred by K. Lidaks leads us nowhere. In any event, Russia is not "Godless." Religion is "under control," and they have abandoned the idea of Marx that: "religion is the opium of the people."

In fact, their followers here "play up to large sections of Roman Catholics where it is advantageous to do so (in towns where such large sections exist), when political support is needed.

If peoples' thought is to be stimulated if we are to meet ideas with ideas, arguments with arguments, we must draw away from just making people purely anti-capitalist, or purely anti-religious.

I do not deny the stranglehold of the bulwarks of our dominant, coercive, property-based regime, and useful work is done by all who deal in specialised ways with certain factors that hinder, or desire to mould, thought into certain patterns.

Assuming that colonial and racial problems are important enough to merit discussion for the reason that they are vital and immediate questions. (I say questions (plural) because they present themselves as different problems.)

The colonial problem chiefly is that of peoples' expression for self-determination, a movement that has been catching on in recent years. But I only view it—despite the peoples' sincere beliefs—that it is exchanging one set of despots for another. But they start, of course, on the level of ideas held at the moment; they have not had to go through all the different stages of development, as has Britain, France, and Germany.

The main problem of *all* peoples, colonial or otherwise, is to co-ordinate on the basis of more essential *human* values than the will-to-power and the will-to-profits.

There are no innate biological differences existing in colonials or so-called races that prevent them understanding the desirability of co-ordinating world-wide, to create a world fit to live in, just by freely co-operating in producing and distributing wealth (in its real sense) for the benefit of mankind as a whole. A whole host of objections may be encountered, arising from prejudices, custom and power thought, but isn't that the same obstacle here and elsewhere?

On the question of race, I would like Mrs. Matson to elaborate, or explain, from what angle does she see the problem.

For my own part, if all "races" (I prefer to call them geographical localities) were known by naming them as colours, black, red, blue, etc., then in dealing with such people or with their problems, I would be colour blind.—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE HILBINGER.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

SIR.—Basil Edgecombe's suggestion that not remaining while the National Anthem is played shows "disrespect to our British democracy" is absurd. One's personal opinions of the GREAT BRITISH SIGNATURE TUNE have nothing whatever to do with British democracy.—Yours, etc.,

E. CROUCH.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

SIR.—"A Taxpayer's" letter in your issue dated October 16 makes queer reading. There is something to be said for the infliction of capital punishment in cases of coldly premeditated murders, as homicidal characteristics are evident, and the same can be said of criminal lunatics who, legally, are not responsible for their actions. The extermination of such individuals does protect society from further outrages. But where is one to draw the line? Would "A Taxpayer" be in favour of executing drunk motorists who kill pedestrians? They destroy "other lives," and their intoxication, so runs his argument, is "even more inerminating."

And why not revive the obsolete criminal code and hang thieves and crooks, whose depredations do more harm to the community than all the murderers put together? "A Taxpayer" has nothing to say about the officers of the law who have to carry out sentences such as he recommends. I can hardly believe that he would care to be one of them.—Yours, etc.,

ERIC A. McDONALD.

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