

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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WITH the passing of Mr. Chapman Cohen, a great age passes as well; we now approach the end of that "century of stupendous progress" from the Freethought angle which began with Charles Bradlaugh and ended with Chapman Cohen. Of the brilliant band of Freethought writers, scholars and speakers, of which the Secularist and Rationalist Movements could boast at the turn of the 19th into the 20th century, only one, Joseph McCabe, still lives to remind us of that age of giants.

Amongst that succession of eminent thinkers, or redoubtable apostles of the cause of Freethought, it can scarcely be doubted that the name of Chapman Cohen will stand very high. That can already be stated with confidence. In the historic succession of outstanding intellects who have moulded both organised Secularism as a Movement, and Freethought as a fighting philosophy, Mr. Chapman Cohen has his own special place. His name and fame stand, as definitely as do such other great Freethinkers as Bradlaugh, Paine, and his own predecessor, Foote, for a definite phase in the evolution of Freethought, for an historic phase in the annals of human thought in general.

Chapman Cohen and British Secularism

The current issue of *The Freethinker* is, in a sense, an issue specially devoted to the memory of Mr. Cohen. In view of his half-century's service to the Movement, and connection with the paper, this is, obviously, inevitable. Elsewhere in this issue will be found, accordingly, reminiscences of, and tributes to the memory of Mr. Cohen. The present writer, a comparatively newcomer to the organised Movement of Freethought, often heard Chapman Cohen in debate, but was never officially associated with him and, in fact, only knew him very slightly. Accordingly we leave to others far more qualified for the task, the personal assessment of the intellectual and personal qualities of this outstanding personality. Here, we merely propose to trace briefly the evolution of British Secularism, and to indicate what, in our opinion, was Chapman Cohen's peculiar and particular contribution to the development of that Movement. "The onlooker—proverbially—sees most of the game." No one has, in fact, assessed the historic task of Bradlaugh more brilliantly than did Mr. Cohen himself, yet he once told the present writer that he had never actually met or seen Bradlaugh personally.

The Evolution of British Freethought—the "Bradlaugh Era"

It would, we think, be broadly accurate to state that the historic Freethought Movement, which began with Owen, Holyoake and Bradlaugh as indicated recently in these columns by Mr. G. H. Taylor, has passed through three sequential phrases, each marked by a pre-eminent general characteristic. We would describe these, successively, as firstly, the age of *political* Secularism when, under the dynamic leadership of Charles Bradlaugh, the British

Secular Movement was concerned primarily with its legal recognition, with its elemental right to exist at all as a *legal* body, with the right to free speech on Freethought platforms and on anti-religious topics, in face of both the outrageous Blasphemy Laws and the "moral"—and, at times, physical—pressure exerted by the Church. Of this initial "heroic" era of Freethought propaganda, the great

Bradlaugh was the outstanding and, we may add, congruous hero, first and foremost, a fighter in an age of combat! One may relevantly add that this phase in the evolution of Secularism took over directly from the earlier Deistic phase of which "Tom" Paine was the effective spokesman and

principal champion; Paine, indeed, in broad historical perspective, may be described in Biblical analogy as the "John the Baptist," the "Forerunner" of the later Secularist Movement which shed his Deism, but carried on the struggle for "The Age of Reason" and tolerance for which "Tom" Paine had fought and suffered. Fundamentally, the primary fighting issue of what we have termed the "Bradlaugh Era," was, for the right, the legal and political right, to exist and to propagate its views.

The Era of "Bible-Banging"—the "Foote Era"

To the initial combative era, one roughly equivalent with the life and propaganda of Bradlaugh (1833-1891), there succeeded what we may, perhaps, term the era of "bible-banging." One may relevantly add that by this somewhat jocular expression we imply that phase in the evolutionary annals of British Secularism which concentrated primarily on attacking the Bible, as the great "Fetish-Book" of (Protestant) Christianity, which was in that era still the dominant form of English Christianity. As the present writer has on occasions criticised "Bible-Banging" in the present era as increasingly obsolete, we hasten to add that *in the era of which we are speaking*, this mode of attack was absolutely necessary and, indeed, was rendered absolutely inevitable by the crude bibliolatry which, as the present writer can testify from personal experience in his own youth, was then rampant and virtually universal in religious circles; in which evangelical "Bible Christianity" was the predominant form taken by Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Just as the initial era of combat found its appropriate champion and expression in Charles Bradlaugh, "The Great Iconoclast," so, equally, the phase characterised by the anti-Biblical attack was represented equally adequately by G. W. Foote, the Founder and first Editor of *The Freethinker*. Eloquent, witty, a master of literary style, of the *bon mot*, of the apt witticism, and of polished irony unsurpassed, probably, in our literature since Swift, G. W. Foote, a great publicist and a great journalist again summed up in his life and work (1850-1915) a whole phase in the evolution of British Secularism that marked, pre-eminently, by the direct attack on Christianity and, in particular, of the still prevalent Christian Bibliolatry.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Passing of a Great Man

By F. A. RIDLEY

The "Cohen Era"

With the passing of the Founder of *The Freethinker* (1915), there commenced that successive era which, we submit, will always be associated with the name and fame, with the intellectual approach of Chapman Cohen. Thus, in our submission, Cohen, along with his illustrious predecessors, Bradlaugh and Foote, may be adequately described as one of the three pre-eminent figures in the history of Secularist philosophy and of the Freethought Movement, who may be said to have given their name and their peculiar style to the successive phases of a great historic Movement. We may, we think, relevantly add, that it is the peculiarity of that higher species of originality commonly described as genius, to make, so to speak, its own peculiar pattern. The three great men of whom we have written, Bradlaugh, Foote and Cohen, all, alike, qualify for this designation, not the least of their qualifications for the designation of genius lies precisely in their, at first sight, startling dissimilarity. However, all three were alike in this, their devotion to the same cause and, we may relevantly add, that all three were "self-educated" men—and what other "education" is worth anything?—who surveyed the enigmas of Life and of the Universe through their own eyes, and not through borrowed glasses.

The Philosophy of Atheism

The particular role of Mr. Chapman Cohen in the evolution of British Freethought was aptly expressed in conversation with the present writer by Mr. Cohen's colleague and ultimate successor as President of the N.S.S., the late Mr.

R. H. Rosetti. Mr. Rosetti described Mr. Cohen's accession to the leadership of the British Secularist Movement as the inauguration and substitution of a *positive* for a negative approach in addition to the necessary but negative attack on religion in general and on the Bible in particular. Mr. Cohen emphasised—and with what lucidity!—the *positive* philosophy of Atheism. It was this notable service which History, we think, is most likely to remember: it is, perhaps, by his philosophical analysis of Materialism rather than by his more controversial writings that the second Editor of *The Freethinker* is, we think, most likely to be remembered.

Hail—and Farewell!

The passing of a great man is always an event in which elements of sorrow mingle with elements of pride: sorrow for the temporary loss of the personal giver; pride at the imperishable personal gifts which were his contribution to human betterment. In the case of Mr. Cohen, both elements are present. However, it was one of his favourite thoughts, and no one has expressed it more eloquently, that birth and death are both sides of the same medal, and that both prepare the way for each other. Rhetoric like "Honours" is made for small men, and Mr. Cohen was not a small man. In bidding him goodbye with the cheerful Pagan "Hail—and Farewell," we salute a great career, a career prolific in great thoughts which, committed irrevocably to the printed page, will continue to guide us in our unceasing search for Truth, in our unceasing quest for the Ideal.

Golders Green Crematorium, Thursday, February 11th, 1954

Address given by P. Victor Morris at the Cremation of Chapman Cohen

WE are assembled here to pay a tribute of esteem and affection to a great, wise and good man, on the occasion of the cremation of his bodily remains.

The true greatness of Chapman Cohen, whom death claimed on Thursday, the 4th of February, at the age of eighty-five years, was his many-sidedness. It is evident in the long list of his books and the thousands of articles that his brain and his pen gave us without a break for over fifty years. It was evident for fully sixty years in his innumerable lectures and debates on the public platform. It is evident, too, in his having chosen to devote his talents as a master of the written and spoken word exclusively to what the greatest of mankind have recognised as "The Best of Causes"—the setting free of the human mind from the falsehoods, follies and fears of ignorance and superstition.

He once wrote that the epitaph he thought he would value most was this: "He took the best from others and gave his best to the world." Let it be the text, then, for the commentary on his life and work that it is my privilege to deliver to you to-day. My purpose is to express to you thoughts that are yours as well as my own, and that will be shared by the host of his admirers scattered throughout the world. You and they will agree with me that there is no type of man or woman more needed in modern life than the individual of brilliant gifts who brings them freely and wholeheartedly to causes vital to social progress. Chapman Cohen was such a benefactor of mankind.

The cause he decided to make his own, moreover, was one which the generality of reformers found, and still find, far from attractive. By ordinary standards there are heavy penalties for devoting oneself to the furtherance of Freethought and Secularism, and the rewards of such a career

may, to most people, seem to be conspicuous by their absence. Chapman Cohen thought otherwise, and neither the difficulties of the fight he chose to wage, nor the disappointments he at times encountered, ever made him change his opinion. He was rewarded by the titles of President of the National Secular Society and Editor of *The Freethinker*, positions that few would envy him. To him, however, they were higher than any that birth or royal decree could have bestowed. He carried them with rare distinction, preferring their modest emoluments to the financial gains his genius could have collected if offered to the highest bidder. He found happiness in doing the work he wanted to do, and doing it with superlative effectiveness.

During his childhood he avoided the indoctrination with outworn ideas and sectarian prejudices that hamper the education of most of the young. He was fortunate in being able to write in his one autobiographical work: "I cannot recall a time when I had any religion to give up." The only formal education he received was that provided by a Leicester elementary school between seventy and eighty years ago, but the judgment he gained later in the "School of Experience" and the knowledge he never ceased to gather from the "University of Books" made him more than a match for the clerics, professors and public men who ventured to cross swords with him on the debating platform or in written controversy. He read anything he came across, and learned something useful from everything he read. "By the time I was seventeen," he wrote, "I had at my service some of the greatest teachers that have ever lived, ranging from the early days of Greek philosophy down to contemporary writers." The particular direction of his taste is revealed by the statement

that Spinoza, Herbert Spencer and George Henry Lewes were his great teachers.

Thus equipped, he came to London and formed the habit of visiting Victoria Park, then a lively centre of propaganda by religious and other orators. He quickly proved a devastating critic of the Christian Evidence Society speakers, and his services as a lecturer and debater, outdoors and indoors, were solicited by the local branch of the National Secular Society. These activities were extended until he had visited every town in the British Isles where there was a branch of the Society, and the connection lasted unbroken for sixty years until his retirement from the presidency in 1949.

C.C., as we called him, began to write for the movement after eight years of strenuous platform work. In the columns of *The Freethinker* he loyally seconded G. W. Foote, never seeking prominence, but steadily building a reputation as a tireless, peerless worker, possessing the keenest intellect, wide knowledge and a rapier-like wit, all placed unreservedly at the disposal of Freethought and Secularism. Naturally he was the only conceivable successor to Foote as Editor and President when the latter died in 1915.

This is neither the time nor place for a detailed history of his thirty-five years as our leader. Suffice to say that admiration for his intellectual attainments and uncompromising honesty became worldwide as his output of books grew, and that in our own ranks he commanded the warmest regard of men and women of all sorts and conditions. I do not use the word "love" in this connection, because he himself frequently expressed his distaste for the facile use of terms with a deep emotional content.

Members of our organisation knew how unstintedly he spent himself to keep the good ship "Freethought" afloat above the tides of ignorance, prejudice, apathy and boycott that two world wars let loose. Spend himself he did, indeed: only relinquishing the helm when the years took toll of his powers and forced him to do so. It was then, and not now, that for the world at large Chapman Cohen died.

But not for a few close friends, his son and, above all, his life partner, to whom our thoughts go out at the present in sympathy and love—and this time I have no hesitation in my choice of word.

There is a short sentence in C.C.'s book, *Almost an Autobiography*, that reveals more than many a chapter of intimate detail could. "My home life has been so free from trouble or serious discordance that it would be quite uninteresting to outsiders." May I say that all who worked with and under Chapman Cohen till a few years ago now tender their deepest sympathy and affection to Mrs. Cohen, who remained at his side while loss of memory, speech and sight gradually robbed him of everything he valued apart from her comradeship and care? We appreciate as never before her services to our movement, remembering her presence and support at so many of the lectures, debates, conferences and other functions at which Chapman Cohen was the outstanding figure.

Realising that the gap left by the loss of her husband is one that can never be filled, we can only hope that the healing hand of time will be kind. Meanwhile let us not forget that human affection is the best balm for the wounds that death inflicts on the living. May it not be too long before present pangs are transformed into pleasant memories, to be recalled and treasured in days to come, growing more precious with the passing of her remaining years.

Before committing the bodily remains of Chapman Cohen to the process that will quickly resolve them into

the simpler natural form they must eventually assume, let us place on record the ideas and ideals he held to be supreme. Affirming the paramount value of freedom of thought and speech, he spent his life campaigning in order to make it a reality. His message was addressed to all mankind, and not to a section, class or clique. He was confident that the great mass of ordinary people would respond to the claims of a civilised social life, if those claims could be lifted out of the muddied waters of religious, political and international misunderstanding.

His pen was amongst the most formidable of those that have been dedicated to the service of our cause during the present century, and no less doughty did he prove on the platform, as a lecturer, and in debate whenever a worthy opponent could be found to meet him. He was always courteous and considerate to honest defenders of their opinions, and it was not unusual for them to take a good drubbing at his hands and then thank him for his fairness in the contest! In his writing and speaking, his supreme ability in clarifying questions usually regarded as deep and difficult earned him the lasting gratitude of his readers and hearers. Again and again have I heard them say, as I myself have said and now repeat: "He taught me how to think." What greater debt could we owe to any man?

It is in our power to repay that debt. The writings which have set free the minds of so many of his fellows survive him, and, if we remain true to the principles he steadfastly upheld, his words can influence an immeasurably greater number of truth-seeking men and women in the future than they have done during his lifetime; and the name of Chapman Cohen will be linked in the history of human liberation with those of Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Robert Ingersoll, Charles Bradlaugh and the whole glorious army of freedom-loving pioneers. He has earned rest after fulfilment, and has been rewarded with Nature's last boon to tired mankind.

As we take leave of the confined remains of Chapman Cohen, let us pledge ourselves to be worthy of the fight he waged and of the legacy he leaves in our keeping. There is no need to bid him farewell.

Honour attend you in your long, last sleep
That knows no strife, no sorrow, no desire.
Richly your gifts you showered, and they shall keep
Your memory green, to comfort and inspire.

A Reader's Tribute

Whilst we mourn his departure, we can appreciate and enjoy the memory of Mr. Cohen's great and life-long services to Freethought and Secularism. He was an eloquent and powerful speaker and gifted writer, and his talents were devoted to these causes with a courage, persistency and sincerity that compelled admiration. Fortunately we can still read his books. There will be differing opinions about his best work. Apart from the arresting articles and paragraphs which his readers enjoyed every week in *The Freethinker* for over fifty years, I think his most useful contributions were the series of twopenny "Pamphlets for the People," in which he presented the Freethought point of view in relation to important questions. One of them, "Did Jesus Christ Exist?" proves the latter's mythical character in the brief compass of 16 pages, while other authors have taken long books to expound the same. "Morality Without God," "What Is The Use Of Prayer?", and "Must We Have A Religion?" are others in this series which show Chapman Cohen's valuable expository powers in regard to ethical, sociological and theological subjects.

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

This Believing World

It must be near fifty years since London had a real slap-up revival, properly conducted under a heaven-sent revivalist armed with all the publicity dodges which make America so formidable in the commercial world. In a few weeks, the Rev. Billy Graham with a marvellous entourage of hymn singers, trombone players, soloists and organists will descend on London, and soon we shall all be on our knees either imploring Christ Jesus to save us or, if we are already saved, helping the ineffable Billy to save other sinners.

The Rev. Billy has the heartfelt blessings of Dr. F. Townley Lord who is the Editor of the *Baptist Times*, and who richly tells us that "the cure is in the Gospel." He, like Billy, wants the "awakening" of London, and the way to help is "by humbling ourselves before God in prayer"—with which we thoroughly agree. Revivals haven't an earthly unless one grovels before the Majesty of Christ babbling prayers.

We hope that Mr. Graham won't make the mistake of his distinguished predecessor, Dr. Torrey. It may be remembered that Torrey, instead of confining himself to saving souls, went out of his way to lie in a big way about Thomas Paine and Ingersoll, with the result that he was practically kicked out of the country with the help of such fervent Christians as the late W. T. Stead. But the real credit for the exposure of Torrey must go to G. W. Foote whose campaign against the Christian liar was the most vigorous he ever made. Let us hope, for his own sake, Billy Graham won't try to emulate Torrey.

Our contemporary "Psychic Realm" very seriously asks whether the "lack of first-class mediumship" is due to the weather? To read our spiritualist Press one would never imagine first-class mediums were scarce, but even if true, we think it most unfair to blame the weather. Surely spooks can be properly dressed to face even the most Arctic climes—for all they have to do is to wish for winter clothes and, hey presto, they come! However, we do commiserate *Psychic Realm* over one thing—that the general standard of mediums is lower than it was 50 years ago. People in these days of scientific training simply will not believe, and a good deal of the "genuine phenomena" which thrilled us 50 years ago can these days so easily be "exposed." It is all very, very, sad.

If the Pope has his way, the canonising of Pius X will be televised all over the world, and will do as much to give the Catholic Church a splendid fillip as did Bing Crosby with his film "Going My Way." Our own advertising experts are simply not in it with the old Church which never misses an opportunity to show that it, and it alone, is God's Precious Heritage. We often wonder whether the Protestant Churches have anybody behind them equal to the Pope for seizing every scrap of publicity to further their interests—even if they had, would they be given any encouragement?

And when will Freethought be given a chance either on the radio or on TV? By Freethought we do not mean the emasculated version which some so-called Rationalists feel the present generation is gasping for. Some of us remember how, 20 years ago, a talk was allowed on the radio on Charles Bradlaugh—it was the occasion of his centenary—and the speaker was afraid to say that the great Iconoclast was an Atheist! This suited the Churches admirably as will all "reverent" criticism.

What all the Churches hate like poison is satire and laughter. Do not, for Christ's sake, laugh at a priest changing a wafer into a God, or poke fun at Jesus clinging to a Devil in mid-air. Do not, please, laugh at any miracle. But above all, never insist that Jesus Christ is as mythical as Jupiter or Osiris. You will hurt the feeling of Christians as well as large numbers of Rationalists very dreadfully. If you must attack Christianity, do it as beautifully as you can, in the subtlest way, and you will have the blessings of God showered on you. And you will never, in any case, if it can be helped, be allowed the freedom of the air or appear on TV. Thus everybody will be happy, especially the Churches.

Continuing his task of teaching Religion and Philosophy to schools on the radio, Prof. Coulson gave, the other day, an excellent account of the "physical basis" of life, and more talk on the "laws" which govern the Universe. But he is haunted by a "lawgiver"—and he assured his hearers that the basis of life, though quite "physical," must have come from God, and therefore God exists. It was quite amusing to hear him fumbling away at the Design Argument in the hope of getting school-children to admit a God—any God, so far, but we are sure to find this God is really Jesus Christ, the Greatest of All Gods.

"Difficulties"

By PETER J. LEWIS

ONE of the questions that are asked of new patients being admitted into hospital is the one relating to the patient's religious denomination. When this question was asked of me, my reply was "None."

About an hour after my admission a nurse came to me and asked what religious beliefs I had held prior to becoming an Atheist. I told her I considered the question irrelevant, but if it was intended as a purely academic question, then the answer was "R.C.," adding that this must not be entered on my hospital record.

A few days later a Catholic priest visited me. I informed him that I was not a Catholic and was surprised he thought I was. He answered that as far as the hospital records were to be relied on, I was a Catholic. After I had reaffirmed by infidel beliefs, he left me.

That afternoon I made a protest to the ward sister, to which she answered that I must have some religious denomination for the hospital records. I insisted on my rights, and after some discussion she assented. In all fairness to this sister, I must add that she was a most efficient woman who never spared herself on her patients' behalf.

However, my protest seemed to have been successful, for I wasn't bothered for some three months. Then I was visited by the local representative of the Church of England. He explained that he was the new C. of E. chaplain, and as the hospital did not possess the services of an almoner he would take on some of those duties whenever he could. Before he left me he mentioned that I was still registered as "R.C."

Once more I sought out the sister and told her that unless she undertook to have the hospital records altered I would have no other course open to me but to bring the matter to the notice of the medical superintendent and to the National Secular Society.

After this, there were no more attempts to make me a "paper Christian." It was unfortunate that these two incidents marred an otherwise pleasant and health-restoring period of hospital treatment, especially as they would have been impossible if a Christian sister had confined herself to the truth when making out the admission forms.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

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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.

Mrs. Chapman Cohen has asked us to convey her deep appreciation of messages of sympathy to all who have sent them, and of the respect shown to the memory of her late husband by all who attended the cremation service at Golders Green on 11th February.

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 21, 6-45 p.m.: Councillor J. BACKHOUSE, A Lecture.
Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 23, 7 p.m.: D. G. MACRAE, M.A., "The Ethics of Reviewing."
Glasgow Rationalist Press Association (Central Halls, 25, Bath Street).—Sunday, February 21, 3 p.m.: Brains Trust. Question Master, GEORGE SCOTT, J.P.
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 21, 6-30 p.m.: Prof. E. A. THOMPSON, "China Today."
Manchester Humanist Fellowship (Cross Street Chapel).—Saturday, February 20, 3 p.m.: L. E. CROSLAND, "Legitimacy."
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, February 21, 2-30 p.m.: L. ELLIS v. T. TURNER (S.P.G.B.), "Is the Soviet Union Imperialistic, Capitalistic or Socialistic?"
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Sunday, February 21, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Historical Novel."
West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, 2 minutes Wanstead Station).—Thursday 25, 8 p.m.: Open Meeting.
West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road).—Sunday, February 21, 7-15 p.m.: G. H. TAYLOR, "The Mind of the Ape."

NOTES AND NEWS

The cremation of Mr. Chapman Cohen took place at Golders Green Crematorium on Thursday, February 11, at 2.30 p.m. The principal mourners were Mrs. C. Cohen (wife), Dr. Raymond Cohen (son) and Mr. J. Cohen (brother). A moving address, reprinted elsewhere in this issue, was delivered by Mr. P. Victor Morris, secretary, N.S.S. Besides relatives and friends, a large number of people active in the Humanist, Rationalist and Secular movements had assembled to pay tribute to Mr. Cohen. Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner represented the R.P.A., Mr. H. J. Blackham the Ethical Union, and Mr. E. J. Fairhall the South Place Ethical Society. Many branches of the N.S.S. were represented, both from London and the country. Mr. R. Johnson represented the Glasgow Secular Society (N.S.S.), Mr. Tom Mosley was there on behalf of Nottingham, representing both the local N.S.S. Branch and the "Cosmopolitan Debating Society," and Mr. A. Woodhead

on behalf of the Halifax Branch, and Mr. A. Tiley represented Yorkshire. Mr. Len Ebury, vice-president of the N.S.S., represented North, Mr. Harry Cleaver, West, and Mr. H. Gibbins, South London. Mr. F. A. Ridley (president, N.S.S.) and Mr. W. Griffiths (treasurer) were present, as also were Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, Mr. Bayard Simmons, Mr. Peter Cotes, Mrs. R. Seibert, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. and Miss Warner, and Mrs. Venton, who represented the West Ham Branch, and Mr. P. Turner. Alert as ever, despite his great age, Mr. J. McCabe attended, now almost the last survivor of an ever-memorable generation in the annals of Freethought. Mr. J. Roberts and Mr. A. J. Driver represented Jacques & Co., solicitors to the N.S.S.

The most brilliant English Freethinker of his generation went to his last resting place mourned and revered by all who knew him.

We are requested by Mr. Harry Cleaver, secretary of the West London Branch, to announce the following changes in the printed programme of the West London Branch. Next Sunday, February 21, Mr. G. H. Taylor will speak on *The Mind of the Ape*, instead of on March 7, as advertised. Mr. Alec Craig, who was originally booked to speak next Sunday, will, instead, speak on *The Kinsey Report* on March 7. Mr. F. A. Ridley will speak on March 21 on *Problems of International Freethought*, instead of the 28th, as advertised. On March 28, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook will conclude the indoor winter session with a lecture on *My Freethought Scrapbook*.

Recently we alluded to the work of the late M. N. Roy in propagating a Rationalist philosophy in priest-ridden India. The dire necessity for such a sane outlook was grimly revealed recently when several hundred Indian pilgrims trampled each other to death in a mad rush to bathe in the sacred waters of the Ganges. This, in the atomic age! To add insult to injury, the President and Prime Minister (Mr. Nehru) of the allegedly "secular" State of India were present for, presumably, the same holy purpose when this terrible accident occurred! A dose of hard-boiled materialism is surely what the Indian sub-continent requires above all else?

Theatre

The High Toby is a puppet play that was written specially for marionettes by J. B. Priestley. The play is described as a highway comedy, and we hear the recorded voices of a cast of competent actors to which the puppets do lip movements which are as near realistic as matters.

These are the Murray Marionettes which are outside puppets with large heads artistically modelled and performing on a wide stage. The potentialities of this form of theatre should reach far and need exploiting further still, though one may expect that the actors would as well produce their faces as their voices.

Housemaster, by Ian Hay, has been revived at the St. Martin's Theatre. It is a light play intended for the younger generation and contrasts greatly with "Crime and Punishment."

Jack Hulbert gives the right touches of grave and gay to the name part, and Winifred Shotter, Yvette Wyatt and Joan Winmill perform well, but one of the best performances comes from Maurice Durant as the Rev. headmaster who is made a bishop, irrespective of the fact that for all his qualifications he lacks the essentials of human understanding. This is significant of the type of man to be found in ecclesiastical orders, even to-day.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

Tributes

So he is gone. How can we who, in varying capacities and each according to our abilities, have served the movement he did so much to foster and enrich, assess the loss? We can never forget the gain. What he gave to the movement is so great, we cannot estimate its effects, either upon us older generation of Freethinkers or those yet to come. He, himself, would have said that he gave nothing, because all his life he had been able to do exactly what he wanted to do.

The youngsters will never know his platform gifts: at his best he was superb; no hammer-blows, but rapier thrusts. He pricked the bubbles of religious cant and solemnity with the needle of irony; they just burst.

He was an orator for the common people, but he was more than that; he was a speaker's speaker. We listened to him with admiration and respect.

As a writer, as one who made profound things simple, as an educator, on whatever subject, ethics, philosophy, history or science, he was unsurpassed. Was he ever equalled?

What do I owe to him? What do we all owe to him? I can only say this: he has gained for himself the immortality which we as Freethinkers recognise. He will be remembered in gratitude and in pride, and his written works, *Pamphlets for the People*, or his books on Materialism, Determinism and Philosophy, will continue to enlighten and emancipate future generations until mankind is free.

As a humble soldier in the great army of intellectual liberation, I can only touch the hilt of my sword and pay to his memory the tribute of my admiration and respect.

No, he is not gone: I look up as I write; his books are on my shelves.

LEN EBURY.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Rationalist Press Association, I write to express our deep regret at the death of Mr. Chapman Cohen, who was for so long such a tower of strength to the Freethought Movement. We shall be grateful if you will convey our sympathy to his surviving relatives.

CONSTANCE KERR, General Secretary.

I was sorry to read of Mr. Chapman Cohen's death in *The Times* this morning, and now I have your note conveying the news. On behalf of The Ethical Union and for myself I want to express our deep regret.

H. J. BLACKHAM.

We are so sorry to learn of Mr. Cohen's death. My wife and I will endeavour to attend at Golders Green as a mark of respect and admiration for one who did so much for the Freethought Movement.

E. J. FAIRHALL, Hon. Treasurer,
South Place Ethical Society.

Few men have done or will ever do as much for a movement as Chapman Cohen did for the N.S.S. Indeed, without what he did I do not think that the movement would have survived the difficult times it has. I had an affection for him rather than a regard. He did a lot to clear my mind and make me one who could and dared think. Please associate me with any messages of sympathy for Mrs. and Dr. Cohen, and appreciation of his life and work.

JOHN T. BRIGHTON,
Vice-President, N.S.S.

I feel sure that I speak for the members of the Glasgow Secular Society and all friends of Freethought here in saying that Chapman Cohen's passing is deeply mourned. Speak-

ing personally, it is 36 years ago since I first heard him lecture. My father took me as a schoolboy to hear him, and, while I did not understand all that I heard, it certainly created the stimulus that later led to my attendance at his lectures and debates, and my study of his writings. To Freethought and Secularism his loss is indeed a heavy one. May his work at his ablest be an inspiration to us all. Our deepest sympathy is extended to Mrs. Cohen and her son.

J. BARROWMAN, Hon. Secretary.

I wish I could be with you on Thursday, the 11th, to join in the tribute to our great fighter against superstition. Please forward to Mrs. Cohen the enclosed letter of sympathy on behalf of the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. and myself.

CHARLES H. SMITH,
Branch Hon. Secretary.

I am very, very sorry to hear of the death of Mr. Chapman Cohen, and so, I am sure, will be those members who do not already know, when I break the news to them. Mr. Cohen has played a great part in the Freethought Movement, and his work will ensure his achieving a far greater measure of immortality than most of those who opposed him can ever hope for.

MICHAEL J. BARNES, Hon. Secretary,
Manchester Branch N.S.S.

Dear old C.C.! There never was a combination of speaker and writer like him. Nottingham Branch N.S.S. salutes his memory.

T. M. MOSLEY.

We at Halifax feel that the National Secular Society has lost a great man and a great leader. We must do all we can to keep his memory alive by carrying on the fight for freedom of speech, inspired by his example.

H. GARSIDE, Hon. Secretary.

Merseyside Freethinkers, especially the older ones who have enjoyed the leadership and friendship of a grand Freethought Philosopher, are deeply moved by the passing of Chapman Cohen. Our first thoughts are in condolence and sympathy with Mrs. Cohen, whose great devotion and encouragement during a long married life supported her husband's unbounded enthusiasm for the Freethought Cause.

W. PARRY, Hon. Secretary.

Although inevitable, the news was received with deep sorrow. Please ask Mr. Tiley if he will represent Bradford Branch N.S.S. at Thursday's ceremony. Our thoughts will be with those who gather to do honour to C.C.

W. BALDIE, Hon. Secretary.

I am deeply sorry to hear of the death of Mr. Chapman Cohen. His influence upon my attitudes to life and living has been more profound than I care to review at this time. I shall be with you in thought at the Secular Service on Thursday, remembering with gratitude Chapman Cohen's long life and his incomparable freethinking.

J. G. BURDON.

I met Chapman Cohen several times between the wars, and my abiding impression is that of a man uniformly, uncondescendingly kind and helpful to Freethinkers of a younger generation. And he was a giant in debate, needing not the book-lined study as a background, but having his matter at his finger-ends in any place; surprising his

opponents by a presentation of *their* case even more comprehensive than their own—and then demolishing it.

His wit and his wisdom could bind and be-spell,

As he crumpled the creeds men create;

And, if there be aught in the story they'd sell,

He is carrying on the debate.

—ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

I cannot let this sad occasion pass without saying how much I owe to him. For me, Chapman Cohen represented the essence of Freethought. He was not only a man presiding over a movement, he infused that movement with an attitude of mind: an attitude of clear and critical thinking on all matters. He was, in fact, an intellectual climate, and I was fortunate enough to be reared in its influence. He conditioned my method of thinking, and I am grateful for it. Then, when I first started writing for *The Freethinker* he helped me in many ways, and taught me to be critical of my own efforts: a valuable lesson indeed. My Mother joins me in my expression of loss and sorrow.

—COLIN MCCALL.

Speech Delivered in Leicester

I am advised by the secretary of the National Secular Society that Mr. Chapman Cohen died on the morning of Thursday, the 4th of February.

Chapman Cohen was born in Leicester in the year 1868 and as a youth went with his parents to live in London, where, at the age of 21, he made his first contact with the National Secular Society.

During the summer of 1889 he had, by chance, stopped to listen to a Christian Evidence Society speaker in the Victoria Park, London. The speaker had asked for opposition and an elderly gentleman with an impediment in his speech offered some. The speaker, in reply, had mimicked the elderly gentleman's impediment and asked for further opposition. The young Cohen accepted the invitation and gave the speaker a dressing down for his behaviour, and also the audience for finding amusement in it. The audience must have liked it, for they applauded the youthful Cohen vigorously.

Two or three weeks later Mr. Cohen received an invitation to give a lecture or two from the Secular Society's platform. He consented, and thus began his long and fruitful association with the National Secular Society.

From 1915 until 1952 he was the National President and the Editor of *The Freethinker*.

His courage was of the same order as that of Bradlaugh and Foote. Like them, he had to face the threats of "Authority" and the violence of the mob and, like them, never once refused the challenge or permitted himself to be intimidated.

Chapman Cohen had a first-class philosophical mind and, in writing and speaking, communicated his ideas with that easy flow of clarity and wit which marks the genius and is the envy and despair of lesser would-be writers and speakers.

Looking back on his life from the age of 71, he wrote: "So as my oldest and most abiding interest is the play of the intellect on life, I prefer to believe that they who are interested in me are also interested in my ideas and in my outlook on life. And when I say my ideas I mean that while they may only be mine by adoption, they are mine in the same important sense that the bread I eat becomes mine in virtue of digestion and assimilation."

"The compliment I have most valued was that paid me by a Labour leader who, at a public meeting, had the courage to thank one of the best-known Atheists in Britain for the help he had given others to look at life."

"If ever any friend is interested enough to write an epitaph over my grave, the one I think I would value

most is: 'He took the best from others and gave his best to the world.'"

And "his best" was well worth the having. It was superlative, and we who have received it acknowledge our indebtedness to this great and courageous Freethinker.

Friends, I invite you to stand with me in a moment of silence, as a token of that esteem and affection which he himself has inspired.

G. A. KIRK.

Chapman Cohen

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

THE death of Chapman Cohen marks a milestone in the story of British Freethought. A man of such noteworthy talent as was his, who devoted over half a century to a concentrated attack on the cyclopean fortress of obscurantism, will have had, difficult though it may be to assess numerically, a considerable influence on the intellectual evolution of the country in which he laboured. The immense change in outlook which has occurred in Britain during his long life has been due to the operation of many forces, among the instruments of which Chapman Cohen must be regarded as prominent. He was perhaps more a Parthian archer than a conquering Alexander, but his slings and arrows certainly outraged the partisans of darkness.

My first clear recollections of him go back about five decades; one of a meeting presided over by G. W. Foote at which Cohen was present and, I think, spoke; the other of an open-air gathering in Brockwell Park, in which the speakers, including my mother and Cohen, spoke from a cart (from which the horse had been detached beforehand). For over twenty years I have had the privilege of working with him as occasion required. I learned to admire the sense of form which displayed itself whether in his writing or in his extempore speaking (in fact I rather felt that Cohen's writing was as extempore as his speaking; his thought was naturally very clear, and his command of vocabulary wide and varied), and also the swiftness of his cerebral reactions.

Apart from the London International Freethought Congress of 1938, of which Chapman Cohen was chairman of the organising committee, the only international conference we both attended was that in Berlin in 1931. I need not recall that the 1938 congress was given unexpected publicity by certain Members of Parliament who attacked it on fantastically erroneous grounds, as well as by the then Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and by lesser angels of night. In dealing with these Cohen was in his element. He was, however, a sick man at the time and was not present at what was evidently intended by our enemies as their crowning glory, the rape of the Bradlaugh bust from the Brookwood monument by British Nazis (presumably, but the special branch of the police would never reveal what they discovered). If he did not attend international meetings often, he gave the World Union his unfailing support, as all the National Secular Society's presidents have done, since the first of them was instrumental in the foundation of the international in 1880. Cohen's support was all the more appreciated in that he held the reins in war-and-between-war period, a very difficult time from which world freethought is recovering very slowly.

I deeply regretted the failure of his health and the forced retirement of one who had been one of the most formidable warriors on our side of any time.

It is now my melancholy privilege as President of the World Union of Freethinkers to pay a last homage on behalf of the Freethinkers of all countries to a great veteran whose work will live long, and to offer our sympathy to his widow and son and to his many friends and admirers.

Privacy Returns as a Philosophy

By PETER CRAIG-RAYMOND

THE privacy of thinking and "approach to God," advocated by such in-time removed thinkers as Jesus and Thoreau, has been resuscitated by Alabama University professor Marten ten Hoor.

Appealing for individual education towards privacy, ten Hoor says, "Never have so many people been occupied with the improvement of so few. The attention of the reformer is drawn away from contemplation of his own soul. . . . How then can he be sure he is the right person to prescribe for his neighbours?"

To learn how to think personally is an idea at loggerheads with the widespread conception of thought usage to-day. A philosophy or teaching to-day is judged on its subscription list too often, on its act-and-deed content too seldom.

If we accept the "uneasy conscience" as a basic underlying and starting point for almost all ethical teaching, it becomes more obvious why the mass religion system cannot work towards any real ideal. Uneasy conscience is not a marketplace commodity. To-day, sadly, its salvation is. And that is why the salvationists are many, and the saveable are few.

A personal, moral affliction must have an equally personal and private solution formed—and a private ambition towards the ideal. The Alabama professor brings this down to the words: "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world—and lose his own soul?" It might equally be used with the text of not using the marketplace to pray, but going into one's own private room and closing the door.

What can privacy of thinking give that public religion cannot? Items: Reason is brought into use instead of faithful parroting of another's (no matter how sound) reasoning. Personal rethinking of ideal or goal is possible rather than a needed orientation to the community ideal foisted upon it by a leader. The "uneasy conscience" can be X-rayed with clearer strokes than ever the form of words can achieve in a church. The analogy might be (if we accept church as a basic) that church religion, like school education, is for the beginnings—one progresses to a private circuit of study and experienced knowledge; one progresses to a private thinking and reasoning and levelling of needs.

If the Church's place as a teacher of basics were to be accepted, and it was thought (say) that Jesus intended his disciples to merely start the thinking, as it were . . . then the strange opposition of Church and Christ's teaching would be more readily explicable. The Church tried to carve a career out of a single term instruction. It outstayed its need.

As the mass mind of religion grows, the possibility of private thought diminishes. Is a crusade towards just privacy the answer?

Not holding a brief for any belief or sect or practice—merely restating the basic need of self-awareness as the guiding hand in living well. If any label is attached—Christian, pacifist, or any other—the simplicity is lost. A campaign for getting to the innards of one's own reason can not, legitimately, be disputed by any interest.

And self-thinking is the only basis of free living.

By Chapman Cohen

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE. The celebrated series of eighteen pamphlets bound in one volume. A complete introduction to Freethought, with clear exposures of the commonest religious errors and fallacies. 5s. (postage 3d.).

Astronomy and God

ON Christmas Eve last, Prof. A. C. B. Lovell (Prof. of Radio Astronomy at University of Manchester) gave a short talk entitled, "Man in the Universe" on the B.B.C.'s Home Service. The talk would have been notable given at any time; its broadcast on the evening which serves to commemorate the birth of Christ was a phenomenal example of the B.B.C.'s rarely-used ability to rise to catholicity.

Prof. Lovell began by asking how Christianity and the hydrogen bomb could be reconciled, identifying this apposition in a rather strange manner with the conflict between Religion and Science. A reference to the good things of Science retrieved the situation, however, and the speaker remarked upon the failure of Religion to absorb the discoveries of Science, a failure which had been responsible for the antagonism of the past hundred years or so.

The Professor then described the egocentric world-view of man and its gradual displacement by the growing knowledge of the Universe, arriving finally at the profound and majestic conception furnished by modern Astronomy. Ascending in this way, he extolled the "cosmic religion" of Albert Einstein, which transcends the narrow outlook of the everyday world and requires no dogma or anthropomorphic god. Thus the talk, instead of fulfilling its implied purpose of reconciling Religion and Science, tacitly branded Christianity as primitive and narrow.

The reverence for objective thought and inquiry which is the essence of the rationalist make-up is an integral part of cosmic religion, and the feeling of oneness and harmony which knowledge of cosmic principles engenders gives rise in its turn to a philosophy of Ethical Rationalism.

D. G. HOLLIDAY.

Obituary

May I report the death, on January 22, and the secular funeral, on January 27, of William ("Bill") Hayhurst, of Bradford, for many years a member of the N.S.S. Many readers knew him well, and justice necessitates that he should go "on the record" as one of the most enthusiastic and uncompromising workers for Atheism. All who knew him will say "farewell" to a valiant warrior in the best of causes, and I, in particular, bid good-bye to a stout-hearted friend, whose grim yet cheerful courage in fighting for his cause while battling against his own failing body is a story which deserves some day to be told more fully.

F. J. CORINA.

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on Saturday, 27th February, 1954

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