

“My country is the world; my religion is to do good”—Paine

The Freethinker

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I WAS about eighteen when I came upon Thomas Paine's summing up of his political and religious philosophy with the words, “The world is my country and to do good is my religion.” When I compare it with the ill-chosen quotations from the Bible that one sees on posters and in newspapers, which are often meaningless or plainly unethical, I am surprised that this sentence of Paine's, which says so much in so few words, is not better known. One can guess the reason; as soon as I have launched the British Thomas Paine Society, I will certainly see to it that we broadcast this perfect introduction to Paine.

I have often been asked by people of all colours and creeds, “Who and what exactly was Thomas Paine?” and after a brief review of his achievements, I have quoted these words. The result has generally been, after a moment of almost stunned silence, an exclamation, “My God—that's fine! It says everything.” That has usually been the reaction of ordinary intelligent people whose impulse was towards good, yet who have not found so simple a directive from their established political or religious faiths—or, if they have found one, such as “Love your enemies,” they have been confused or embarrassed by contradictory instructions from the same sources which, mostly being “divinely revealed,” are not put into their proper human perspective.

Paine's Noble Outlook

In his many years of selfless activity, although Paine always aimed at a noble objective, he adjusted his philosophy by experience. Naturally he had his moments of understandable irritation, and even of bitterness, for he suffered greatly, but the overall picture is overwhelmingly one of a man who lived up to the high standards which he set himself.

Much of his humane outlook he acquired from his Quaker father, but the hell-fire doctrines of his Church of England mother soon set Paine questioning, analysing, rejecting, accepting and improving. It was not until he was well into his fifties and under the shadow of the guillotine, that he summarised his freethinking deism in *The Age of Reason*.

Courage was an outstanding quality of the man. He seems to have been without fear of any kind, though he must often have been deeply conscious of it. Indeed, if he could have curbed his courage sometimes, if he could have been less outspoken, tempering his views with what is termed political wisdom, if he could have wrapped his thoughts in less clear words, he might have become President of those United States of America, which he named and did so much to create. But I prefer him as he was.

His Convention Speech

Although his speech to the Convention, opposing the execution of Louis XVIth and advocating his *banishment*, was Paine at his political best, for it was both forceful and

moderate, he failed to win a majority because his speech had to be translated and read for him. As a result, the voting went against him, though the majority was comparatively small and he just missed the chance of altering the course of events, of saving France from the Reign of Terror and Europe from Napoleon.

His courage, not for the first time in his adventurous career, cost him much, for he was banished from the Convention, and while in retirement wrote the first part of *The Age of Reason*, and finally he was imprisoned in the Luxembourg, where he wrote most of the second part of his famous work.

This speech was not only an example of his moral courage, for he realised that it might cost him his life—as it nearly did. His physical courage was remarkable, possibly aided by the fact that he was a well-built man, tall for those days (5 ft. 10 in.), a good horseman and an expert skater. During the American Revolution he not only fought with his pen, writing *Common Sense* and his *American Crisis* papers, as well as playing what is now claimed to be a major part in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, but he fought in the war with great distinction and on one occasion, when he was aide-de-camp to General Nathaniel Greene, he rowed out under the fire of the British Fleet to reconnoitre a besieged fortress, a deed which, in different circumstances and later times, could have won him the Victoria Cross.

The Price of Liberty

Paine had another great quality, which can be as inspiring and as useful as that of his courage. He knew so well that the price of liberty was eternal vigilance in every field of human activity: he therefore never relaxed his vigilance and always stepped into the fight to protest and to defend. By reason of the variety of his efforts, he never became a one-theme bore, and looking back on his activities, one realises what a remarkable pioneer he was in so many causes.

His very first printed work was his *Case of the Officers of Excise*, a skilful plea for his fellow Excisemen which could, in other times, have qualified him as a trade union leader. Next, when he became Editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, his articles attacked the vanity of titles, the cruel folly of duelling, the crueller folly of War, the injustice of the colour bar and the unfairness of the prevalent attitude towards Women's Rights. And so it was throughout his life—his interests ranging from Bridge Building to Economics.

In my Paine library I have a book by him, issued shortly after his death in 1809. On the title page are inscribed in a shaky contemporary handwriting, the words, “Thomas Paine was a good man.” I don't think there is any doubt about that.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

To Do Good Was His Religion

—By ADRIAN BRUNEL—

Omar Khayyám

By F. A. RIDLEY

NOT, probably, the greatest, but to English-speaking readers, at least, by far the best known of Oriental poets, is the Persian astronomer, poet, Umar—*anglice* Omar—Khayyám. His *Rubáiyát*, or four-line stanzas, each regarded in the Persian original as a separate independent poem, have achieved a world-wide fame. In English this sequence of jewelled stanzas may legitimately be regarded as, so to speak, a double-barrelled performance. For Edward Fitzgerald, a Victorian literary dilettante, who, apart from his exquisite rendering of the Persian original, occupies a very minor rank in the majestic Republic of English Letters, yet managed to capture the spirit of the Persian sceptic so completely as to produce, if not one of the greatest, at least, one of the most perfect poems in English or in, probably, world-literature.

Shakespeare somewhere refers to a "marriage of minds" and such a "marriage" went to produce the Fitzgerald version of the *Rubáiyát*. Neither Omar Khayyám, the original Persian author, nor Edward Fitzgerald, his English translator—if that be the appropriate word for so "free" and original a version as that of Fitzgerald—rank very high in the literature of their respective lands. English poetry is, by the general consent of most non-English critics, the finest since that of the Greeks in any Western language. While the poetry of Iran (Persia) is, we understand, accorded a similar priority amongst that of Asiatic nations, yet according to that eminent English Orientalist the late Prof. F. G. Browne, the author of a monumental "Literary History of Persia," which ranks amongst the major works published in this country in the 20th century, Omar is regarded in Persia itself as a comparatively minor figure in the stately court of Persian literature, as and when compared with the "Big Four" whose name and fame tower over the literature of Persia: Fydausi, Godi, Yalal and Ysin Kumi, and, greatest of all Háfiz; the poetic reputation of Omar dwindles to very modest proportions, his literary standing is that of, to refer to an appropriate English parallel, a Donne, a Herrick, or a Crabbe rather than of such literary giants as Shakespeare, Milton, or Shelley. Indeed, we understand that the old poet-astronomer of Nishapur is actually better known in his native land as an astronomer rather than as a poet, no doubt his heresies contributed to this modest role. None the less, the original quatrains of Omar, when rendered literally, are not too impressive and, in the original, his work was, perhaps, only that of a minor poet. The unique character of the English version of the *Rubáiyát* is, perhaps, due as much, or even more, to its "Translator" Fitzgerald, than to the genius of the original author. Our English *Rubáiyát* may almost be regarded as a joint composition, the work of two "Siamese Twins" of literature, who widely separated in space and in time, yet discovered common spiritual approach to Life and to its permanent problems. Yet it must be added that the *Rubáiyát* has had notable success in other languages where the genius of Fitzgerald could play no part. There is the famous French version of M. Nicholas, whilst my late friend, J. H. Hallard, himself the author of a scholarly translation of Omar into French, personally assured me that, with or without Fitzgerald, the *Rubáiyát* was one of the world's great poems; perhaps, the poetic judgments of modern man are ultimately determined by *theological*, not by literary criticisms.

Omar—more accurately Umar—Khayyám was born about the middle of the eleventh century and his death can be dated to be 1126. The period in which he lived, and the

melancholy forebodings of which are featured so accurately in his wistful stanzas, was one of decline and decay, of growing despair and of deepening futility. The great Persian-Arabic-Moorish Muslim mediæval civilization, which had risen from the fusion of the conquering Arabs with their more cultured neighbours and which has left its monuments from Seville in Spain to Samarkand in Central Asia was visibly disintegrating both internally and externally, internally, the "two and seventy jarring sects" to whom the poet scornfully refers in a famous stanza of the *Rubáiyát* were tearing the Commonwealth of Islam to pieces with their fierce theological and political dissensions. The Founder of the most famous of these sects, Hassan-Ben-Gabah, the Founder of the celebrated "Hashishin"—*anglice* "assassins"—which has added a new word to most European languages, is stated, though the story is open to doubt, to have been a friend of the poet's during their respective youth and the "assassins" themselves held an agnostical scepticism, not unlike that portrayed by Omar. Externally the Islamic Empire and culture were crumbling before the attacks of ferocious barbarians from west and east alike, the European crusaders, white savages from the Europe of the dark ages, drove the Muslims out of Spain, and stormed Jerusalem on the first crusade in Omar's lifetime in 1099, after which, they set up Christian States which, like modern Israel, drove a wedge into the heart of Islam. Whilst in the east the ferocious Turks were imposing their yoke on the civilised races of central Asia. Beyond the Asias lurked the "Hordes" of that Tatar "Scourge of God," Jenghis Khan who, in the century of Omar's death, laid waste central Asia in an orgy of indiscriminate death and destruction.

Such was the concrete background against which the Persian poet wrote the famous lament how:

"Sultan after Sultan with his pomp
Abode his hour or two and went his way."

There were many such ephemeral "Sultans" in the Asia of Jenghis Khan and of the Crusaders.

Probably the two greatest and, certainly, the two most famous sceptical poems in world-literature are the *De Rerum Natura* of Titus Carius Lucretius, and the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám. Apart from their attitude to religious dogmatism, mockingly incredulous in the case of the Persian astronomer, and openly hostile in that of the Roman Epicurean, there is not much in common between these two works of genius. Here, indeed, we may relevantly accept the classic definition that a life is a "comedy to those who think, and a tragedy to those who feel." To Omar, despite the unutterable sense of frustration that his most memorable verses portray, one has the instinctive feeling that life is fundamentally a comedy, to be surveyed with amused indulgence, whereas to the perhaps, profound genius of Lucretius, life was essentially a tragedy to be felt. As Monsieur Paul Nizam has reminded us: "when he speaks of love, of solitude, and of death, no poet in the world's literature surpasses Lucretius." Despite the unrivalled poignancy of his verses, Omar, one feels, was not quite at ease in that profound Lucretian vein. In both the case of Lucretius and that of Omar their poems represented an immediately futile defiance to the mounting tide of dogmatism and of superstition. Christianity seems to have arisen in the generation that followed that of Lucretius.

Whilst Persia, since the century when Omar wrote, has sunk back under the sway of Muslim orthodoxy, which still presides over the land that gave birth to the *Rubáiyát*, it has been left to the Rationalist civilisation of modern Europe to rescue both these works of genius from their Christian and Muslim theological detractors and to restore them to their rightful place in the annals of world literature. It is a notable place.

Wanted—A Papal Bull

By C. G. L. DU CANN

HAVING breakfasted in London, I decided to lunch in Madrid. This is perfectly easy nowadays if you have about forty-four pounds to buy an aeroplane-ticket, return-fare.

I had. So I went.

There are many delightful things to be said of, and for, Madrid, that City of the Sun. Here I will merely observe that the Madrilenos have two religions: God and Mammon, like the rest of the world. There are hosts of magnificent buildings dedicated to each; but Mammon (as usual in this modern age) has the biggest and best. Here the Banks far outnumber the Churches and are much more palatial. Mammon is defeating God in Madrid, as nearly everywhere else.

On the holy Sabbath, with 26,000 other idlers, I went to the local bull-fight in the Plaza de Toros.

I went on the principle, when in Madrid do as the Madrilenos do, or don't. All the transport in the City was going there at great speed, and all the white-helmeted police in the City was mobilised, unavailingly to whistle at them and make things difficult. My gallant taximan hooted more often and was whistled at more often, than all his brethren, so naturally he charged me treble the legitimate fare, which I gladly paid, thankful to be still alive. For I had feared that his family motto was your money and your life.

The terrific spectacle was hallowed by the presence of several clergy, both Roman Catholic and Church of England. By these priestly attendances, I knew therefore that the coming events were fit for me (a child of God) to see, and my old friend Mammon had thoughtfully provided me with one of the best seats, as he usually does when I call upon him. (It's no use relying on God for an expensive seat, or any at all, except your natural one.)

The vast packed amphitheatre resembled in its architecture and its tiers of spectators, the Roman Coliseum re-designed by a Moorish architect.

A fine black Andalusian bull charged gallantly into the ring. Graceful, full of health, life and vigour, bellowing like—well, like a bull of Bashan as bulls do—I thought him the finest advertisement for Bovril I had ever seen. His bellow could be heard above the noise of 26,000 of us, and we were pretty deafening, I can tell you.

Except me. I was quiet. I was lost in admiration of the ox and dreaming of my next cup of Oxo in my dear, indeed most expensive, native land.

Certainly that bull would fight like St. Michael against any devil that came along, I thought. But he never had a dog's chance (let alone a bull's chance) from beginning to bloody end.

I was to learn that the three leading principles of this bloodsome business are: First, that numbers of you first get the bull exhausted and out of breath by rag-flapping and running-away; then some more of you stick coloured knives into his shoulders until he is thoroughly enfeebled by loss of blood. Second, one of you, mounted on a thin horse, secured against disembowelling by a cross between a large door-mat and a dirty carpet, sticks him with a lance. Third, now that it is safe to do so, several of you goad him into further exhaustion by scarlet rag-flapping and stab or two with a sword. Lastly, when he is all-but-dead, you, the Toreador, bravely finish him off, sometimes after several unsuccessful attempts. Then his dishonoured carcass is dragged out by a team of mules to enraptured applause.

A cowardly, ludicrous business which you would laugh at if it were not so cruel! That bandy-legged, pink-

stockinged Toreador is a national hero with a fabulous income, and fame beyond a cinema star's dreams.

The bull-fight is supposed to be very dangerous (so it is for the wretched bull who is always killed). But for the men it is perfectly safe—far safer than crossing a street for an English child in London! You see, a bull will always charge and try to toss a piece of coloured, especially red, cloth, instead of the man who holds it. This is the bull's nature, and on that invariable trait in a bull, this cowardly pretence of human heroism and skill is founded.

Upon my soul, after seeing six bulls killed that evening, I swear there is no more in it than that! (People who don't see that must be blind.)

For this "Spanish national sport" is not bull-fighting. It is not even butchery. It is botchery. Bull No. 4, bleeding, exhausted, on its knees, kept offering its head, and the brave Toreador stuck it no fewer than seven times before he managed to kill it! The bungling brute! Any English butcher would have cursed him for an amateur.

If that toreador had been Hitler, Stalin, Barrabas and Judas Iscariot in one, he could not have received more plaudits.

This is not merely cruel and cowardly; it is a cheat and a fraud. It is not bull-fighting. It is bull not-fighting. Let us have Queensberry Rules for bulls. One man, one bull would be fair. (Not sixteen men and one horse to one bull, as here!) And if it is cowardly to hit a man when he is down, it is more cowardly to stab a bull when he is down, and to go on stabbing him because you haven't the skill or the nerve to stick him fatally in the exact spot.

One man and one institution could stop this sadistic cruelty like the turning-off of a tap. That is not General Franco and the Cortes. It is the Pope of Rome and the Roman Catholic Church.

If I were Pope, within 24 hours I would launch a Papal Bull that would save all bulls by excommunicating all so-called bull-fighters, toreadors, picadors, matadors, banderillos, all the management, all the spectators, and the taxi-drivers and bus-drivers. Not one should escape. The priests from every pulpit should hurl my anathemas, consigning the unfaithful to the wrath of God and the bottomless pit of hell. The thunders and lightnings of Holy Church should strike from the Vatican through radio, newspaper and sermon. I would raise St. Francis d'Assisi from the dead to strike for his brother, the bull. I would have all Spain on its knees, lamenting its sins and renouncing its iniquity under my threat of an Interdict.

When I am a candidate for St. Peter's chair, this is part of my election programme, even if it loses me the votes of every Spanish and Portuguese Cardinal. What an opportunity Baron Corvo lost when he wrote "Hadrian the Seventh."

I am very willing to think good of the countrymen of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and I remember with gratitude Cervantes, Quivedo and Gracian. I am all for the Spanish caballero, his senora, and still more, his senioritas with their sloe eyes, raven hair, graceful movements and languishing, bewitching airs.

But Spain has a wretched reputation for cruelty amongst the nations. Upon her fair fame rests the black and purple bruise of the Inquisition. And her last Civil War was hardly creditable to her. It is time she civilised herself up to the standards of decent conduct to animals held by the other nations.

They tell me that she wants Gibraltar! For my part, if

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

The World Council of Churches, which is meeting in Illinois, was told the other day by an English lay preacher that "workers were quitting the Church." He pointed out that all over the country there were large churches and small congregations, and he wanted to know whether the people were leaving the Church or the Church was leaving the people? And he added that divinity and theological students felt that they ought to know "more about workers and their problems." We quite agree—but in that case, where does Christianity come in?

For practically all social and wage problems which occupy our workers so much can come under one head—Secularism. These things have nothing to do with Heaven, Hell, the Devil, Miracles, the End of the World, Divine Judgment, and whether Jesus Christ does or does not sit at the right hand of God Almighty—all of which have to be studied by Christian students as part of true Christianity. What the workers want is as good a time as possible on this earth—God and Jesus can look after themselves in Heaven for all they care. In other words, it is *Secularism* and all that it implies which must be the aim of all workers, not an imaginary Paradise long ago given up even by Christians—the knowing ones, that is.

You can always trust our Romanists for moving with the times. Their latest move is to use English instead of Latin in some of the "sacraments"—marriage, baptism and extreme unction, and in 25 blessings. But these things are never rushed, and one must always look for a little snag. It appears that permission from the Pope to use English instead of Latin is only for the U.S.A., not for England. In this country, the Latin gibberish is still "holy," and the Lord would not tolerate anything else from English Catholics. Or is it, perhaps, because Roman Catholicism is far more widespread in America than in England?

In the Bombay "Free Economic Review" is an article on Pakistan and Islam, and it points out that "Islam is lauded to be one of the most democratic of religions, and is also credited to have granted freedom to women." And is that true? In this 20th century, and "in the so-called Islamic countries," states the F.E.R., "democracy is completely absent and women are much more enslaved and backward than anywhere else." The only way that Turkey could get a measure of freedom for women was practically to disown Islam. "Autocracy, fascism, and corruption are the hallmarks of any Islamic country to-day including Egypt," we are further told, and Pakistan is no exception.

The small body of Muslims in this country have moved heaven and earth to perpetuate the legend that in Islam is the "perfect" religion, that Muhammed taught only the highest truths, and that it would be the best thing in the world if everybody grovelled (as they do) six times a day in prayer before Allah and Muhammed. We, in this journal, oppose *all* religions, not just the nonsense of Christianity. And this is a point sometimes forgotten by our readers.

As an example of the way in which can be found the utmost reluctance to give up a religion, any religion, so long as it can be called religion, take the case of Prof. Draghicesco, of Bucharest, who died in 1940. He was a philosopher of international fame who wrote more than a dozen works on all sorts of subjects; but his *Truth and Revelation* (1934) aimed at giving "Rationalists, disturbed

unbelievers, and even Atheists" a new religion and "a new idea of God." A new universal religion for our own times cannot be Christianity which is out of date, but something for modern needs. Materialism, we are assured, is "one-sided." Vitalism deals only with the "organic" world, and Idealism is limited to the "super-organic world"—whatever that is.

The Bulgarian professor throws overboard all traditional views of God though, for him, Atheism "is not enough." But as man believes in "goodness" and "justice," the "ideal" God—even if he does not exist—must be "an all-powerful, all-wise, all-good God," who is merely "a projection of man's ideals." Therefore, here is a God and a religion which "even" Atheists can be happy over, and which can help to "create the divine in man." We can only say that even Atheists can do without all this talk and talk which, in the ultimate, is just "religion"—the same old religion no matter what name it is given. We oppose, let us say again, *all* religions.

FIFTY YEARS AGO . . .

THE Rev. Dickie asserts that the gospels abolished slavery. The facts, apart from the gentleman's flatulent rhetoric, are: (1) the Gospels nowhere condemn slavery; (2) the writings of Paul emphatically endorse it; (3) the early Christians accepted it as an established fact; (4) legislation for the improvement of slave life received a distinct check by the conquest of Christianity, while the number of slaves actually increased; (5) American slavery was wholly a Christian introduction and institution; (6) the growth of anti-religious feeling in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was directly responsible for anti-slavery legislation, "Infidel France" being actually the first to set the example of liberating its slaves; and (7) the pro-slavery party found its principal source of strength in appeals to the Old and New Testaments. I know, of course, that one need not bother much about what they say in the pulpit—so long as it is not too sensible; but really Mr. Dickie's disregard for facts is quite phenomenal, even for that place.

And then comes the familiar rigmarole about Christian charity. That is the way to silence critics. The man who does not believe in the resurrection may be convinced by your giving a shilling to a beggar!

(Chapman Cohen, *Freethinker*, September, 1904).

Wanted—A Papal Bull (Concluded from page 283)

there are any bulls on that Rock, they shall live happily in their pastures and die of old age or the humane-killer. Not one Gibraltar bull shall be butchered to make a Spanish holy-day. Let me recall how Recalde and Leyva "watched from their bulwarks in haughty scorn" when Francis Drake, tired of their insolence and abetted by his commander-in-chief, Lord Howard of Effingham, with Frobisher, Hawkins, Raleigh, Cavendish, Cecil and Brooke, broke all the rules of war and the power of Spain simultaneously. "Where are the galleons of Spain" today?

The descendants of those men still live in England, treating their cattle rather better than cattle as is their way and wont. If sixteen Spaniards cannot kill an exhausted bull without botching it, what does the Spanish nation think it can do against the British bull-dog? Spain is mounted on its Rosinante and acting against the sensible advice of its Sancho Panza. Come, come Don Quixote! you are not living in the 1954 world of reality at all. In the days of Queen Elizabeth II you had better remember the days of Queen Elizabeth the First.

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

To Correspondents

CORRESPONDENTS may like to note that when their letters are not printed, or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda. On the basis of an eight-page paper, space is the enemy, which means we cannot print as much as deserves to be printed.

S. WILSON.—A skilful mixture of science and nonsense is very saleable these days. "Universal Mind" is a cheque not honoured at the bank of science. Thanks for appreciative remarks on *The Freethinker*.

ALVIN McELVAIN.—Your "cosmic mis-hap" presupposes a Cosmic Plan, and as we find no evidence of Plan, we cannot accept the "mis-hap."

R. PEACE.—Catholic Action is politically directed and analogous to Jesuit activities in the 16th century. See F. A. Ridley's *Evolution of the Papacy*.

S. RUDKIN (Mrs.).—It was the Anglican Dr. Chillingworth who said "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants."

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

J. CLAYTON'S meetings.—Friday, September 3, Worsthorne, 7-30 p.m. Sunday, September 5, Blackpool (Central Beach), 3-15 p.m. Preston (Town Hall Square) 7-30 p.m. Tuesday, September 7, Hapton, 7-30 p.m.

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

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.).—Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

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. At Deansgate Blitzed Site, 7-30 p.m.: C. MCCALL.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, August 29, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, August 29, 7-30 p.m., Old Market Square: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

INDOOR

Junior Discussion Group (South Place Ethical Society), Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1. Friday, September 3, 7-15 p.m.: A. BOWDEN, "Housing."

Notes and News

La Liberpensulo is the bulletin of a newly-formed free-thinking group in an international Esperantist political organisation. The first issue contains the following message from the Secretary of the N.S.S. translated into Esperanto by Mr. Basil Edgecombe:—

"In thirty years' membership of the Society of which I am now the Secretary I have learned that a number of enthusiastic Esperantists can always be found in our ranks. Having also learned recently from an article in our paper *The Freethinker* that there are four million Esperantists in the world to-day. I can affirm that their proportion amongst Secularists must be at least six times as great as it is in most cross-sections of the population.

From which it would appear that our movement is highly sympathetic towards the aim of adding a world-language

to existing national tongues so as to facilitate the fullest understanding between all peoples. Yet I have no record that any leader of our movement was ever a practising Esperantist, nor can I claim to be one myself. I ask readers to put this down to our preoccupation with other tasks of no less importance.

If those most active in the Secularist movement, which fights to rescue the human mind and human life from the influence of superstition, obscurantism, intolerance and reaction, cannot find time to learn Esperanto now, they realise nevertheless that the universal introduction of Esperanto as a subject in schools and universities would be one of the greatest forward strides ever taken in the march of humanity towards a civilisation deserving the name."

Will those readers who have sent inquiries regarding Joseph McCabe's new work, *Crime and Religion*, please note that we have written to the American publishers and are awaiting news from them before we can announce that copies will be available in this country. We hope to have supplies shortly, when an advertisement giving the price will immediately appear in our columns.

The well-known American freethinker, Mr. Jack Benjamin, who has been militantly engaged in our movement for 42 years as writer and lecturer, writes: "It heartens me to see *The Freethinker* carry on the Chapman Cohen style."

Jesus is coming again, according to the Bible. If you believe the sacred message, it is possibly unwise to prepare for his immediate arrival in the manner of Bryant Bailey, who being being asked by police what he thought he was doing when found standing nude at a busy New York street corner at 3 a.m. in 16 degrees above zero, replied: "I am waiting for Jesus."

He was taken to a psychiatric ward.

A member of the N.S.S. recently inquired of the Society whether it would be prejudicial to an applicant's prospects of acceptance as a police recruit and thereafter of promotion if he stated that he had no religious belief. A letter was duly sent to the Home Office, and elicited a reply that will be of interest to other readers besides the inquirer mentioned. It stated: "I am directed by the Secretary of State to say that the responsibility for making appointments to police forces in England and Wales is vested by law in local appointing authorities and he has no information as to the practice generally regarding religious tests for candidates. No religious tests are applied to candidates for appointment to Metropolitan Police Force." The matter is being pursued further by the General Secretary of the N.S.S.

A correspondent asks where Keats applies to the clergy the epithets used in Mr. P. V. Morris's verse. Mr. Morris writes: "He and others may be interested to know that in a letter to George and Georgiana Keats dated 14th February, 1819, the following statements are made: 'A parson is a Lamb in a drawing-room and a Lion in a vestry. He is either a knave or an idiot. He is an hypocrite to the believer and a coward to the unbeliever. No man is so much to be pitied as an idiot parson led by the nose by a bench of bishops.'"

—NEXT WEEK—

REPORT FROM IRELAND

RIDLEY'S CONGRESS PAPER

The Infallible Church

By H. CUTNER

WHEN the Roman Catholic Church calls itself "infallible," it can easily prove this is so from Holy Writ. (Incidentally, lots of things can be proved in the same way—and disproved). Every Catholic—and Protestant for that matter—knows the famous text in Matthew, "Upon this rock I will build my Church," a text which has made a little fortune for papermakers, publishers, and authors, so many books having been written upon it. Neither side has convinced the other and, though genuine Protestants are still protesting that the Roman Church has got it all wrong, it is a fact that there are many clergy and laymen in the Church of England who thoroughly agree with Rome.

It need hardly be said that there is not a scrap of evidence to prove that somebody called Jesus ever delivered the notorious text, but it is one of the most famous examples of what logicians call arguing in a circle. Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my Church," and it is only natural that we ask—"What is your authority?" Like a shot, every Catholic will tell you, "Matthew" in the New Testament. And then, "Who or what guarantees Matthew is telling the truth," and again like a shot comes the answer—"Why the Church of course!" You see the little game—Matthew guarantees the Church and the Church guarantees Matthew; and so the Church is God's or Christ's Church and must be infallible. It is all very beautiful and convincing.

Then take those two famous first chapters in Genesis which every true Catholic is taught to believe in literally. Many years ago, Joseph McCabe had a debate with that very orthodox champion of primitive Christianity, the late G. K. Chesterton—no mean opponent by the way. And after Mr. McCabe had demolished the Bible Creation story from the point of view of science, Mr. Chesterton was asked—did he still believe it? "I believe what my Church tells me to believe" was in effect the reply. If the Church tells its sheep to believe every word as infallible, then they must be infallible; but if the Church says—we now know the Earth is much older than 6,000 years and the Universe is a little larger than one would suppose from the way in which God "made the stars also," then the sheep obediently follow suit, and reverently utter, "Amen."

When I was a boy, it was not only your true Protestant who decried Evolution but also our infallible Catholics. Most of the rank and file of both Christian sects still ridicule Evolution; but if you press an educated priest very hard, he will ask in a tone of injured innocence, when did the Church, as an "infallible" institution, oppose Evolution? And if you have not the exact words of this or that Pope, he will tell you that some of the greatest Catholic scientists—like Mendel—actually provided the best proofs of Evolution. As in everything else, if Jesus Christ was not the greatest Evolutionist that ever lived, at least the Church is now always ready to defend Evolution against all comers—with certain provisos, of course.

One has only to read the Genesis article in the Catholic Encyclopedia to see how very difficult that erudite work found it to reconcile God's Precious Word with Science. The Papal Biblical Commission (1909) insisted that Christianity, that is Roman Catholicism, stands or falls with "the literal, historical sense of the first three chapters of Genesis in so far as they bear on the facts touching the foundations of the Christian religion, e.g., the creation of all things by God at the beginning of time, the special creation of man, the formation of the first woman from the first man, the unity of the human race." That is pretty clear, is it not? To put in another way—if there was no Adam or Eve, or the tempting Serpent, there was no Fall

of Man, and therefore no necessity for a Saviour, that is, no need whatever for Jesus Christ. So Christianity must inevitably stand by Genesis.

And what does the Infallible Church say now? There is a body of very earnest Catholics who are advertising a *Course of Catholic Instruction* and overboard they throw the Papal Biblical Commission. What was infallible in 1909 is no longer infallible. Every word in the Bible is true, *must* be true, but as the late Prof. Joad used to say, it depends on what you mean by Truth—when it comes to the Bible.

Our "Catholic Enquiry Centre," formed to make Catholics infallible, tells them, "we have a large liberty of discussion in the matter of Evolution" as regards—what do you think? "As regards the human *body*," triumphantly says its pamphlet *Tradition and the Bible*. As regards man's *body*, Darwin then is right, and the Papal Biblical Commission is quite wrong. So is Genesis, so is God's Precious Word, and the Pope, and the Church's various pronouncements against Evolution. They are all *right*, however, when it comes to the "soul" of man, the "living soul" the Bible said. When Evolution had finally evolved the *body* of Man—it took something like 300 millions of years, though a hundred million years more or less do not matter—in came God Almighty and "breathed into his face the breath of life and Man became a living soul" as Holy Writ has it. It is not clear, and *Tradition and the Bible* does not tell us, where Woman came into this scheme of things. Was she formed out of a rib of Adam before or after God did his breathing act? Or doesn't it matter?

In any case it seems, to a blatant unbeliever like myself, that it is quite easy to say God created the "soul" for nobody has ever discovered anything about it, or even if it exists. We are told that there are really three things, all "entities"—a soul, a spirit, and a mind. I grant the *mind*, of course, but not as an entity; but where in heaven's name resides the soul or the spirit? Does anybody know?

If Evolution is true, nothing in this world can prevent it being accepted by mankind. Even the infallible Church has had to admit its own fallibility and eat its words as to the truth of Genesis. It has to claim "a large liberty" in the matter. We are in full accord. It is not the Evolutionists who have accepted Genesis, it is the Church which has been *compelled* to accept Evolution. Or, in other words, it is Freethought which has won all along the line—even without infallibility. The Church has surrendered and the victory is ours.

Obscenity and Freedom of Thought

By ALEC CRAIG

(Concluded from page 278)

The Blackpool case by no means stands alone, and it is not an exceptional hole and corner affair. A vigorous defence was set up and the prosecution was taken over by the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is true to say that the provincial police maintain a constant sporadic guerilla warfare against books of sex education. Open and wide-spread publication, reviews in reputable journals, even acquittal in other districts, are no protection. The responsibility for this state of affairs can be firmly fixed on the Home Office. Cases are reported to them before they come into court, and it is understood that the prosecution of the publishers or of wholesale distributors is always given

consideration. But where this is not found justifiable nothing is done to discourage the local prosecution of booksellers.

Sporadic attacks under the Obscene Publications Act have been made on nudist magazines. Generally speaking, these have been unsuccessful, and it may be taken that British magazines published by respectable publishers are now in no danger. But last year a large consignment of nudist magazines imported by a British distributor were seized as obscene at the Port of London by the Customs authorities. The importer challenged the seizure and it was condemned in total at the Guildhall. Among the magazines condemned were issues of continental magazines of the highest reputation in the nudist movement. Now there is only one difference between these magazines and their British counterparts. Both contain illustrations depicting nudist activities in sun camps, etc. The difference is that in British magazines the pubic hair is deleted by touching-up and in the continental ones it is not. This criterion is clearly ridiculous. An untouched photograph may be perfectly decent and a touched-up one pornographic—as anyone can see by buying one of the numerous illustrated magazines of a certain class on sale everywhere.

British nudists have a legitimate interest in the magazines which are the organs of continental nudist societies, and to deprive them of a sight of them on this ground is unjustifiable.

What is the legislative reform we envisage? Here we can look for guidance in two directions.

First we can go back into the legal history of our own country. When the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 was before Parliament it was strongly opposed in both Houses, and it was only passed by the Lords on an assurance given by its promoter, Lord Chief Justice Campbell—predecessor in office of Lord Chief Justice Cockburn, on whose dictum in *Hicklin's* case the present legal test of obscenity is based. Campbell said: "The measure was intended to apply exclusively to works written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of youth and of a nature calculated to shock the common feelings of decency in any well regulated mind. I am ready to make what is indictable under the present law a test of obscenity." The present law was the common law which is with us to-day; but the test of obscenity has been changed and is so wide that it is a threat to books written with the highest educational motives and in the interests of social progress. In fact, it sets up an *ex post facto* censorship of serious literature. A simple legislative reform would be an Act of Parliament setting aside the Cockburn definition and substituting the definition which Campbell said was good law in his day.

We can also seek guidance by looking across the Atlantic. The United States took over the common law of England and have also had a lot of legislation on the subject of obscene literature. Of course, the Cockburn dictum never applied to them, though the courts paid great respect to it. Under the influence of the famous or infamous Anthony Comstock, the most outrageous attacks were made on literature of all kinds, and his mantle fell on John S. Sumner who is still, I believe, the secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. Of recent years, however, the American courts have been much more liberal than the English. It was the clearing of James Joyce's *Ulysses* by a high American court in 1934 that made the continued suppression in this country so ridiculous as to be impracticable.

The multiplicity of legislatures in U.S.A. makes any generalised statement about American law rather uncertain; but it is probable that the law as laid down by Judge Bok in a 1949 case, and confirmed by the Superior Court of

Pennsylvania, is pretty near the mark. Judge Bok said that the American law did not penalise anyone who seeks to change the prevailing moral or sexual code, and that it was quite clear that the harsh rule of *Regina v. Hicklin* had been supplanted in the American courts by a modern rule that the law may only be applied where there is a reasonable and demonstrable cause to believe that a crime or misdemeanour has been committed or is about to be permitted as a perceptible result of the publication and distribution of the writing charged: the opinion of anyone that a tendency thereto exists or that such a result is self-evident is insufficient and irrelevant. The criminal law is not, said Judge Bok, "the *custos morum* of the King's subjects" as *Regina v. Hicklin* states it is only the custodian of the peace and good order that free men and women need for the shaping of their common destiny. This opinion of Judge Bok would do as well as the dictum of Campbell as the basis of a reforming statute.

What I urge is very modest. I have not concerned myself with pornography. I am content with the law so far as that is concerned. But the application of a law intended to deal with pornography against works of literature, science and education by reputable authors, is a danger to individual liberty and freedom of thought, and inimical to the promotion of true morality.

[This article is part of a lecture by Alec Craig to the Progressive League Conference on "The Anti-Vice Drive—A Threat to Freedom" on March 21 last in London.]

By the Way

By F. A. HORNIBROOK

FECAMP, a French seaport of some 17,000 inhabitants, stands on the English Channel. It is the headquarters of the French cod-fishing fleet which is usually away for several months in the year, fishing off the coast of Newfoundland. It boasts a magnificent church, the Trinity, built in the 12th century. No matter how poor a town may be and no matter how wretched the dwellings of the workers are, the one costly building dominating the place is the church.

We find in *The World's Pictorial Gazetteer* that "Fecamp grew up around a nunnery founded in the 7th century to hold a relic of the True Blood which was washed ashore in the trunk of a fig tree. Hence the name—a corruption of *Ficus Compris*."

Now it might not be a matter of wonderment that this was believed in the 7th century, but it is amazing that people living in the 20th century should still believe it. We boast that we are living in a scientific age; so we are, as far as science and invention are concerned, but millions of people are in the same benighted stage mentally as their ancestors of the 7th century were.

The R.C. Church, which is responsible for perpetuating this swindle, claims that if given complete power it has the answer to the world's unrest.

The great Abe Lincoln was wrong when he said "You can't fool all the people all the time." You can, if the poisonous Catholic Church grabs them young enough and teaches them that the greatest sin of all is that of unbelief.

The Church of England has been figuring in the news in connection with the goings on in a haunted house in Somerset. The ghost apparently objects to the presence of people in his house and makes it very uncomfortable for them. This is very selfish of the ghostly one considering the acute shortage of houses in England. The local clergyman was asked to use his powers. He said prayers in every room and he says that if these are not effective, he will use the service of exorcism; and newspapers solemnly publish this and thousands read it and are impressed.

Yet we are told again and again by the ultramodern that, in attacking religion, Freethinkers are flogging a dead horse.

On January 2 an aeroplane containing 22 passengers got into difficulties near Birmingham and had to make a forced landing. Philomena McCloskey, the air hostess, had to break the news to the 22 passengers. She told them to fasten their safety belts and to pray for a miracle. The landing was effected without injury to the passengers or crew. No doubt this will be held up by all the religious papers as an example of the efficacy of prayer.

On the same day an appalling explosion took place at Santiago in Chile in a dynamite works in which over 50 people were killed and over 300 injured.

Surely the Lord moves in a mysterious way his blunders to perform. This explosion will be ignored by the clergy who will give thanks to the Lord for His goodness in saving the aeroplane passengers.

This stressing of the prayer and the silence when disaster occurs rather reminds one of the people who go to the races. We hear a great deal about those who are fortunate enough to back a winner but nothing about the poor mutts who lose their money.

Correspondence

THE SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS OF FREETHOUGHT

It is true, as Mr. Matson says, that "Religious reaction is social reaction," but that does not alter the fact that social reaction can accompany freethought when the latter is limited to religious questions. As the writer of the article *The Church is a Tiger* has pointed out, Diderot, Helvetius, d'Holbach (Rousseau, Voltaire, Paine and Ingersoll could be added) all attacked the social and economic abuses of their times as well as the superstitions of religion and royalism. It does not seem to me to advance the general cause of Freethought to limit the attacks of freethinkers to the Churches and their superstitions, when the general social and economic background to the Churches, of the exploitation of the labour and mind of the masses of the people is ignored. Capitalism and the Churches, on occasion, quarrel over the division of the loot, namely, when the Churches control too much of the Land: but the background of the economic and mental exploitation of the people, on which Feudalism and Capitalism rest, could still remain, though the majority of the population was (as is the fact) non-believing or non-practising on religious matters.—Yours, etc.,

C. H. NORMAN.

NOTE ON THE ABOVE

As for "limiting the attacks of freethinkers to the Churches and their superstitions" we refer our correspondent to the following subjects dealt with, based only on our last ten issues:—

1. War-making and Civil Defence (Morris, *Freethinker* No. 26, and Vernon-Worsley, 27). 2. Sunday Restrictions (McCall, 28). 3. Film Propaganda (30). 4. Crime Comics (Taylor, 30). 5. Colour Bar (Ridley, 31). 6. Mau Mau (McCall, 31). 7. B.B.C. Censorship (frequently). 8. Crime Statistics (McCabe, 31). 9. Newspaper Propaganda (Dr. Comfort, 32). 10. Secular Education (32). 11. Royal Patronage for Romanism (Morris, 32). 12. Cruelty to Animals (Du Cann, 36). 13. Law Relating to Homosexuality (Cotter, 29; Morris, 30). 14. Obscenity Laws (Craig, 34, 35, 36). 15. Catholic Influence on Labour Politics (35). 16. The Stage (Morris, 35; Hornibrook, 35). 17. The Question of Religious Tests in the Police (36).

To these add sundry book reviews, science reports, news from overseas, etc., and we think we can fairly rebut any charge of confining ourselves to attacking doctrine. And the examples given are selected, not exhaustive.

A limited supply of back numbers is available.—Ed.

CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND? By G. H. Taylor, M.R.S.T. Materialism stated and defended. Price 4s.; postage 3d.

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION. By F. A. Ridley. Price 6d.; postage 1½d.

JESUS (to order)

By G. H. TAYLOR

AMONG the many hundreds of books by Christian apologists that I have read I have found nothing more amusing than the efforts to concoct a plausible human figure called "Jesus" out of the scanty and wholly unreliable material of the Gospels. Christians would be satisfied with just one determinable historical figure, just one Jesus with a definable historical background beyond challenge. Instead of which we get almost as many Jesuses as there are writers who try to catch him. To make their task easier, the alleged sayings attributed to Jesus offer such a glorious assortment of theme and counter-theme, meaning and counter-meaning, policy and counter-policy, that the temptation to carve out of them a Jesus of one's own choosing is a temptation seldom resisted by such writers, especially those with a leaning to fiction.

First you start with a theory of what you want Jesus to be. Then you select any promising material. Then you impose your personal interpretation of it. Jesus is supposed to have been nailed to the cross. He is to-day fitted to the Bed of Procrustes.

His is the nose of wax, to be twisted in any direction to order.

Jesus was a mystic (see J. M. Murry's *Jesus, Man of Genius*). You don't like him that way? Too remote? Too much like someone cut off from the affairs of everyday life? Then he was a social reformer (see *The Lord of Thought*, by Dougall and Emmet). He was a diehard (Gough, *The Fight for Man*). He was just a working man, much misunderstood: do you not hear *The Call of the Carpenter* (Buck White)?

In *The Beginnings of Christianity* (Jackson and Lake) he is a Dreamer. Mellor's *Jesus of Nazareth* is an apocalyptic. He was a Pacifist (Cadoux, *The Early Church and the World*). He was a real He-Man (Grenfell, *What Christ means to Me*). He was *Jesus the Heretic* (Rev. Conrad Noel). He was certainly *The Man Nobody Knows* (Bruce Barton).

My own favourites along these lines of conjecture are those of Woodbine Willie and Beverley Nichols. According to the latter Jesus was "by far the greatest wit that the world has ever known." It only remains for me to add that Beverley's book is a perfect exposition of its title, *The Fool Hath Said*.

And finally, the Rev. Studdert-Kennedy: "He was the Man Woman, the Mother Father, the Creative Warrior complete." (*The Warrior, the Woman and the Christ*). I assume that this gem of Woodbine Willie's was in pursuance of the advice of Thomas à Kempis, "It behoveth thee to be a fool for Christ." (*Imitation of Christ*, Part I, Chap. xvii).

Such are the possibilities of this accommodating and mobile figure of Jesus that if any firm wants to cash in on them I offer them the following advertisement gratis:

Are you a lounge, or loafer, or lout?

A stargazer? Sadist? Or spiv?

You need moral backing for what you're about?

Then see what the Saviour can give.

Are you a dawdler, or dodger, or drone?

A noodle? Or nobleman bred?

Then justification can always be shown

From something that Jesus has said.

Are you a cosher? A cannibal chief?

A fiddler, a fake or a fraud?

You want holy sanction? Then just take a leaf

From the Book of Christ Jesus the Lord.