

The Freethinker

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IT is not without significance that the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws is at the moment almost, if not quite, moribund. No appeals are being made for its support, and most Freethinkers, I imagine, do not even know of its existence.

This appears to me to be very dangerous for our future. It may well be that the authorities are not at all anxious to press any prosecution for blasphemy, but the law is on the statute books, it has never been repealed, and every writer attacking Christianity can be hauled up before a magistrate and be either fined or imprisoned. The law of this land does not allow you to attack the Christian religion.

When prosecutions for blasphemy began in England is not easy to say. Certainly before the era of printing, reports of such cases must be difficult to find particularly because there never has been a clear boundary line between heresy and blasphemy.

We know how heresy was punished in the Middle and later ages. People who declared any unbelief in the tenets of the Church were tortured, imprisoned, fined, or put to death. When we are told that the Church and the Bible have endured for nearly 2,000 years, it is sometimes forgotten how very difficult it was for anybody to proclaim himself a heretic or an unbeliever. Even in our own day, what happened to anybody in Hitler's glorious reign who boldly declared he was an anti-Nazi? During at least 1,000 years, the Church was quite as Totalitarian as Hitler and his thugs, and its power in our secular courts was unlimited. That is why our infamous blasphemy laws have persisted, and will persist, for a long time still.

In his authoritative work, *A History of the Crime of Blasphemy* by G. D. Nokes, L.L.D., the author gives the dates of two statutes against heresy—like that of the Lollards—respectively 1400 and 1414 which remained in force as late as 1531. Under Queen Elizabeth I, these were repealed for something stronger. In 1596 appeared one of those bold souls, Robert Fisher, who was said to declare that "Christe was no sauioire and the gospell a fable"—about as splendid a piece of blasphemy as it is possible to get in a few words. He was referred to the Archbishop to be severely punished—but what this was has not been recorded. Then, in 1606, "one Miles" for "a fearefull and most prophane sayinge" was also severely punished.

Dr. Nokes goes into detail in his book of the way heresy and blasphemy gradually became clearly defined in our courts, and how often "profanity" was punished by fines and imprisonment. You were not allowed even to "sneer" at preaching, for Lord Chief Justice Coke solemnly pronounced "to disturb a preacher is to disturb God."

There were two methods of treating blasphemy 300 years or so ago. "The first was," says Dr. Nokes, "to declare an action criminal, whereupon it became *ipso facto* a breach of the peace. The second was to declare an action a breach of the peace, and thereupon to make it a crime." Either of these methods was successful in securing convictions, of

course—and they are even at this day. And it is quite amusing to find that the Rev. John Traske in the seventeenth century was actually indicted for declaring that the genuine Sabbath Day was the Jewish one, and not Sunday, and that all Bible believers should abstain from eating "Swines flesh." Traske had to go to prison and was made to eat swine's flesh while there—in exact fulfilment of the Golden Rule, of course.

After the restoration of Charles II, "the expression of unorthodox religious opinion was generally recognised as an offence of the common law" and prosecution for blasphemy and heresy became a regular thing. Always could be found some sturdy English-

men ready to fight the law for the free expression of opinion on matters of religion, and no punishment appears to have deterred them. Unfortunately, among those punished were what we would call religious maniacs—they were certainly "heretics" but just as certainly religion mad. These people cannot come under the general "crime" of blasphemy as understood by Freethinkers. Obviously, "witches" and "sorcerers" were "heretics" and they suffered terribly as well for "blasphemy"—but not exactly for our kind of blasphemy.

In any case, the dictum of Lord Chief Justice Hale (1609-76) that an attack on Christianity was an attack on the State, and this, that Christianity was the law of the land, lasted almost to the famous Bowman case in 1917 when Lord Sumner said that Christianity was *not* the law of the land. This was one of the greatest victories of Freethought—and one for which G. W. Foote more than anybody else was responsible.

But, armed with such a declaration as that of Lord Hale, the Church was able to triumph against all blasphemers. In trying to show that the "miracles" of Jesus Christ were never meant to be taken literally but were purely symbolical, Thomas Woolston was in 1729 sentenced to prison and to a fine of £100 which he could not pay. He died in prison four years later. And thenceforth, Deists and other Freethinkers were never let alone as far as possible by the Church of Christ if there was the least chance of a severe punishment.

As Dr. Nokes points out: "It is clear that it is an offence at common law to attack the Deity, the Bible or religion." It is an offence to attack the existence of God or to deny the existence of the Holy Ghost. You must not, in fact, poke any fun whatever at the Holy Ghost. You must not attack Jesus Christ in general terms, or attack his divinity, his miraculous birth, his works, his Resurrection, his teaching, his sanity, his human existence, or his existence at all. You must not attack the Bible in general terms, and even an attack on the Old Testament has been declared criminal. You are not allowed to attack the theory of "inspiration," or the authorship of God, or the authors of the Bible, or its miracles, or the validity of its prophecies. It is perhaps, says, Dr. Nokes, even an offence to attack religion in general; it is certainly criminal to attack

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Some Notes on "Blasphemy"

— By H. CUTNER —

Christianity, or salvation through Christ, or his Second Advent, or Heaven and Hell. You must not attack the establishment of religion by the State, or the way in which the Church is "governed," or the bishops. Whether by word of mouth or by the printed word, all such attacks come under the general head of blasphemy and the penalties can be severe.

Robert Taylor suffered in all three years, and G. W. Foote one year to mention only two of the victims of a Church which parades love and mercy in a theory, and in the past inflicted the most horrible penalties on all who used the human faculty of reason and so found its claims untenable. That the Church can no longer do this must

be one of the most terrible blows it has suffered in its history.

So long as the laws against blasphemy remain on the statute books, so long can no Freethinker be safe. And it is something to reflect upon that the Home Secretaries of the three parties in Parliament, together with almost the whole of their followers there, are entirely in favour of the retention of these infamous restrictions on the free expression of opinion on religion—that "hang-over" of primitive man whose credulity, ignorance and superstition are responsible for the delusions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, to mention only three religions. What can we now do about it?

Luxemburg

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

THE International Congress of the World Union of Free-thinkers held at Luxemburg was certainly the most successful since the war. Mr. Charles Knaf showed himself to be a thoroughly efficient organiser with a flair for what pleases Rationalists, which is, of course, not always what is rational.

The opening meeting on the evening of Wednesday, September 1, was well attended; the great hall of the Casino was full; the platform was tastefully decorated with flowers and greenery with a portrait of Servetus in the centre. The Luxemburg Freethought Society has recently been celebrating the Spanish martyr, who was burned alive by Calvin at Geneva in September, 1553, and the Congress was dedicated to his memory. The platform was flanked by the busts of two of the founders of Luxemburg—Joseph Junck and B. Weber, both noted for their generosity as well as their militancy.

Among those seated in the front row were three Ministers of State and other distinguished members of the Congress whose presence added prestige to the gathering.

Maitre Jean Gremling, President of the Luxemburg Free-thinkers, Vice-President of the World Union, President of "Ons Jongens," the powerful association of "maquisards," député city councillor and a leading member of the bar, welcomed the Congress to his city. The World Union President, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, replied and opened the Congress, which he rejoiced to see so well and brilliantly attended. It was his sad duty, however, to lament the deaths of two whose presence had added lustre to the Brussels Congress in 1952, the American, Woolsey Teller, and the German, Hermann Graul, as well as the loss of outstanding figures such as the Indian, M. N. Roy, and the Englishmen, Frederick Watts and Chapman Cohen, the latter had attended the Rome Congress of 1904 as well as that at Berlin in 1931. He went on to describe how a week or so earlier he had found himself confronted by three powers in a little Alpine valley—the Rhine had risen two metres in one night, the alarm had been sounded, bridges, roads and houses had been destroyed like toys—another night had been made into pandemonium by army manoeuvres and then, before dawn, further sleep had been banished by the matin chimes from innumerable churches. Man, not satisfied to strive with the tremendous forces of nature, had invented two terrors, both of which arose from fear, War and Religion, both incompatible with free thinking. Congress after Congress had expressed its desire for peace; the freethinkers of former days such as Voltaire and Diderot and those of latter days such as Büchner and Spencer had uttered their detestation of war. So had Buddha Confucius and Lao-Tse five centuries before Christ. It remained for the Christian Church with its claim to universal dominion to speak with a double tongue, to praise peace and to bless war as occasion served; to conse-

crate chivalry (Sis miles in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti); and, when the peoples were war-weary, to proclaim with utter lack of scruple and supreme opportunism a crusade for peace. Peace must not be a matter for clerical trickery, for political fraud or diplomatic dodge; it must come from the individual, from goodwill and greatness of heart, and not from lassitude and listlessness.

The next four days were compact of hard work for the chairmen, the organiser and in particular the interpreters as well as the speakers and their auditors. The admirable patience of certain sections of these last sitting through long lectures in languages they did not understand in the hope that someone would tell them what it was all about was beyond praise. The subject of the Congress was the ways in which the great religions, particularly Christianity, adapt their doctrines and their methods to meet the developments of scientific knowledge and theory and the evolution of a new structure of society. M. Charles Thomes showed how the Church had shifted its ground in face of Biblical criticism and scientific advance in a manner which he could only stigmatise as hypocritical. Prof. Alfarc made a claim for an evolving moral code derived from the needs of society, a moral code in the wake of which the churches followed, while claiming to guide; it is mankind a man must serve, not a "god." Prof. Labregère dealt with the impact of recent scientific progress on clerical outlook and the efforts made particularly by the Vatican to ingurgitate it. Prof. Angelo Crippa had some interesting and suggestive things to say on modern art, particularly architecture, and the Church. In the middle ages the two powers which could finance architecture on a grand scale were War and Religion; to-day the Church, if not War, was exerting less and less influence. Heer G. Rausch studied recent Protestant teaching and showed how its answer to the attacks of Reason was to run away and deny that reason could attack religion. In this Mr. Archibald Robertson was in agreement, but called on Freethinkers not to relax their attacks for all that. Mr. Ridley demonstrated how in past centuries and again to-day the Roman Church had endeavoured to overwhelm new ideas in blood and fire and then, the strong hand being ineffective, had adapted and included the new in her own doctrine; the Jesuits had repeatedly been the instrument of adaptation and inclusion. This opportunist process was in operation to-day. He was delighted to have the support of M. J. Cotereau, who produced a series of quotations from La Croix in confirmation. M. Denis, Sheriff and Professor of Liège, drew attention to the legal and scholastic changes in Belgium; the Church had steadily profited during the war years and the inter-war period to strengthen its position, but the recent elections had put into power ministers with liberal principles who are trying to undo as far as they can this reactionary work.

M. Jean Cotereau produced a formidable series of facts to show how the Roman Church is endeavouring to take full advantage of the Press, of the Cinema, of Radio, and now of Television, by establishing national and international organisations to employ these means of propaganda to the utmost, as well as inspiring Catholic women's and youth organisations to influence the commercial concerns exploiting these inventions, and by placing Catholics in positions of control. M. Pol Schneider presented a young Luxembourg's outlook on Freethought with vivacity and vigour. Mlle. Pardon reviewed the Freethought situation rather mournfully the world over, while Prof. Noordenbos (Holland), Mr. Edwards (Ireland) and Herr Freistuhler (Germany) dealt with their own countries. Prof. Noordenbos looked forward to an international congress at Amsterdam in 1956, the centenary of the Dutch society De Dageraad, and Herr Freistuhler anticipated increasing his own society's membership to 10,000 by that time.

On Saturday evening M. André Lorulot addressed a crowded public meeting and by skilful use of the biographical method combined an exposition of arguments against supernatural religion and the Roman Church in particular with a survey of changing ideas during the past half century, an impressive piece of oratory, at times deeply moving, at times gay and witty.

On Friday we went to Dudelange, the great steel works and iron mines, where we were officially received by the Mayor and his Adjoint, in the fine hall decorated with roses (The Grand Duchy is sometimes termed the Land of Roses). M. Fohrmann, the Mayor, had worked his way up through the factory to the top, in fact he is now President of the Schuman Pool Council for Coal and Steel; though he had only an elementary school education, he addressed us in five languages, passing easily from one to another; he is also an M.P. and a militant Freethinker. We drank to Dudelange and its remarkable Mayor in Moselle, and admired the Home for Old People, the Sports Ground and the Swimming Baths which he has had built since the war. On Saturday we were received in Luxemburg Town Hall by the Mayor, Hamilius, the Sheriffs and Councillors of Luxemburg City and welcomed in sympathetic and encouraging phrases. On Monday we went to the Martyr City of Vianden, a famous beauty spot five times visited by Victor Hugo and noteworthy for its vast feudal castle and other medieval remains. It is also famed for its resistance to the Germans during the last war and for its heroic defence against overwhelming forces, though isolated miles away from the Allied armies, under the present Mayor, M. Victor Abens, who received us in the little ancient town hall and showed us the plans for the rebuilding of his town and also for the construction of a dam across the valley which will bring prosperity to his people. At the excellent dinner on Sunday evening brief speeches from representatives of nine countries enlivened proceedings; and the coach tour on Monday, included a visit to the Caves Co-operatives de Remerschen, where we were received by the president of the Co-op in person, and vivacity was general in spite of torrents of rain outside. Our most efficient Treasurer, M. Louis Courtois, displayed unexpected vocal talents, and our host, after welcoming us in sober and rationalist terms, led the singing in both German and French, with occasional English asides. Certainly on the social side the Congress was one of the best ever.

The RESOLUTIONS passed at the 31st International Congress of the WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS held at Luxemburg, September 1 to 6, 1954.

1. The CONGRESS calls on the peoples of the world to urge their representatives in the Assembly and Councils of

the United Nations Organisation to proceed seriously with plans aiming at complete and universal disarmament.

2. The CONGRESS reaffirms that the essential feature of Freethought is the rejection of supernatural beliefs and of clerical authority in human affairs, and in particular of the scientific method as the sole criterion of truth. This CONGRESS repudiates all suggestions that the Freethought movement should abate its criticism of the supernatural or should collaborate with the Churches, above all, with the Roman Catholic Church, on the pretext of averting any alleged consequences of the rejection of the supernatural in the social and political sphere.

3. This CONGRESS goes on record with the affirmation that the Vatican, which incorporates ecclesiastical fascism, is to-day, as in the past, the primary enemy of human progress in general and of Freethought in particular. The Congress expresses its ardent desire to collaborate with all bodies that seek to defend civil liberty and freedom of opinion against clerical totalitarianism and the restoration of medievalism in Church and State.

4. This CONGRESS draws the attention of all democrats, whatever their political views, to the danger to which they will be exposed by allowing themselves to support measures of ostracism against any category of citizens whose ideas may be considered as dangerous or subversive. Such measures lead easily to tyranny and frequently the clumsiness of the persecutor succeeds only in strengthening the influences which he endeavours to suppress. Freethought requires trust in Freedom, in Tolerance and in Reason to facilitate the peaceful and progressive evolution of ideas and social institutions.

5. This CONGRESS deplors the prostitution of scientific invention to the service of supernatural religion, in particular of the Radio, of Television and of the Cinema, and demands that such technique shall keep to their proper function of instructing the people in the realities of existence.

Catholic Relics

ALL superstitions are nonsense, but some are more ridiculous than others, for example the so-called relics of the Church. Nothing sillier can be imagined. It would require a large book to list them all, but in a recent article the Rev. Stephen L. Testa, of Los Angeles, a Protestant minister, lists some glaring examples. Being a converted Catholic, he knows the dope. Among his specimens he mentions that a feather from the Angel Gabriel, which Mary picked up at the Annunciation is in a cathedral in Spain, and many churches claim they have drops of the Virgin's milk. They also have tresses of her hair, her wedding ring, her waist girdle, and pieces of her petticoat and mantle. They have straw from the manger at Bethlehem; pieces of the cradle of Jesus in St. John Lateran, in Rome; the tail of Balaam's donkey and the pieces of silver which Judas received as payment for betraying Christ. They have also the little house that Mary lived in in Palestine. It is in Italy, having been transported there by Angels several hundred years ago. It is difficult for an intelligent person, not indoctrinated in childhood, to understand that anyone in his right mind can fail to see how ridiculous all this is. The Clergy say that one must see with eyes of faith else he cannot appreciate these beautiful mysteries. (*Liberal*, of Philadelphia).

Ministers say that they teach charity. This is natural. They live on alms. All beggars teach that others should give.—*Ingersoll*.

This Believing World

A beautiful picture of Lourdes was given by William Hickey, of the *Daily Express*, the other day. Armed with a pass, he joined the pilgrims and reverently describes the way the full-blooded but sick believers kiss the stone in the grotto where St. Bernardette, in 1859, saw "our Lady" for certain, and where, since then, innumerable healing miracles have been performed. The unfortunate people prayed and prayed but alas, no miracles appear to have been forthcoming for Mr. Hickey's benefit. Of course, he was given half a dozen pamphlets in which past miracles were duly set forth for, as he was severely told, "It takes two or three years to confirm a miracle."

The miracle business is, in fact, now a real business—"There are rules for every miracle at Lourdes." Thank God, a miracle has the greatest difficulty in getting past the lynx-eyed medical staff. At Lourdes, there is nothing like the ease with which our Spiritualist healers perform dozens of miraculous cures of incurable ailments in one evening. "Our Lady" has none of the skill with which a spirit doctor is endowed when he works through our "well-known" spirit healers who, the Lord be praised, are now springing up everywhere.

Needless to add that Mr. Hickey's reverent approach did not please some of his Protestant readers who charged him with being a Roman Catholic. On the other hand, Roman Catholics found his account "not enjoyable reading." And all he can say to both charges is—that he was glad to be back in London! The long line of stretcher cases who were *not* cured at Lourdes seems to have upset Mr. Hickey. Why does he not now read the book that riddled the fraud to bits—Zola's famous *Lourdes*?

The Harvest Feast of St. Pumpkin, the Rev. F. M. Phillips tells us, "invariably attracts good congregations" though "these services are not always as popular with the clergy as with the laity." This is not altogether surprising for Mr. Phillips is obliged to admit that the feast is purely Pagan in origin. The Romans used to keep it in honour of Ceres, the Goddess of Corn, and it is obviously a relic of older fertility rites. But, like so many Heathen customs, Christianity has taken over, the Harvest Festival Services are now used by "thousands of men and women as a means to show their gratitude to God Almighty." A little pious pinching from the despised Pagans for the Lord's sake—so what?

We are pleased to see that religious grovelling is not confined to earth. Sixty divers anchored a statue of Jesus on to the sea bed off the Italian Riviera the other week, 60 feet down, "and knelt and prayed" there with thousands of people doing the same on the cliffs nearby. The statue is the first to be placed under water—and we hope it will not be considered blasphemy to wonder whether under the sea is not after all the best place for similar statues of "Our Lord." We reverently put forward the suggestion.

Does day school religious teaching in schools send children to church? That was the momentous question posed by Mr. W. E. Egner, headmaster of Ormskirk Grammar School, and he claimed that it did not. It was, he insisted, the Sunday school which did the trick—though the more or less empty churches and the indifference which the average adult shows on Sunday to church-going appear rather to be against his contention. What we would dearly like to see is Mr. Egner and his like teaching children the Creation story from Genesis—"and he made the stars also"—and

then telling them what modern astronomy has to say about this star-making. Does he know what a "light-year" is?

Oh dear, this ignorance of the Bible! If only, moans Mr. C. E. O. Lee, the Secretary of the Merseyside Branch of the London Bible College, "more congregations knew their Bibles better, the life of our churches would be transformed." Well, as they don't, where are we? It was just too true that people do not know their Bible (or even their Bibles)—but then does Mr. Lee? Could he give us, off-hand like, the Precious Message found in Joel, Haggai and Zephaniah? And if he could, in what way would that help the churches? With all his knowledge of the Bible and his thousands (or is it millions?) of converts, did Billy Graham really help the Churches? Did he send even *one* backsliding Roman Catholic over again to Rome?

The Yoke of Gods

("Man's fate was not decreed in the temple of Osiris, or written on the tablets of Marduk."—HOMER W. SMITH in *Man and His Gods*.)

OSIRIS is dead. Marduk is dead. Ormuzd and Mithra are dead. The gods of the Elamites, Akadians and Sumerians are no more. Baal is no more. Yahweh is no more. All are buried in the dust of centuries.

Yet to-day the temples, mosques and synagogues are thronged. And new divinities—as hollow, as sterile, as transitory as any that have gone before—are kneeled to, prayed to, sacrificed to.

Of man and his gods, who shall explain or resolve the paradox?

* * *

In song, in the labour of his hands, in the ceaseless out-reachings of his mind, in the myriad and enduring glories he has caused to flower on earth, how nobly man has wrought! Contrariwise, with what ignobility and ignorance has he conceived the ruler of the universe!

Who shall answer for the evil in the world, if not the creator of the world?

Who shall answer for wars, tyrannies, cataclysms, the slaughter of the innocent—if not the All-seeing, the All-powerful, the All-knowing?

Where is it written that man shall forever bow down before a deity whose dog-headed ancestors were spawned in the night of Egypt and the mud of Nineveh?

* * *

Of a thousand fears, of a thousand falsehoods, of a thousand myths, taboos, superstitions, man has shaken himself free. But from that most intolerable of all burdens, from the yoke of his gods, how much longer before he shall deliver himself?

Only when man is done with prayer and penance; with vows, rites, baptisms, orisons, libations; only when he has repudiated miracles, exorcisms, sacraments, resurrections and heavenly rewards—only then will he achieve a god worthy of the name.

W. GORDON DRAKE.

U.S.A.

City Site

Mithras is gone, and Christ is passing too; Dead is the Persian, soon will die the Jew. As History shows, the Death of God's is common: Yet City men build temples still for Mammon.

B. S.

THE FREETHINKER

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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.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

J. CLAYTON'S LECTURES.—Friday, October 1, 7-30 p.m., Crawshaw-booth; Sunday, October 3, 3-15 p.m., Blackpool (near Central Pier); 7-30 p.m., Preston (Town Hall Square).

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

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, October 3, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSELEY. Sunday, 6.30 p.m., Old Market Square: T. M. MOSELEY 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, October 1, 7.15 p.m.: Miss L. GERARD, "Problems of Personal Life."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 3, 11 a.m.: Professor T. H. PEAR, M.A., "Is there a moral equivalent of war to-day?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, October 3, 6-6.45 p.m.: P. VICTOR MORRIS, "The Farce of B.B.C. Religion."

Glasgow Secular Society (West Room, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall St.).—Sunday, October 3, 7 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "A Secularist Looks at the World."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Milton Hall, 244, Deansgate).—Monday, October 4, 7 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Notes and News

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. is supplementing its energetic outdoor propaganda by monthly indoor meetings on Thursday evenings at the Trades Hall, Thurland Street. Mr. T. M. Mosley started last week, and speakers in October, November and December will be Messrs. A. Elsmere, J. W. Challand and A. Hewitt, indicating that the branch can stand on its own feet. This branch now holds its Sunday evening meetings at 6-30 p.m., having noted that the Salvation Army with its band marches away from Old Market Square at that time. As other meetings do not start until 7 o'clock, the N.S.S. has a ready-made audience and a clear field for the first 30 minutes of its meeting. Good for Nottingham!

All members of the Manchester Branch are referred to the notice above of the branch's unavoidably belated A.G.M. Important business in addition to the election of officers is on the agenda, so a full attendance is vital.

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

APPEAL BY N.S.S. VICE-PRESIDENT

I WHOLEHEARTEDLY support the official opening on September 1 of the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund in aid of *The Freethinker*, and I greatly admire the portrait of our late President and Editor: it depicts his keen intellectual face with fidelity. I feel it is necessary, however, that something further should be said if the Appeal is to meet with success.

The urgency of the need for the Memorial to take this form has not been stressed. Unfortunately it has now become impossible for propagandist or educational papers and magazines to survive without considerable subsidisation. Where this is not forthcoming they disappear one by one. *The Freethinker* is no exception to this rule and unless the considerable weekly loss is made good it is a matter of simple arithmetic how soon it too will disappear. *The Freethinker* is indeed the living monument of Chapman Cohen and the guarantee of his imperishable fame, but it is something more; it is a vitally necessary weapon in our War of Ideas, that War to which he constantly referred and in which he spent such a rich and glorious lifetime of successful endeavour.

After nearly 30 years' continuous service on the N.S.S. platform, I know how much more difficult, nay almost impossible, would have been the fight without *The Freethinker*, which was and is, at once an inspiration, an education, and a necessity to the success of our Cause.

I cannot say all I would like, but I would make what I consider is a practical suggestion to the G.W. Foote Board, the admirers of Chapman Cohen, and all lovers of Free-thought who could not bear to see *The Freethinker* die. The suggestion is that they will, where possible, make a promise of a yearly or periodical contribution of a certain fixed amount, until we are able to declare that this need is past. Some time ago a friend suggested to me that it would be a good idea if a number of persons not in a financial position to contribute a large amount would make a weekly contribution of, say, a shilling a week to *The Freethinker* Fund. He had, he said, been doing himself something like this for a long time past. Perhaps some such scheme would be practicable where the new Fund is concerned.

I make these suggestions in the hope that some official and individual action will follow. The Churches and the political organisations are only able to carry on their propaganda in such a manner. Surely "The Best of Causes" will not be forced to wage the unequal struggle, crippled by the loss of its fighting organ, *The Freethinker*, because we, as individuals, cannot do as much for spreading enlightenment as others do to maintain superstition and privilege.

Previously acknowledged, £314 7s. 3d. G. Swan, £1; S. M. Caines, 10s.; J. Johnson (Liverpool), 10s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; K. Lidaks, £1; R. J. Hale, £1 1s.; J. G. Burdon, £1; F. C. Warner, 5s.; Mrs. A. Kean, 10s. Total, £320 4s. 3d.

LEN EBURY, Vice-President, N.S.S.

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers. By William Kent. Price, cloth 6s.; paper 4s. 3d.; postage, 3d.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST. By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? By H. Cutner. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 2d.

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

Catholic Counter-Reformation of the 20th Century

By F. A. RIDLEY

(Continued from page 308)

THE CATHOLIC COUNTER-REFORMATION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

WRITING at the beginning of the present century, the famous English rationalist, Joseph McCabe, pointed to the political insignificance of Catholicism in Europe, and confidently predicted its speedy demise. Subsequent facts have not, at least in the interim, born out his too optimistic forecast. To-day the Catholic Church is at least in the political sphere, more powerful than at any time since the Middle Ages, and, beyond Europe, she stretches out for new worlds to conquer. The seemingly moribund institution of 1870, whose assumption of Infallibility provoked a scornful smile amongst "Liberals," who confidently predicted her early demise, is now one of the three or four leading powers in the world. As in the days of the Jesuits, her "Counter-Reformation" has met with unforeseen success. To what factors is it to be ascribed, if we reject the Vatican's own explanation that she has allies beyond Space and Time?

THE GENERIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The 20th century may be defined generally as an era of social and intellectual transition between a pre-scientific era of "scarcity" and a fully scientific era of human mastery over nature. Defined more particularly, it is an age of revolution and counter-revolution: an age which sees the wholesale eradication of ancient landmarks, institutions, and vested interests, and the consequent reaction of such interests against their impending doom. In which respects, incidentally, it bears a general resemblance to the earlier era of the Reformation, albeit on a more universal scale. As we shall now see, the reaction of the Catholic Church in the 20th century, pursues generally similar lines to its earlier reactions in the 16th century.

THE STRATEGY OF CATHOLIC COUNTER-REFORMATION— (a) VIOLENCE

In the earlier Counter-Reformation of the 16th century, the Papacy pursued, what we may term, a double-barrelled policy. On the one hand it used the Big Stick, systematic violence, to drown in blood the Protestant revolutionaries who menaced its existence: Alva and the Spanish Army: "St. Bartholomew's Eve", the fires of Smithfield, and the *auto da fes* of the Holy Inquisition; the Spanish Army, the "Spanish Armada," and "The Thirty Years War." All these are examples of the Catholic Reign of Terror, of bloody and systematic repression. Popular History has, perhaps inevitably, fastened upon these sensational happenings. However, they were not the only, or even the most efficacious instruments at the disposal of the Papacy. Had they been so, as popular Protestant histories, of the type of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* too readily assume, the Church could hardly have survived their eventual failure.

THE STRATEGY OF CATHOLIC COUNTER-REFORMATION— (b) DEMAGOGY

Faced with the "Protestant Revolution," with the upsurge of a new world, the Catholic Church supplemented force with demagogy; and it was, in the permanent sense at least, the more effective weapon. For, we repeat, the leaders of the Counter-Reformation were the demagogic Jesuits, not the Dominican Inquisitors who relied solely on the rack and the stake. The Jesuits, probably the greatest Counter-Revolutionary *corps d'élite* in all recorded History, "the genius of Counter-Revolution" as we have elsewhere described them, whilst not disdaining the dagger of the

assassin, yet had more permanently efficacious means at their disposal. It was by their superb demagogy, by their masterly opportunism, by their educational system which, as Karl Kautsky phrased it: "pressed Humanism into the service of the Church"; by their subtle diplomacy; by all these; far more than by direct violence, that the Jesuits averted destruction and led the Counter-Reformation to its astonishing victory. The Inquisition was *reactionary*; it sought merely to save and to prolong the old. The Jesuit "Company" was "Counter-Revolutionary"; it *adapted* the old to meet the requirements of the new. No wonder that Adolf Hitler, the greatest of modern demagogues, has singled out his Jesuitical predecessors and mentors for special praise in *Mein Kampf*!

Thus, we note that the earlier Counter-Reformation made use of two complementary methods: systematic violence, achieved with the aid of the old regime; and demagogy and opportunism, which sacrificed outworks—for example, the corruption of the Renaissance Papacy, with its Neo-Paganism and unashamed worldliness—in order to preserve the essentials of the Catholic Church and of Catholicism.

In the 20th century, as we shall now see, *mutatis mutandis*, a similar combination of force and fraud, of violence and demagogy, is now being used to further the ends of our contemporary Catholic Counter-Reformation, and to save the Church from an even more perilous situation than that which confronted Loyola and his contemporaries, four centuries back.

THE PAPACY AND "MODERNISM"

As was, also, the case with the Catholic Church vis-a-vis Luther and Calvin, Rome first reacted with violence to the new century. Pius X (1903-14), Leo's "saintly" but stupid successor, launched an intellectual "Reign of Terror" against modern knowledge in general, summarised in theological language as "modernism." With the exception of Copernican astronomy, which had been grudgingly recognised by the Papacy early in the 19th century, the whole gamut of modern knowledge from the evolutionary theory to the "Higher Criticism" of Genesis, was officially condemned by the Vatican, and the "Modernists" were thrown out of the Church, neck and crop. If the terrorism of the Vatican remained on the intellectual and economic levels only this was merely because modern progress and the secularisation of politics had put an end to the *auto de fé*. Otherwise it can hardly be doubted that the "Modernists," Loisy, Tyrrell, *et al*, would have shared the fate of Servetus and Bruno. (As it was, the only material damage suffered by Loisy was that his Catholic charwoman gave notice!).

SUBSEQUENT COMPROMISES

In fulfilment, presumably, of the Gospel aphorism: "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing"; the Catholic Church has never, to our knowledge, retracted publicly any of Pius X's fulminations against religious "Liberalism" and modern knowledge. In fact, he has just been raised to the altars of the Church as a canonised saint. However, in *practice*, Rome appears to be cautiously grafting as much modern knowledge as can be fitted into her theological system. Recent Encyclicals of the present Pope have—albeit with much theological circumlocution, which, however, need not deceive anyone familiar with the ways of theologians and the language of the Papal

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INTERVIEWS WITH N.S.S. SPEAKERS

C. E. Wood

THE presence of Mr. C. E. Wood on the N.S.S. platform in Hyde Park is the guarantee of a scholarly address which will combine learning with militancy, humour with argument, and science with light relief. His studies have provided him with a scientific background, as more than one Christian opponent, priding himself on a little scientific knowledge, has found to his cost.

After a quarter of a century of outdoor propaganda under, or near, the "tree of knowledge," he has lost none of his effectiveness, and his admirers will wish him many more years of service to the cause with which he has so efficiently associated himself.

G. H. T.

If you had only one lecture to give, what would it be about?

My theme would be to explain religion from its anthropological, historical and psychological origins; and then to show that religion in general, and the Christian religion in particular, is unreasonable in the light of modern knowledge.

The comprehensive form of attack?

Yes, because to an intelligent audience an explanation is more satisfying than mere criticism. It encourages them to use their own thinking powers and draw their own conclusions.

I've also heard you knock the Bible for six!

As light relief, certainly—interspersed between more serious topics.

Serious topics, of course, cut out a large number of people who come to the Park. Some only want to hear their favourite dope, some are there for amusement only, some to start a row, and there are also the inevitable oddities riding their hobby horse. What's your estimate of the crowds at N.S.S. meetings?

Undoubtedly the large majority, whether they are our sympathisers or our opponents, take our lectures seriously and give us a good hearing. They are really most appreciative.

You are well qualified to tell us how they compare with pre-war crowds.

Audiences are larger and more attentive than before the war, and the opposition is weaker.

You think we are making more friends?

I think opposition from believers should be treated reasonably and with sympathy; ridicule only produces hostility and, while it may afford the already converted some amusement, it is likely to offend the newcomer and cause him to close his mind to our propaganda.

I know you are an atheist, but do you prefer it as an appellation?

For what it covers, yes. But I find the description "freethinker" or "rationalist" makes a wider appeal and is more acceptable, as implying an attitude which promises something positive, whereas "atheist" is taken to mean only a denial.

What is your assessment of the comparative value of the spoken word and the written?

While the spoken word is valuable as the means of reaching many who would not trouble to read on the subjects, the more lasting results are obtained through the distribution of literature, as readers are obviously the more intelligent, and they are the individuals prepared to go deeper into the matter.

How do you meet the Christian who attempts to enlist the support of his favourite scientists?

Though some scientists have a private religion, apart from their work, science itself is atheistic.

What is your reply to the opponent who adduces God as the creator of man?

One can show that the human being has his origin as a single cell like all other organisms and is nourished, sustained and developed by chemical compounds such as proteins, carbohydrates, mineral salts and so on, combined with the oxygen and with "our Father in Heaven," the sun; whereas the God Almighty of religion is merely a compound of human attributes, creativeness, love, anger, power, mercy and so forth, extended to infinity.

Do you come across many defenders of the Ten Commandments?

I usually find that such people only know one or two of them, generally the sixth and seventh; and they are ignorant of the fact that the Commandments were addressed specifically to the tribes who were "brought out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Their application to our day is an unfounded assumption.

How about the believer who derides the Atheist as having nothing to show comparable with Christian social institutions?

The obvious reply is to show that any benevolent action or institution is man's attempt to help mankind, and whether it is the believer or the unbeliever who builds and operates, it is the skill and knowledge of our fellow man that produces the beneficial results. And if the believer's God is the Creator, then the institutions such as hospitals are man's efforts to correct God's faults. If God creates disease germs, it is man who invents the antiseptics which destroy them.

What of those who say they need something in place of their religion?

I point out that in every case without exception, where a religious doctrine is put forward, science and human reason have a far more satisfying alternative.

Are you optimistic about the prospects of Secularism?

Of Secularism, yes. Of organised Secularism, no. While there are many who are in agreement with our views, only a minority will bestir themselves to take an active part in the furtherance of our objectives. Secularism is the true working philosophy of life, aiming at a high standard of culture, and I am convinced that it will eventually supersede all the old beliefs of mankind. And though at present few are preaching it, millions are practising it and are thereby helping towards the realisation of the secularist objective, a better world.

And finally a few tips for new speakers.

I advise sincerity without solemnity. They can get confidence by specialising on some aspect of freethought, and getting thoroughly versed in it. Never pretend to know all the answers; be friendly with the audience and give them some credit for being intelligent. Remember that not all religious people are fools. Some of them are potential freethinkers because they are already taking religion seriously enough to attend a freethought meeting. In time they may come to replace fancy by fact, superstition by science, and God by truth. So above all, use persuasion, don't rant. And know when it's time to stop.

NEXT WEEK

OSCAR WILDE UP TO DATE

By C. G. L. DU CANN

CATHOLIC COUNTER-REFORMATION OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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chancery!—recognised that the *evolution* of man's *body* may be a fact, and it is permissible to Catholic scholars to assume it; that the creation narratives in *Genesis* need not be taken *literally* and, most far-reaching concession of all, that our universe is some four thousand million years old; a far cry from the seven "days" of *Genesis*. Here we have left the Garden of Eden a *long* way behind! It should further be noted that all the above concessions necessitate many others, which Rome, no doubt, will announce in due course. For example, if *Genesis* is not to be taken literally, why stop at *Genesis*? If the *body* has "evolved," what about the "soul"?

It is a reasonably safe assumption to one familiar with the ways of Rome that should she last another millennium she will have transformed her entire theological system even more radically, perhaps, than the "modernists" demanded. For, as Isaac Taylor pointed out, what is there that cannot be "developed" by an *infallible* Church? Meanwhile, Pius X is to be pensioned off with a seat in Heaven; the Church would have shown more gratitude had it canonised Newman! Of one thing, at least, we can be certain; whatever dogmas the Church may teach in the Future, however far removed from its original teaching, will be presented to the Faithful with imperturbable assurance, as having been taught, "Everywhere, always, and by all" in the classic formula of St. Vincent of Lerins!

THE PAPACY AND FASCISM

If the reign of Pius X can be equated with the suppression of "Modernism," that of Pius XI (1922-39) can, equally, be equated with Fascism. For the Russian Revolution (1917) had, meanwhile, occurred (under Benedict XV, 1914-22), and a new enemy had arisen, which still remains the major foe of the Catholic Church—Communism. It has always been the practice of Rome to reserve her fire for her major enemy at any given time: successively, Protestantism, Liberalism, and now Communism. It was, primarily, to allay (what Marx called) "The Spectre of Communism" that Pius XI formed the Catholic-Fascist alliance, which was roughly co-eval with his reign—1922-39. During this period there was realised over wide areas that type of Clerical-Fascist policy, summarised by the great English historian, our immortal Buckle; that the absolute State dominates the human body, whilst the absolute Church dominates his mental activities; a kind of "Holy Alliance"; a co-operative of exploitation!

(To be continued)

Calumny

Calumny is the homage which dogmatism has ever paid to conscience. Even in the periods when the guilt of heresy was universally believed the spirit of intolerance was only sustained by the diffusion of countless libels against the mis-believer and by the systematic concealment of his virtues.—*Lecky*.

TIME TO JOIN THE N.S.S.



Confident that most of the readers of this paper who are not already members will gain a great deal of satisfaction from being "in the fighting movement," and only need some small inducement to make them join. The Secretary announces that a subscription paid by new members this year on or after the date of this issue will cover membership until 31st December, 1955. He invites all interested to send for a membership form at once.

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SABBATARIAN DEBATE

It is disappointing to learn that the talented author of "The Faults and Failings of Jesus Christ" (now out of print) is to debate with the prime organiser of narrow sabbatarian prejudice in this country merely to uphold the position that (1) the sabbath is made for man and not for the Lord's Day Observance Society, and (2) Jesus was himself a sabbath-breaker, and therefore an example to be followed. The former contention is a pointless variation of a reported saying of Jesus, in which I scored on the Pharisees, but in no way questioned the sabbatarian principle of a day set apart for holiness. The second has no force, since it relates to healing miracles such as to-day only quackery would claim and credulity accept.

Perhaps the National Liberal Club is not liberal enough to be able to listen to an uncompromising attack on the principle of sabbatarianism, which Jesus upheld. If Mr. Du Cann wants to sweep away the remaining stupid and irritating restrictions on Sunday freedom, he will find the Secularist position more effective than the one he has adopted. It is that the Sabbath was made by priests for dupes, that most people no longer want a holy sabbath, but a secular holiday, and that minority control over how they shall spend such a holiday is a scandal that no free people should tolerate.—Yours, etc.,

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

HUMILIATING THE GERMANS

May I strongly protest at Mr. W. G. Cook's statement that "after the First World War the German people were greatly humiliated." The German *people* (as with Hitler) were completely behind the Kaiser. They invaded France and Belgium and in the 4 years of war they killed 1½ millions French and nearly 1 million English—to say nothing of about 6 millions wounded. They destroyed, tortured and imprisoned hundreds of thousands of civilians. And all that Mr. Cook can say is that "Germans" "were greatly humiliated"!—Yours, etc.,

Obituary

I am sorry to have to report the death of yet another of our North-Eastern stalwarts, Mr. Robert Burns. He had been a very loyal member and worker for the great cause, and had won for himself a splendid reputation in the area. He had been a sea-going engineer, and had taken the freethought message to many lands in his time. During the days when I was opening out my efforts in and around Newcastle, he gave valuable assistance and was respected by all who knew him, friend or foe. He had in the course of his life helped to train hundreds of youths for engineering, and scores of them owe their success to the patience and encouragement and help afforded them by Robert Burns. A very well-read man, his advice was often asked for, and at all times ungrudgingly given. He will be sadly missed on Tyneside.

A secular oration was given by J. T. Brighton at the crematorium to honour his request, before a large gathering of friends and relatives. Our sympathy goes out to his widow and family. He was 70 years of age.

JOHN T. BRIGHTON.

Robert Speirs, a staunch member for many years of the Parent and Sheffield Branches of the N.S.S., died on Saturday, 18th September, in his seventy-eighth year, following an operation. He and his wife, who predeceased him five years ago, were both enthusiastic secularists, and his death has robbed the movement, and particularly the Sheffield Branch, of one who was always ready with help and support when needed. The undersigned travelled to Sheffield on the 21st to conduct the secular cremation service that was attended by members of the family, representatives of the Sheffield Branch, staff of Mr. Speirs' firm, friends and business associates. The deceased has left instructions that his collection of books is to come to the N.S.S.

P. V. M.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s.; postage 3d. (Tenth edition.)

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

CHRISTIANITY—WHAT IS IT? By Chapman Cohen. A criticism of Christianity from a not common point of view. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.