

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IN his famous despatch after one of his victories, Julius Cæsar sent off that model war-bulletin: "Veni, Vidi, Vici"—"I came, I saw, I conquered." In the interests of historical accuracy we dare not compare our recent Transatlantic invader, Mr. Billy Graham, with Julius Cæsar. Truth has its rights! In any case, even Mr. Graham's journalistic admirers do not claim him as one of the world's outstanding orators. Nonetheless, in an interview accorded by our much-publicised visitor to the B.B.C., we detected the note of underlying arrogance. Probably, Mr. Graham does not know Julius Cæsar's famous epigram. His recorded utterances do not impress as those of a man of wide culture. However, one could detect a note of smug satisfaction in the suave utterances of this professional soul-saver. One felt that the underlying note was that of self-satisfaction: England was going to perdition—sure she was! But I saved her! This note was, we thought, accentuated by the glib announcement which followed: Britain is, to-day, on the eve of her greatest "spiritual revival" in her history. Shades of Wesley, Spurgeon, etc., not to mention Mr. Graham's own American predecessors who visited our shores on the same holy errand—Moody, Torrey, *et al!*

What does Dr. Fisher Think?

It would be interesting to know what the Bishops of the Church of England think about the far-travelled Billy? What does His Grace of Canterbury think, Geoffrey Fisher, "By divine permission, Primate of all England"? All England? Not Harringay Arena, when Billy Graham is out on the soul-saving business! It seems to us that if there is any truth in Graham's assertions that a million and a-quarter people came to hear him, and tens of thousands were brought to the "Mercy Seat" by his preaching, that this constitutes a gross slander on the Church "of England," which has been in the soul-saving business for four centuries. Why should it need an *American* to save the souls of the *British* people? Is not the organised Christianity of this country capable of doing the job without outside assistance? For example, take the "Established" Church alone. It is enormously wealthy, with bishops, deans, canons, and beneficed clergy with four-figure incomes. What are they all doing for their wages when they have to rely on an American immigrant to do their work for them? It is relevant to add that as far, at least, as the Church of England is concerned, all these ample funds come ultimately from *State* endowments. Is there not here a *prima facie* case for a parliamentary investigation? We pay Dr. Fisher and his colleagues to save us; in calling in outside assistance they are, surely, falling down on their job and taking *money, our* money, under false pretences? Or does Mr. Graham's mission indicate that we are now an "occupied territory," dependent on the U.S.A., not only in this world but also in that which is to come? This is, indeed, a grave situation to be in!

Jesus, Paul, and Billy Graham

Personally, we are sceptical in all things; and we shall actually believe in "the greatest spiritual revival in history" when we see it—and not before! However, it is indisputable that Mr. Graham's technical apparatus for "putting over" the Gospel—American-style!—marks a notable advance on the more primitive methods of evangelism as currently practised in the New Testament. Jesus and Paul, at least if we are to believe their biographers, got along without the aid of motor-cars, radio, and all the other techniques of high-power salesmanship of which Graham and Co. have made the fullest use, and yet there are lessons,

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Two Religious Demagogues

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

in comparative religion at least, to be learnt from this "nine days wonder" whirlwind campaign. Religions depend for their efficacy on the prevailing *social* climate. In the first century of our era that climate was favourable to religion, so much so that the New Testament preachers were actually able to found a religion which lasted nineteen hundred years, and is still a force to be reckoned with, even without the technique of high pressure salesmanship. To-day, the social climate has changed to such an extent that we shall be singularly surprised if Mr. Graham's name is still remembered in 19 years, let alone nineteen hundred! "He came, he saw," but he failed to conquer. In our submission all that he did was to furnish a sensational interlude in the current decline of religion. There is no reason to suppose that his version of Harringay's circuses did anything permanently to arrest that decline. As a religious demagogue, Graham does not actually appear to be in the same class as Wesley and Spurgeon, and in our opinion does not equal the present writer's former opponent in debate, Dr. Donald Soper.

A Future American Pope?

The sensational publicity methods of the Reverend Billy got all the limelight. But during the last few weeks a far more sinister and dangerous religious demagogue has visited these shores: no less a person than Dr. Fulton J. Sheen, the crack broadcaster and "brains-truster" of the Catholic Church in America. Dr. Sheen is a *very* big gun, indeed, in the Catholic Church. In the U.S.A. he addresses enormous audiences on the radio and the TV, and his list of distinguished converts includes Mrs. Claire Luce, the present American Ambassador in Italy—a key position in the eyes of political Catholicism—and Mr. Louis Budenz, the former Editor of the Communist (*American*) *Daily Worker*. Bishop Sheen is one of the key men of the Roman Catholic Church. He is already "tipped" as a certainty for the College of Cardinals, and it has even been anticipated that in, say, ten or fifteen years' time, Sheen may be in the Vatican as the first American Pope—perhaps we ought to say, "the second," since Sheen's present chief, Cardinal Spellman, of New York, is said to entertain Papal ambitions? Fulton Sheen is a far more powerful demagogue than Billy Graham: if Graham addresses thousands by word of mouth at Harringay, Fulton Sheen talks to, literally, millions on the New York radio.

What is he Doing Here?

We know why Billy Graham is here: to start "the greatest spiritual revival in history"; an aim so preposterous that we can afford to smile. But what is Bishop Sheen here for? Ostensibly, we learn, for a holiday: but why here? One could suggest a more sinister but not, we imagine, a less probable reason: the world is in imminent danger of war, and rifts are appearing in the anti-Communist Front amongst the not-so-United Nations. The prime "Enemy No. 1" of Communism is the Vatican, and Fulton Sheen is one of its recognised experts on Communism. Verb. sap! We have far more cause to fear the Vatican's secret diplomacy aiming at an eventual "Crusade" to make the Church a world-power than we need have of Billy Graham's circus acrobatics and ephemeral "spiritual revivals." Again, verb. sap!

The Future of Secularism

By G. H. TAYLOR

(Concluded from page 187)

WE do not need to be reminded that we cannot survive by the mere contemplation of past successes. But a movement which takes no pride in the achievements of its ancestry will probably not accomplish much to be remembered by its posterity. We secularists are rather proud of Bradlaugh and Foote. But when we look backward it is only to gain inspiration and momentum for what lies ahead.

The period I have sketched is 1840-1954. But these dates show neither the beginning nor the end of the journey. The beginning was wherever man began to think independently. 1851 was when the freethought approach in Britain became channelled into secularism. The freethinker criticises ideas: the secularist is a freethinker who carries this logically on to the criticism of institutions. 1866 was when the British secular movement became nationally organised, and 1881 was the year it gained a permanent mouthpiece. We are not parochial; we make no claim that either the N.S.S. or *The Freethinker* is the sum total of British secularism. We think the facts indicate that they are an important part. There are other bodies, other groups and individuals, whose work we salute and value. Many freethinkers remain outside the N.S.S., doing good work in their own way and preferring not to be "organised."

There is a great deal that such individuals can do. There is also a great deal that can be done by team work. Branches of the N.S.S. have existed with a minimum membership (six), some in remote districts. They have been without either a regular speaker or a lecture hall. They have done what is possible. They have watched their opportunities in the local Press till they have started a controversy and kept it going. They have teamed up to question election candidates. They have combated religious influence in their unions and so on. And they have reported their activities to headquarters and gained moral ammunition in knowing they are part of a larger body, the National Secular Society.

As I write these lines the outdoor propaganda season is beginning. Some of our speakers have been at it many years in all sorts of adverse conditions and circumstances, fighting religious bigotry and (what is even more formidable) fighting apathy and ignorance. Next year they will be doing it again. And they will go on doing it, not because they hope to convert the world to-morrow, or because they expect to achieve personal renown outside the movement. They are satisfied to do it in comparative obscurity, leaving popular fame to nonentities, leaving the

headlines to the Billy Grahams, the religious morons of the B.B.C. and all manner of theatrical Christian buffoons. They have the greater reward in knowing it is the freethinker who is at the core of civilised progress. Not for them the vulgar outworks of popular fame, but the true line of social betterment.

People every week are writing to their local press, or propagating freethought in their unions and among acquaintances; with the written and spoken word the movement prospers. Nor do we imagine the N.S.S. is the alpha and omega of British secularism.

It is not by one voice or one movement that theology is condemned, but by the whole trend of civilised life guided by educated reason, and it is of this trend that our secular movement is an integral part. We believe that the continuance of this trend, aided by the development of science in its many directions, will create an intellectual milieu in which the Christian churches, carrying their medieval lumber, cannot hope to survive.

Converting a Corpse

DURING his lifetime Darwin was the *bête noir* of the clergy. They hated him with a perfect and very natural hatred, for his scientific doctrines were revolutionary, and if he was right they and their Bible were certainly wrong. The Black Army denounced his impious teachings from thousands of pulpits. With some of them he was the Great Beast, with others Antichrist himself. And they were all the madder because he never took the slightest notice of them, but treated them with the silent contempt which a master of the hounds bestows on the village curs who bark at his horse's heels. Yet, strange to say, when Darwin died, instead of being buried in some quiet Kentish cemetery or churchyard, he was actually sepulchred in Westminster Abbey. Having fought the living Darwin tooth and nail, the clergy quietly appropriated the dead Darwin. The living, thinking and working man was a damnable heretic, hated of God and his priests, but his corpse was a very good Christian, and it was buried in a temple of the very faith he had undermined. Darwin, with all his gravity, is said to have loved a joke, and really this was so good a joke that he might almost have grinned at it in his coffin.

By and by, the great naturalist may figure as an ardent devotee of the creed he rejected. The clergy are hypocritical and base enough—as a body we mean—to claim Darwin himself now they have secured his corpse. Who knows that, in another twenty years, the verger or even the Dean of Westminster Abbey, in showing visitors through the place, may not say before a certain tomb, "Here is the last resting-place of that eminent Christian, Charles Darwin. There was a little misunderstanding between him and the clergy while he lived, but it has all passed away like a mist, and he is now accounted one of the chief pillars of the Church?"

What the clergy have done in the concrete with Darwin they have done in the abstract with his predecessors in the great struggle between light and darkness. What are all the lying stories about Infidel Death-Beds but conversions of corpses? Great heretics, whose scepticism was unshaken in their lifetime by all the parson-power of the age, were easily converted in their tombs. What the clergy said about them was true, or why didn't they get up and contradict? All the world over silence gives consent, and if the dead man did not enter a *caveat*, who could complain if the men of God declared that he finished up in their faith?—
G. W. FOOTE, *Flowers of Freethought*.

AGE OF REASON. By Thomas Paine. With 40 page introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s. 9d.

Penalties for Thinking

By E. H. GROUT

THE Church has always been ready to enter into an agreement with the State; but it has not always called such agreements "Concordats," nor has it always made open admission of such understandings.

By such an understanding, Henry Bolingbroke of Lancaster was assisted in his murderous rape of the throne: the nobles had been partly won by the promise to renew the French War; "the support of the Church had been purchased by the far more terrible promise of persecution." (Green: *Short History*, p. 265.)

It was in 1399 that Henry IV forced the deposition of Richard II, and the persecuting act, *De Heretico Comburendo*, was made law on March 10, 1400. But the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundell, was so itching to dig his claws into his prey that he could not wait until the Parliament had passed this disgraceful measure.

He summoned William Sautre(1), Rector of St. Osyth—a church on the north side of Pancras Lane, in Cordwainer Ward, London. The "most reverend Father in God" was supported by the Archbishop of York and an array of Bishops and other ecclesiastics. It soon appeared that Sautre had refused to adore the Cross except as a symbol. He persisted in this refusal in spite of the array of solemnities. He said: "I will not, and intend not to, worship the Cross whereon Christ was crucified, but only Christ that suffered on the Cross. I will not worship the material Cross, the gross corporal matter." The solemn array took a very poor view of this.

But this independent rector also said that it better behoved deacons and priests to preach the word of God as in the primitive Church, rather than say the canonical hours(2).

There was worse to come. Sautre asserted that after pronouncing the words of the Sacrament, the bread remained just bread! What could the "most reverend Father in God" (!) do after that? He had this Rector burnt at Smithfield. J. R. Green says that Sautre was the first victim of the Statute *De Heretico Comburendo*. That is not correct. Gardiner(3) and James F. Stephen(4) point out that Sautre was burnt before the new law had been enacted—so much in a hurry was Thomas Arundell to push on the bloody business. Sautre was consigned to the stake by a special order signed by the King, Henry IV—that King who had been brought up in the Reformed Religion by his father, John of Gaunt, the friend of Wycliffe!

His honour, rooted in dishonour, stood

And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Before this time (1400) there had been other burnings on account of religion. James F. Stephen cites Bracton that under the Archbishopric of Stephen Langton (1206-1228) a council was held at Oxford whereat a certain deacon was condemned and burnt for apostasy. Mary Bateson(5) states that the chronicle of Meaux (Yorkshire) records the burning of 55 men and eight women. No doubt, such burnings occurred in many areas where arrogant ecclesiastics were able to find complaisant or venal sheriffs—a third of the entire revenue of the country was in the hands of the Church!

The difference made by the Act of 1400, was that it put the whole process of arrest, trial and sentence into the ecclesiastical courts, leaving only to the civil officers the execution of the sentence. The Church dignitaries could not soil their hands with meting out the punishment! Oh, no. But they could soil those dainty hands with torture, and the Bishops had their cells and dungeons and "Chapels

of 'Little Ease'" where they could glut their sadistic lusts. They could quote papal authority for the use of torture, for in the elaborate directions issued in 1252 by Innocent IV for the guidance of the Inquisition in Tuscany and Lombardy, the magistrates were ordered to extort by torture not only confessions of the heretics' own guilt, but accusations of all who might be their accomplices(6).

The effect of the Inquisition was to advance heresy to the dignity of a crime worse than treason, "for it was held to be a far more serious offence to be false to Divine than to human majesty"(7). Sir Edward Coke clothed this pernicious doctrine in a specious figure: "As a leper is to be removed from the society of man, lest he should infect them; so he that has the soul's leprosy, convicted of heresy, shall be cut off, lest he should poison others, by the King's writ *De Heretico Comburendo*."

Yet among these terrible offenders I have not met one in this period who was sufficient of a thinker to be a Unitarian, let alone an Atheist. Look at the case of William Thorp, another parson. Camden(8) records that he was imprisoned by Archbishop Arundell at Saltwood Castle in Kent. He was charged with saying in a sermon preached the third Sunday after Easter, 1407, in St. Chad's Church, Shrewsbury:—

1. The consecrated bread was still bread.
2. Images should in no wise be worshipped.
3. People should not go on Pilgrimages.
4. Priests have no title to tithes.
5. It is not lawful to swear in any wise.

After being examined by the Archbishop, Thorp was remanded to prison. "It is not found that he was burned," says Camden. "It is most probable, that being committed to prison, he was either secretly made away, or died of sickness and hard usage." What "a merry England" it must have been!

A couple of years later (1409), and we reach the enlightening case(9) of John Badby, a tailor of Evesham. He was condemned as a heretic by the Bishop of Worcester, who kindly gave Badby a year for reconsideration. Badby got away to London, but was re-arrested in March 1410, and tried before Archbishop Arundell. His answers show a thinking mind—a most deadly offence that! He said, "If priests could make the bread to be the body of Christ, then there were 20,000 Gods in England every morning, and he believed in only one."

Also, "If he had heard Christ say, 'This is my body,' he would have said, 'Christ spoke amiss'." This was very daring for those days, and before the Archbishop and his satellites! The Archbishop gave him three days for reflection (probably with torture).

But when brought up again for interrogation, Badby asserted "that a spider and a toad were superior to the consecrated host, and more worthy of reverence, for they were alive." That was more than the Gospel of Love could stand. For this little bit of independent thinking, this worthy tailor of Evesham was burnt alive.

In this connection, the historian S. R. Gardiner(10) shows himself rather credulous regarding the Prince of Wales, later Henry V. He says that when Badby "was led to be burnt, the Prince in vain urged him to recant. As the flames blazed up, the poor wretch, stung by the torment, cried for mercy. The Prince bade the executioners drag away the blazing faggots, and offered Badby support for his lifetime if he would abandon his heresy. Badby

(Continued on page 198)

This Believing World

Both Socialists and Tories proved themselves allies on one thing at least—they shared similar horror at the thought that commercial T.V. may indulge in *advertising* on the Lord's Day. To desecrate the Holy Day like this was more than they could stand and, aided by Mr. William Ross, the Socialist M.P. for Kilmarnock, they all piously deplored the way the traditional British Sunday was being "pushed out of existence by Government legislation." The idea that there was not the slightest compulsion on these survivors of belief in a primitive Sabbath Day to look at commercial T.V. on a Sunday, never appears to have occurred to them.

Needless to add such things as advertising cigarettes or patent medicines or lotteries was, in these legislators' opinion, about as bad a thing as possible—but it was a million times worse to call the attention of viewers to them on a *Sunday*—it was simply horrible to think that the British public cannot be guarded against such contamination. It does seem a pity that people are not compelled these days to go to church on the Lord's Day as they did in the "good old days." Sunday should be a day for study, meditation and prayer, a day of downright misery; laughter should be sternly forbidden, and anybody reading advertisements in a Sunday newspaper, or looking at them on T.V., should be compelled to recite the Lord's Prayer in a pillory 1,000 times. Only by such methods will we get back our own noble Lord's Day, and thus have at least one completely miserable day in the week.

Though it may be flogging a dead horse we must put on record the view of one of the B.B.C. "critics" in "Any Questions" about the Billy Graham circus. They were all, of course, entirely for it, and were nearly thanking God Almighty then and there for its wonderful success; but M. A. Wedgewood Benn, M.P., felt it ought to be now followed up by something more "intellectual," for which he was loudly cheered. We agree that "intellectual" is the operative word.

Our dear old Scots ministers still imagine that they are living in the days of John Knox, so that we do not find it astonishing to read the Rev. J. Colquhoun's attack on dance halls and women's clothes at a meeting of Presbyterians recently in Scotland. And naturally this was followed up by another attack on divorce, not because married people sometimes find it impossible to live together, but because they "did not regard the word of the Lord as binding to them." What a dead celibate God—if ever he lived—thought about marriage, or why he should dominate people these days, the rev. gentleman did not trouble to explain. Why should he? Once people began to think about these things themselves, may well mean his losing his job. And that would never do.

The canonisation of Pope Pius X is as much a publicity stunt as the Revivalism of the Rev. B. Graham and the crowds who cheered and grovelled in Rome when he was finally called a Saint showed exactly the same "un"-intellectual level. But there is one event in the Pope's reign which should never be forgotten. The foul and brutal murder of Francisco Ferrer (1909) took place with his fullest sanction. Freethinkers should never allow this monstrous infamy to be forgotten.

The Roman Catholic Church in Spain were determined not to allow Ferrer's secular schools to be run, and framed a lying charge against him. This resulted in a death

sentence and, in spite of violent opposition from all parts of the world, it was carried out. The Pope could have stopped this scandalous execution but, as he wanted it to be carried out, he never raised a finger in protest. Ferrer was later, of course, found innocent—no doubt to the disgust of the Roman Church. And this man Pius is now—a Saint!

We wondered what had become of the inevitable "converted" Atheist, converted by the Rev. B. Graham back to Christ for evermore; and we owe it to *Picture Post* at last to discover him. He is a Mr. J. Howard Scott Thomas of Hertford, once an out-and-out confirmed Atheist and now an out-and-out believer in (we hope) spooks and spirits, myths and miracles, Hell and Heaven, Devils and demons, Gods and ghosts, and witches and wizards.

Converted Atheists have always been a feature of revivals, and it would have been a holy shame if this wonderful campaign for Christ Jesus had failed to bring in one Atheist grovelling on his knees. All the same we wonder whether Mr. Scott Thomas ever knew more about Atheism than the *word*?

Fidei Defensor in Australia

By B. CALCUTT

ACCORDING to my reading of history that ruthless lover, Henry VIII, was appointed by the Pope *fidei defensor* (defender of the Vatican religion in the English realm).

Hal's daughter, Elizabeth I, became *fidei defensor* by Act of Parliament, the *fidei* becoming the Protestant faith as interpreted by the Church of England.

In the course of time the Protestant faith split into a multitude of faiths, and now it is best described as a non-Catholic section of Christianity.

When Australia minted its own coins the Sovereign, amongst his other titles, was described as *fidei defensor*, usually in abbreviated form.

Then in 1953 an Australian florin appeared which bore this description of the Monarch: *Elizabeth II, Dei Gratia Regina*. That and nothing else. Gone was *fidei defensor*!

Some Protestants protested against the omission, and a Government spokesman stated that there was not room on the florin for the extra title. (Probably not one person in a thousand knows what *fidei defensor* means, but that is by the way. The explanation of the omission is very weak.)

Then the Australian Government announced that a florin would be struck to commemorate the Queen's visit to the Commonwealth in 1954.

The new florin duly appeared. In place of the emu and kangaroo which adorned the old coin there is a lion and a kangaroo (two hopeless incompatibles, the lion being a meat-eater); and the letter F.D. (abbreviation for *fidei defensor*) appear in the Queen's title.

Whether Her Majesty is *fidei defensor* in Australia is arguable, the Australian Constitution prohibiting the establishment of any religion.

Anyway, the two-bob crisis is passed.

Sydney, N.S.W.

The most remarkable achievement of the Jew was to impose on Europe for eighteen centuries his own superstitions—his ideas of the supernatural. Jahveh was no more than Zeus; yet the Jew got established the belief in the inspiration of his Bible and his law. If I were a Jew, I should have the same contempt as he has for the Christian who acted in this way towards me, who took my ideas and scorned me for clinging to them.—Huxley.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

"THE FREETHINKER" FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £14 15s. 8d.; A. Hancock, 6s.; W. McKee, 5s.; S. Trent, 6s. 11d.; S. Greenberg, 4s.; J. Benjamin (U.S.A.), 14s. 1d. Total: £16 11s. 8d.

OCTOGEN.—*The Freethinker* is the oldest freethought journal in Europe.

JOAN H. VERNON (Miss).—A re-reading of N.S.S. principles should convince you that your place is with us.

WM. F. MELLOR.—Indeterminism and indeterminacy are not the same. The former is an illegitimate inference from the latter, which was devised by Heisenberg to apply to human prediction.

J. O'D.—That's the spirit. In a twelve-page paper your letter would certainly have appeared.

T. GUNN.—We attack superstition in general and religious superstition in particular. Magic and religion are interwoven in their origins.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, Wanstead).—Thursday, June 24, 8 p.m. Open Meeting.

OUTDOOR

1. Clayton's Lectures—Friday, June 18, 7-30 p.m., Worsthorne. Sunday, June 20, 7 p.m., Burnley Market. Tuesday, June 22, 7-30 p.m., Hopton.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 3 and 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL. From June 13, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL and J. CLAYTON.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday at 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle St.).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER, E. MILLS and others.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields: a Lecture.

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

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S.—H. ARTHUR, W. J. O'NEILL, L. EBURY, C. E. WOOD. Hyde Park, every Sunday, 5 p.m.

Notes and News

As an experiment the N.S.S. annual demonstration after the Conference took place as an outdoor meeting at Manchester on June 6 (Sunday).

Mr. C. McCall, the newly-elected vice-president, acted as chairman and organiser, functioning in his new capacity for the first time, with the utmost efficiency and effectiveness. The speakers were the President (F. A. Ridley), H. Day (Bradford), Jack Clayton (Burnley), L. Ebury (London), M. Barnes (Manchester), W. J. O'Neill (London) and a young Irish member who came over from Eire and whose name we suppress for reasons of his safety—a sad commentary on the state of things in that country. He made an intelligent, dignified and courageous exposure of conditions where he came from. It is altogether tragic that such enlightened and mentally-emancipated young men should have to endure such a priest-ridden, medieval atmosphere in the twentieth century.

With rain threatening the whole evening the meeting was continued for three hours, and of five meetings on the site that of the N.S.S. more than doubled the size of the other four combined. And so the best-attended post-war Conference was followed by the best-attended demonstration. At one point a Christian organisation, unable to bear O'Neill's shreading of the Bible, opened up in direct, shrieking opposition, a challenge which eventually petered out miserably with O'Neill still going strong. A large number of copies of *The Freethinker* were sold.

N.S.S. ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Manchester 1954

MANCHESTER certainly belied its reputation when members, delegates and friends of the N.S.S., arrived on Saturday, June 5. It was a lovely day—in fact, some of us wondered whether we had got out at the wrong station. Unfortunately, the weather later completely changed, and the projected Outing for Whit Monday had to be abandoned.

The Manchester Branch, headed by Mr. Collins and Mr. McCall, and with the help of a number of ladies, made the reception at the New Millgate Hotel a happy, informal affair. Apart from the games and "a quiz" sponsored by Colin McCall, and heartily supported by those present, everybody had a chance of "talking" to everybody else, and it was late when the party broke up. Needless to add, the refreshments—on a lavish scale—added to the success of the evening.

The Conference began the next day punctually at 10-30 with a request from the President for all present to rise in silence for a minute in honour of the late Chapman Cohen, so many years the President of the N.S.S.; after which he welcomed members and delegates, and expressed the hope that this Conference would advance the cause of Rationalism.

The President then read out the Executive's Annual Report—a copy, when printed, will be sent out to all members—and the applause which followed proved that all present thoroughly appreciated the good work done during the past year.

Mr. Griffiths then presented the Financial Report, and after dealing in detail with some of the items, it was adopted.

The name of Mr. F. A. Ridley was the only one put forward for election again as President, and he was, after a number of eulogistic speeches by Mr. Ebury and others, elected. Mrs. Venton formally proposed his election, Mr. Burdon seconded. In a brief speech, Mr. Ridley thanked the members present for the honour they gave him by re-electing him.

Four names had been put forward as Vice-Presidents, but under our rules only two could fill the posts. There were the two retiring V.P.s, John T. Brighton and Len Ebury; and Tom Mosley and Colin McCall. Mr. Brighton's other duties made it difficult for him to continue and after some discussion—during which Mr. McCall offered to withdraw—the matter was put to vote and Mr. Ebury with Mr. McCall were elected. It was decided that the Executive Council would consider a proposal to honour the work Mr. Brighton had done for Secularism in the past.

The following other officers were elected: General Secretary, P. V. Morris; Honorary Treasurer, Mr. W. Griffiths; Auditors, Messrs. Wright, Fairbrother and Steele, Incorporated Accountants; and the following Executive Committee:—

- N.E. Group—Mr. A. Gibbins. Nominated by Newcastle and Chester-le-Street Branches.
- N.W. Group—Mr. G. H. Taylor. Nominated by Manchester, Blackpool, Chester, Merseyside and Blackburn Branches.
- Midland Group—Mr. F. A. Hornibrook. Nominated by Birmingham and Nottingham Branches.
- Yorkshire Group—Mr. J. Tiley. Nominated by Bradford Branch.
- South London Group—Mr. E. W. Shaw. Nominated by Kingston and S. London and Lewisham Branches.
- North London Group—Mr. L. Ebury. Nominated by North London Branch.
- East London Group—Mrs. E. Venton. Nominated by West Ham & District Branch.
- West London Group—Mr. R. J. Woodley. Nominated by West London Branch.

Scotland—Mr. R. Johnson. Nominated by Glasgow Branch.

Parent Branch—Messrs. P. V. Morris and W. Griffiths. Nominated by the Executive Committee.

Motion 10 by the Executive Committee advised that a capitation fee of one shilling should be paid for all members of Affiliated Bodies and, after Mr. Kirk wanted more information, Mr. Griffiths suggested that it should be left to the Executive, which was agreed. The motion on Self-Government by Colonial Territories in discussing which Messrs. Attfield, Cassel and Mrs. Joseph took part was carried, and the motion against the way religionists sedulously fostered the idea that Communism and Atheism were identical was moved by Mr. Ridley who pointed out that it was not meant to be an attack on the Communist Party. This skilful and ruthless attempt to identify Rationalism with Communism had to be opposed. Mr. Johnson seconded, while Mr. Ebury thought such a motion would perpetuate McCarthyism. Other speakers took part in the discussion, and the motion was carried.

Mr. Parry initiated a discussion on printing as a pamphlet the address "The Meaning and Value of Free Thought" recorded by the late Chapman Cohen on a gramophone disc—a small masterpiece of condensed propaganda—but Mr. McCall thought some phrasing was not too happy, and the matter should be carefully considered. Other speakers wanted more records available, but this was impossible. It was finally agreed that the printing as a pamphlet should be considered by the Executive.

On the question of homosexuality and the desirability of repealing the existing out-of-date laws, put by Mr. Ebury, the Conference was unanimous and the motion, after being seconded by Mr. Collins, was carried.

Mr. Attfield then put in a long plea for fighting every manifestation of McCarthyism, Mr. Johnson seconded, while Mr. Elsmere thought the matter was fully covered by our Principles and Objects. Mr. Ebury insisted it was necessary to reaffirm these now and then. The motion was carried.

The Secretary then spoke on "The National Secular Society looks to Science and the scientific approach as offering the most reliable guidance in the solution of human problems," and deplored any attempt to condemn Science and scientists. If we did this, religionists would certainly point to the N.S.S. as giving up science. Mr. Burdon pleaded for freedom of opinion, and declared that Secularism was greater than Science. Eventually an amendment was proposed and defeated and the original resolution was passed.

Mr. and Mrs. Ebury and Mr. Cleaver, dealing with the three years in which Mr. F. A. Ridley had edited *The Freethinker* and broadened its scope, desired the Conference to express its full confidence in him; and after a question by a member as to who was now Editor, Mr. Griffiths, Managing Director of G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., replied that it was now in the hands of an Honorary Editorial Committee of equal status consisting of Messrs. F. A. Hornbrook, Bayard Simmons and G. H. Taylor. Mr. G. H. Taylor proposed to add the names of Mr. H. Cutner and the G. W. Foote Board to that of Mr. Ridley and the motion was carried with this addition.

Mr. G. H. Taylor's plea for Branch Press Sub-Committees to advance the cause of Secularism was also carried unanimously as was the Executive's appreciation of the renewed activities of several branches.

Mr. Ebury then opened a discussion on blood sports anent the running of the Grand National which he opposed, and was warmly seconded by Mrs. Venton, but opposed by Mr. Kitchen who claimed that there was no cruelty involved. As we were not experts, Mr. Challand thought any such condemnation might earn us the appellation of

"cranks"; and after more discussion in which Messrs. Rothwell, Hamilton, Williams and Baldie took part, the motion was passed.

The question of Universal Disarmament and its implications was opened by Mr. Johnson and carried, after which Mr. Ridley deplored the "continued association with official Christianity of the head of the British Commonwealth"—a motion heartily passed by the Conference. The last motion on the agenda—like many of the others—gave rise to considerable discussion dealing, as it did, with the infiltration of Roman Catholics into the Labour Party and the Trade Unions. Some members objected to the words "Labour Party" and wanted "major political parties" substituted; eventually, after an excellent speech by an Irish member, the motion as originally put was carried. And with this the 1954 Conference, with its vigorous criticisms and discussions, ended with the flag of Secularism held proudly high.

For the first time the usual Public Demonstration was held outdoors (on the Deansgate blitzed site) and, with the drive and energy of Colin McCall as Chairman at the head, a splendid audience was collected. All the speakers, the President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, and Messrs. Day, Clayton, O'Neill, Barnes, Ebury and "Mr. Kelly" were at their best, and even after the meeting, the discussions continued.

As has been said, the weather made it impossible to have the usual Outing in the district—though a few members went on a bus drive nevertheless. The annual processions of the local children, run in the interest of religion, took place, and it was pathetic to see these poor little mites, gaudily dressed, following "cribs" and banners and other Christian emblems, looking so tired, wet, and bedraggled.

For the rest, one must affirm that it was a very successful Conference for which, not only the Manchester Branch and its officers must be thanked, but also Mr. P. Victor Morris, the General Secretary, and his Assistant, Miss Jill Warner, who modestly hid their own hard work behind the scenes. Our thanks are due to them all.

H. C.

Penalties for Thinking (Concluded from page 195)

refused, and the Prince sternly ordered the executioners to push the faggots back and to finish their cruel work." I think this is just tara-diddle. If it is intended to boost up the Prince of Wales, it fails utterly. For if the Prince had the power to stop the burning, he was a fiend not to stop the hellish proceedings whatever Badby might have said or not said. I don't believe that Badby, subjected to the intense pain from the burning faggots, said anything coherent. Probably, what with the flames, and the smoke, and the stench, and the acuteness of his torment, he sank into blessed unconsciousness, and found that relief in death into the Holy(?) Church would not accord in life.

- (1) In modern spelling, SALTER.
- (2) *Canonical hours*=seven periods a day appointed for formal prayers.
- (3) *Student's Hist. Eng.*, p. 292.
- (4) *Hist. Crim. Law of Eng.* II., 440.
- (5) "Mediæval England," p. 361.
- (6) Henry C. Lea: *Superstition and Force*, p. 484.
- (7) *Idem*, p. 467.
- (8) *Britannia*, IV, 701.
- (9) *Cobbett's State Trials*, I. Col. 219.
- (10) *Student's Hist. Eng.*, p. 298.

—NEXT WEEK—

JOSEPH McCABE
JOINS "THE FREETHINKER"

BELGIAN COAST, BLANKENBERGE: HOTEL ASTORIA,
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SIVE.

INTERVIEWS WITH N.S.S. SPEAKERS

Jack Clayton

ABOUT 26 years ago, the then travelling propagandist, George Whitehead, reported to London that he had found a new speaker of considerable ability at Nelson. Shortly afterwards this new speaker was asked to accept a roving commission to lecture for the N.S.S. regularly in N.E. Lancashire. And so, for a quarter of a century, the message of freethought has been conveyed, mainly in that area, in the rich and powerful tones of Jack Clayton. Frequently operating in small towns, he has not had the advantage of the ready-made crowd such as is enjoyed, for instance, at the Marble Arch. This implies no disparagement, of course, for *all* our speakers, whether London or provincial, have at some time or other had to work up difficult pitches. And, in common with all freethought propagandists, Mr. Clayton is never happier than when confronted with a Christian opponent, and has now had nearly a hundred debates, the majority of them with the clergy, ranging from a Canon of the C. of E. to the "cut-price parson" of the Gospel sects.

He is here interviewed by G. H. Taylor.

In your area, which do you find harder to fight, religion or apathy?

Apathy. That's by far the greater obstacle.

And I suppose you, too, find the crowds smaller than before the war?

Yes, but one cause of this is partly the result of our own propaganda, so we can't grumble: I mean the opening of Sunday cinemas.

What do you consider a suitable length for a speech for your audiences?

About fifty minutes to an hour, but, of course, I like being heckled; it usually indicates that something has gone home with effect.

Do you get many questions of a topical character?

Roughly one in five.

Political ones?

In pre-war days a big percentage of questions had some political motive, but to-day I find such questions very rare.

Are questioners interested in Spiritualism?

Yes; in some form or other Spiritualism is much to the fore. A religious leader in Burnley told me that 90 per cent. of Nonconformist women were Spiritualists, and I should think he's not far out.

Do you find audiences alive to the political machinations of the Vatican?

No; very few seem to know anything about them.

I hope that's only a local characteristic. I suppose you find it necessary to put a lot of work in on the Bible?

It's impossible to ignore the Bible, even if I wanted to, with such types as Jehovah's Witnesses and Plymouth Brethren in the audience. Trust them to drag you back to it.

Is the "Bible Handbook" well known?

Not as well as it should be. It's only the student type who will buy it and read it.

Does any particularly unpleasant experience stick out?

Yes; it occurred at Greenock. There was a big crowd, quiet and attentive. A nearby Catholic Revival Mission closed down, with the result that my crowd doubled in size. They surged round the platform and tried to tip it over; they took hold of my ankles from behind and tried to drag me off. Finally the chairman closed the meeting and a mob followed us up the main street yelling and throwing fireworks.

Such incidents are becoming rare, I think?

Very rare now.

And for that we have to thank such propagandists as yourself, who have made the way a little easier for those who follow. And no doubt you have had experiences less unpleasant. Can you recall any laughs?

Plenty. Once the Vicar was on my platform in opposition, with half the village out listening. As he worked up to an explosive peroration out came his false teeth, flying out of his mouth with the message of the Lord. Friends and foes alike set up a roar of laughter that quite ended the gravity of the proceedings and ended the discussion.

That deserves another dip into the memory-bag. What do you find?

A village in Rossendale where a Nonconformist parson had come out in opposition. One of his supporters was a fat little man with white hair who got so excited that he left his place in the front row and came up to me shouting and waving his arms in my face. It was impossible to go on speaking so I told him to get out. He bulged with importance and said: "Do you know who I am?" I replied: "I don't care who you are," and took him by the scruff of the neck and ran him back to his place. This was the signal for a sudden roaring with laughter by the crowd. I was rather puzzled because I didn't see anything to call for such a wave of mirth. However, I carried on with the meeting, and when it was over I asked: "Why the great laugh?" "Don't you know who that was you had by the scruff of the neck?" "No," I said. "Why, that was old Dr. —, chairman of the local Bench of Magistrates!"

Now what's your contribution to advice for new speakers?

First, practise reading aloud. Don't try to give a full-length lecture the first time you take the platform. Instead, take a short theme. Read it up, familiarise yourself with every aspect of it, and go over it at home several times. And finally, if you've made any notes on it put them in the fire before you get on the platform. If your questioner appears to be sincere try to give him a reasoned answer. On the other hand, if it's someone just playing the fool a little sarcasm can be useful, or even ridicule against the supercilious type who is not amenable to reason. But I should never ridicule an opponent trying to state his case reasonably.

Thanks. You've often had to plough a lone furrow for long periods. Let's hope a little extra help will be forthcoming.

Why Be Sane in a Mad World

By A. R. WILLIAMS

CONVERTED from a windmill tower situated on a low hill my house looks down a slope of country to a river. A pleasant champaign it is, farms with orchards and great hedges extending to woodlands along the river bank.

Happily day by day, week by week, through succeeding months linking into seasons to make years I see my neighbours busy about their healthy useful avocations.

Harvest of corn and roots, fruit and hops is gathered. So plentiful is it that it seems impossible to think of aught otherwise. Yet millions of human beings engaged as my neighbours will never see abundance. Instead they will face, year after year, all through their lives, deficiency of crops and scarcity of food, living in poverty, on the verge

of hunger, at times relapsing into famine with starvation and death.

Yet those who rule over them continue to tax them heavily wherewith to pay for huge armies of soldiers withdrawn from useful work, armed with expensive engines of warfare, a tithe of whose cost would pay for tools and implements sufficient to make their soil productive.

I look at the ground about my tower home, so fertile its crops are weighty, its grass so lush that cattle and sheep fatten on it. Incredible it is that millions of acres, thousands of square miles of the earth's surface have fallen sterile.

Man has allowed that land to become so by his foolishness and negligence. Whilst millions of people support their rulers in playing at politics; playing with ferocity that leads to war; the good earth has become bad desert, incapable of supporting life instead of teeming with it.

Shout for war and swarms of people respond, exulting in destruction and death. No one calls them to make fertile and productive the waste places of the earth. Would there be any response if they did?

Which is the maddest: criminally contrary politicians who play only the game of beggar-my-neighbour, or deluded myriads who allow themselves to be impoverished because they will not be—or are not—led to productive work?

II

This fertility of my surroundings in contrast to the barren areas of the world is emphasised by the trees. At intervals some of them are cut, a valuable product. Not all are felled; only selected ones, ripe for timber, full-sized beyond further growth. The others are watched over, brushwood and undergrowth removed, and most important of all new trees planted.

So our land will always be well wooded, with all the advantages that brings. For many of the sterile, barren, desert areas of the earth were once great forests. Foolishly or ignorantly they were destroyed, result being wastes of sand and dust, because with elimination of trees humidity necessary to fertility disappeared. Now to make such areas bear trees and crops again water will have to be brought to them, at enormous expense and trouble.

Not greater expense and trouble than is devoted to armaments and preparations for war, but the latter can be achieved easily by working up people's passions and fears and hates. Can no powerful emotion be aroused potent enough to enable the world to be improved, ennobled and beautified at the same time as it is made sustentant of its populace by increased fertility?

III

Our nearest church is over a mile away. I see its slender spire graceful above the trees, and hear its bells when the wind is from that direction. Those who wish to attend church, to practise its formularies and receive ministrations of the rector do so; those who do not stay at home or seek other business during churchtime. Each group of people goes on exercising the simple virtues of life, content to let others find uprightness with or without religious sanctions.

Looking out upon the world this appears unusual of them. Beyond missionary and propaganda efforts, we see whole nations rent apart by religious differences, fanaticism and enmities aroused thereby, antagonisms so fierce as to lead to bloodshed, thousands, millions of people hating each other for the love of God, made miserable and cruel by their repugnance to other faiths. For us, the simple doctrine of live and let live. Nothing in it to philosophise or argue over, still less to persecute for or fight about, but a workable and abiding creed.

IV

Summer evenings local youths play cricket; most of the year they prefer football. Some Saturday afternoons there are matches. Spectators—one cannot call it a "gate," for admittance is free—may number a score.

Play is of the "kick and rush" style. When the ball goes over the line spectators participate, enjoying a little free kicking on their own account. All is accompanied by much laughter and shouting of names, often nicknames.

Maybe this loose but vigorous football does the players more good than standing in crowds of thousands and getting excited, often bad-tempered, over the performances of paid League teams. Our local football has the further advantage of not having its teams listed in Pools Coupons. So the game is played for fun, real sport.

V

Within a few miles of us are Parish Councils, with a wider Rural District Council and County Council. Local politics are placid, conducted in friendly manner, with intent to make administration and changes bearable by all, if possible helpful.

Perhaps such genial public-spirit is to be regretted. If each local authority had an Army and Navy and Air Force, a Foreign Service and Secret Police and spy-system, with rigidly guarded frontiers over which movement of goods is jealously watched and taxed, while all human arrivals are regarded as enemies, and detained, or turned back, on the least pretext, with insistence on showing of passports and visas. . . .

Then our local affairs might be full of liveliness and sensation: in addition to bad feeling rising to enmity, the staggering cost of it all added to the hindrances to trade and travel.

Mystified we ask: Why be sane in a mad world?

Correspondence

HOMOSEXUALITY

SIR,—It seems rather dangerous to suggest that in regarding homosexuality as not only permissible but desirable, ancient Greece and Rome showed themselves "older and wiser." They are certainly dead, and their declension was not unrelated to their attitude to sex, although which caused which may be regarded as a question of the hen and egg type.—Yours, etc.,

ROBT. H. CORRICK.

IS SMOKING RATIONAL?

SIR,—Mr. G. H. Taylor's article "Cigarettes and Lung Cancer" deals with only one danger to smokers. Cancer also attacks the mouth and throat. I asked a doctor acquaintance, who was an inveterate smoker, what effect smoking had upon the tongue, and he startled me by saying that he was suffering from cancer of the tongue, and had pieces cut out. He avowed that all smokers were liable to be similarly affected. That was enough to make me desist!

Smoking also diminishes the eyesight, and the fumes are unhealthy, especially the dense variety at public gatherings, in railway carriages, and at cinemas.

At a recent discussion meeting of the Hunterian Society a proposition "that tobacco is a blessing" was debated, and a show of hands resulted in a large majority against.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

EMILE ZOLA ON SCIENCE

Has Science ever retreated? It is Catholicism which has always retreated before her, and will always be forced to retreat. Never does Science stop; step by step she wrests truth from error, and to say that she is bankrupt because she cannot explain the world in one word and at one effort is pure and simple nonsense. If she leaves, and no doubt always will leave, a smaller and smaller domain to Mystery, and if supposition may always try to explain that mystery, it is none the less certain that she ruins, and with each successive hour will add to the ruin of the ancient hypotheses, those which crumble away before the acquired truths.—Rome.