

The Freethinker

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WE have commented before in this column on the work of Professor Alfarcic, the eminent French Freethinker. Monsieur Alfarcic was an Honorary Vice-President of the recent International Freethought Congress at Luxemburg. Though unable to be present himself, a message from him formed one of the intellectual highlights of the Congress. A former Professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Strassburg, Professor Alfarcic's *Magnum Opus* is a monumental work on St. Augustine, the famous African theologian and philosopher of history, as interpreted by the Catholic Church. In recent years, this learned French Freethinker has produced a number of scholarly booklets on various aspects of Church history and ecclesiastical dogma; several of these have appeared in connection with the *Circle Ernest Renan*, an association of rationalistic scholars, in Paris. Prof. Alfarcic's last production, which appeared quite recently, was also published under the auspices of the "circle" named.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Age of Pope Joan

By F. A. RIDLEY

The Origins of the Papacy

Our historian's most recent study bears the title, *Comment se faisaient autrefois les papes*—"How Popes used to be elected." It deals with the origins of the Papacy and, in particular, with the frequently unedifying history of the Papacy during the European "Dark Ages" that followed the fall of the Roman Empire. This is the least known era in the history of the Papacy and, perhaps, the most scandalous. Even the later Popes of the Borgia era hardly equalled some of their predecessors, the scandalous doings of whom our French author learnedly—and luridly!—describes. Significantly, the most celebrated "Pope" of this era was actually the mythical product of one of these scandals. We refer to the celebrated "Pope Joan," "The feminine Anti-Christ," as the Protestant pamphleteers of the era of the Reformation used to describe the fabulous woman Pope.

According to Matthew

According to the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, the Papacy was founded by Peter, under a commission to rule the Church, which the first Bishop of Rome received directly from Christ. Prof. Alfarcic does not waste much time on this obviously interested legend; as he indicates, the famous text in the *Gospel according to St. Matthew*, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church," is an obvious interpolation inserted by, and in the interest of, the Church of Rome itself! The older "Pauline" Epistles, which are earlier than the Gospels, know nothing of the primacy of Peter, to whom, indeed, Paul is represented as being fiercely opposed. Neither, in the course of a long *Epistle to the Romans*, does Paul make any allusion to Peter's supposed connection with the Church of Rome. Whilst the two *Epistles of Peter* in our New Testament are Egyptian documents addressed from Babylon, an Egyptian town near the modern Cairo, the alleged Gospel of Peter

is, also, an Egyptian document. The Divine Origin of the Papacy was unknown to the original writers of the New Testament.

The Evolution of the Papacy

Actually, the evolution of the Papacy can be explained quite adequately by the contemporary history. Once established in Rome, the capital of the Empire, the local Christian congregation soon acquired a position of exceptional importance, due to its position in the metropolis. This outstanding position was reflected in the importance of its bishop. Nor was the bishop selected as the successor of Peter.

The earliest popes are legendary figures, about whom nothing is known for certain. And the very names of these depend on a doubtful ecclesiastical tradition unsupported by any secular evidence. Originally, there can be little doubt that the Bishop of Rome was merely, in modern phraseology, the chairman of the parish council. The organisation of the Early Church was Presbyterian rather than Catholic; the congregations themselves elected the clergy, including the Bishop. As Prof. Alfarcic indicates, it was not until the eleventh century, where his narrative ends, that the election of successive Popes was taken away from the people of Rome and confided, as ever since, to the College of Cardinals. In form, at least, the Early Papacy was a democratically elected organisation.

The Papacy and the Roman Empire

It was the Decline and eventual Fall of the secular Roman Empire which made the fortune of its ecclesiastical successor. Already in the Third Century, when the Decline was beginning, the Bishop of Rome was becoming an important figure. Perhaps the *real* founder of the Papacy as a going concern, was Pope Calixtus I (218-223) early in the third century. This Pope, who had previously been a convicted swindler, seems to have been the first Pope to begin the long connection between the Papacy and Big Business. In the Fourth Century, which witnessed the "conversion" of the Roman Empire, the Pagan historian, Ammianus Marcellinus, tells us that the Papacy was already a glittering prize, the recipient of this coveted post possessed enormous wealth and power. When the Roman Empire in Western Europe succumbed in the Fifth Century to the *Drang Nach Westen*—"pressure to the West"—of the German barbarians, the Pope succeeded the Emperor as the principal representative of Roman civilisation in the West. It was a civilisation which soon wore remarkably thin.

The Holy Roman Empire

The City of Rome at first was the capital of the barbaric Kingdom of the Goths. Then, later, it was re-conquered by the Byzantine Emperors of Constantinople, who claimed to be successors of the old Roman Empire. Then, it was menaced by the barbaric Lombards. The Popes during

this period existed precariously by playing off one against the other. Individually, they seem to have been a pretty poor lot. The most famous Pope of this period, Gregory "the Great" (sic), who sent missionaries to England and Germany, warmly congratulated the reigning Byzantine emperor on the particularly atrocious murder of his predecessor and his entire family. Most of the Popes of this period were Arabs or Syrians; by a curious coincidence, this was the self-same period in which Muhammed (570-632) founded the rival Arabic religion of Islam. The Muhammedan invasion of Italy added to the troubles of Rome. Finally, on Christmas Day, 800, the then Pope called in the aid of the King of the Franks, Charlemagne, and crowned him as the first "Holy Roman Emperor," an action which, perhaps, saved the Popes from destruction though it created a difficult problem for their successors.

"The Age of the Whores"

The period that immediately followed the coronation of Charlemagne was, perhaps, the most contemptible in the not very edifying annals of the "Vicars of Christ," as presented by our French author. It appears as a grim round of murder, mutilation, torture, intrigue, and debauchery. If the Popes here described were actually the best men of their time, one shudders to think what their contemporaries must have been like! It was this self-same age which an honest Catholic historian, Cardinal Baronius, later described as "The Age of the Whores"! To one such "Whore," it appears that we owe both the most famous story and best known "Pope" of the period in the question;

the famous and once widely accepted story of the female Pope, "Pope Joan." That no such person ever existed, appears, nowadays, to be generally accepted, even by Catholic scholars, e.g., the learned Jesuit, Fr. Herbert Thurston, has effectively "debunked" the story. However, the fable of a "Pope Joan," if actually fictitious, had a solid and most discreditable foundation in fact. It appears that Papal concubines actually presided over the Bacchanalian orgies which were periodically celebrated by the debauched Popes of the period. Two of these ladies, in particular, Theodora and Marozia, were alleged even to wear the Triple Crown and to receive the homage of the Papal Court at such convivial gatherings. "Pope Joan" represented the not very much exaggerated version of these goings on, which finally emerged as the story that we know. At any rate, the story was later to prove very useful to the Protestant critics of the Papacy!

Prof. Alfarcic does it Again!

Again, as so often in the past, Prof. Alfarcic has added to our knowledge of the history and dogmas of the Church. Certainly, the first thousand years of the "infallible" Papacy which he describes are not calculated to give us much confidence in its pretensions to a monopoly of Divine Truth. It must always be a source of permanent astonishment that educated Catholics can believe in an institution with such a despicable record. Perhaps, however, they take the same view as the Turkish convert in the later Rome of the Borgias, that only a really Divine Church could have survived such a succession of blackguards as the Popes who were its earthly rulers.

The Church's One Foundation

By ARTHUR GRANT

THE Church Hymnal tells us that the Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

The financial returns of the Church Commissioners show that there are other factors besides Jesus Christ which help to maintain the foundations of the Church of England.

We learn that the assets of the Church stand at £22,000,000 and the annual income of the Church is £8½ million. Yet St. Matthew tells us: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth."

The Commissioners own 1,000 farms. We are told in the Sacred book that "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." The Church, which preaches of the blessings of poverty, say that "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." No doubt if the figurehead of the Church decided to revisit the earth, He would not complain that He had no place to lay His head. The Church Commissioners would probably rent Him one of their numerous farms—at a nominal rent, of course. If He preferred city life He could be accommodated in one of their many flats. The Commissioners own more than 50,000 flats, office blocks, shops and factories. The rents from these increased by £144,000 last year. If the Commissioners could not spare Jesus Christ a flat they might fix Him up in a two-roomed maisonette with bathroom and kitchen, and guarantee a regular supply of hot water in case He wanted to wash the feet of some of His followers.

Seven million pounds are to be spent in increasing the stipends of parsons. It will be noticed that a clergyman never receives wages or a salary—it is always a stipend.

Not only are the clergy sure of a place in the heavenly choir but the new pension scheme for "the labourers in the Lord's vineyard" will make certain of a rest from their labours in this world that they so richly deserve.

We ought to feel grateful and happy that the followers of the lonely Nazarene, who have been pointing the road to heaven to us for so long, will not themselves be neglected in this world.

We read in the scriptures that "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." This must be a great consolation to the Old Age Pensioner whose allowance for food pans out at about 2s. 6d. a day. They, of course, can dutifully join in the hymn—

I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home,
Earth's but a desert drear, Heaven is my Home.

and for an encore they can sing

In that beautiful land I'll be
From earth and its cares set free;
My Jesus is there, He is gone to prepare
A home in that land for me.

Not being lucky enough to get one of the Church Commissioners many homes to live in, he must content himself with existence in a slum, because he knows that he is but a stranger here and Heaven is his home, and he also knows the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is preparing a home for him where he will live free of worries, twanging his harp and eating the choicest meals.

Thousands of churchmen tell us that the solution of the world's unrest is to return to the Christian-Socialism that Jesus taught. If Jesus Christ ever lived and preached this gospel it would be in direct opposition to capitalistic economy.

As usual the Church wants to have the argument both ways. When a war is on the God of Battles is preached and guns, ships, and planes blessed. When the hostilities have ceased the Prince of Peace who, during the war racket was kept in cold storage, is again restored to favour. What

(Continued on next page)

The Menace of Politico-Economic Religion

By MARSHALL J. GAUVIN

(Speech delivered at the Thirty-First International Freethought Congress, Luxembourg, September 5, 1954, by the president of the National Liberal League and associate editor of *The Truth Seeker*.)

MR. PRESIDENT.

AS the last speaker in this Congress, I hope I may be permitted to comment briefly on some of the remarks I have heard here. Grave fear of the Roman Catholic Church has been expressed by some of the speakers. Let me assure those of you who fear the mother church, and all of you, that in my judgment the old church can never again be what it once was.

The advance of civilization is creating forms of thought in whose atmosphere the Catholic Church cannot live. We are developing the while a technological, mechanical, industrial civilization, and an understanding of the world in which the touchstone of all truth is science; and in this scientific approach to reality, the doctrines and claims of the old church, and of all religion, indeed, must progressively shrink and lose their influence.

In truth, we are confronted to-day with a situation very different from anything previously known in the history of Christianity. For the days of almost universal ignorance are gone. We are living in times of a considerable degree of popular school education, of thousands of books and pamphlets, or the daily newspaper, and of widespread free discussion of all important questions. And along these avenues of culture, in spite of the reactionary influence of the churches, there are coming into the world more reasonable judgments than were known to our fathers.

Gone are the hosts of good and evil spirits that once were believed to influence the lives of human beings. Gone are the curse of pope and the threat of priest and preacher before which men and women quailed in fear. Science is teaching all but the most ignorant that the performances of nature are orderly—that sunshine and rain, and fire and frost, and plenteous crops when they come and famine when it comes, depend upon the nature of things, and cannot be influenced by prayers to God or to his virgin mother. And philosophy, or common sense, if you will, tells men more and more plainly to look to themselves for help; and that what has happened in the past will be pretty closely repeated when the circumstances are nearly the same in the future.

So rationality as to the nature of the world and the claims of religion is growing the while among Catholics and Protestants alike. Thousands of priests and preachers participate in this development of reason; and though the Catholic Church and the more conservative Protestant churches struggle to keep the human mind within the old faith, the thought of mankind is surely outgrowing the teachings of what is called supernatural religion.

During the dark and dreary centuries through which the world has passed, it was easy enough for a despotic, persecuting church to hold the thinking of mankind in leash. But growing science and intelligence using the Reformation, political revolutions, industrialism, popular education and increasing freedom have created a new world—a more liberal, secularized world; and in this free world of wider knowledge and better living, the absurd doctrines of the churches find themselves more and more severely challenged by growing common sense.

The churches in America to-day are themselves torn with every degree of unbelief. Every intelligent priest and preacher knows that the Christian religion logically requires belief in a small one-world universe, in man created a per-

fect being a few thousand years ago, in a personal devil at war with a personal God, in the Bible as God's inspired word, in an everlasting hell of torture as the destiny of all but a few who will be saved from it.

But thousands of American priests and preachers do not believe these things. They are informed and intelligent enough to know that the universe is the home of infinite hosts of suns and planets; that man is the product of millions of years of life's development; that the Bible is made up largely of myths and legends; that there is no devil; that the human mind can have no knowledge or even thought of a God; that heaven is only a vague perhaps, and hell but a nightmare of revenge.

These thoughts, increasingly shared by the pulpit and the pew, are filling the American churches with doubt and unbelief.

Some years ago, the Protestant churches in America were openly divided between the fundamentalists, who insisted on the old time religion with its crucified God and its hell, and the modernists, who accepted and preached many of the views of Freethought. The people talked of what they called the "war in the churches." Then the clergy discovered that their advertising their differences and calling one another names would injure the churches, and they stopped it. Modernism, however, has continued to spread in the churches; and the fundamentalists, many of them, are adopting more progressive views. There is very little orthodox Christianity left in the real beliefs of such clergymen as Bishop Oxnam of the Episcopal Church, and Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, and scores of other religious leaders.

The truth is that the American Protestant churches are honeycombed with unbelief. And it can hardly be that the situation is very different in Europe. With us, certainly, the whole edifice of Protestant orthodoxy is crumbling. Many churches seek to help themselves by having picture shows after the Sunday evening service. Some have public speaking classes and other secular group activities. Efforts are made by some clergymen to induce bright young men who have no belief in religion at all to enter the ministry; the purpose being to keep the institution going.

Largely permeated with hypocrisy as it is, religion in America is big business. And nothing could be more pathetic than much of the preaching. Catholic preaching seldom rises above sermons on the glory of Mary, the goodness of Joseph, the duty of coming to confession. Protestant preaching deals chiefly with the goodness of Jesus. Except among the more ignorant congregations, the doctrine of hell is never mentioned.

The Catholic Church is doing its utmost to herd its people as much as possible into a separate group. Catholics have their own clubs and unions and groups of every kind.

(To be concluded)

THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

(Concluded from page 402)

a ghastly swindle the whole business is even if the Church story was true.

Jesus Christ was an itinerant carpenter, whose pals were fishermen and poor folk, who preached of the blessings of poverty.

Now we have Bishops' Palaces and a millionaire State Church that does not pay Income Tax—and all for what? To perpetuate a colossal lie and maintain the world's biggest hoax.

This Believing World

As "Divine" Healing or Healing by Spirit Doctors is making rather a splash in the news these days, we gladly turn to the latest "investigator." Mr. Godfrey Winn gives in the *Sunday Dispatch* the case of a boy who was cured of leukæmia—an incurable disease—and submitted to the Archbishop's Commission on Divine Healing. It was Mr. Harry Edwards who was responsible for the cure, and he gave Mr. Winn at once the name of the doctor in charge of the case. As this doctor was a personal friend of Mr. Winn, it was easy to consult him. And what did the doctor say? "Yes, that boy was suffering from leukæmia, but in his case it took a form known to have recessions. We treated him with X-rays at the hospital, and we believe ourselves that it was this treatment which brought about his present recovery." But will this exposure of the claims of "Divine" or "Spirit" Healing have the slightest effect on true believers? Not on your life.

Then take the investigation carried out by a London psychiatrist, Dr. Rose, of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, who interviewed patients and checked their medical records. He "failed to find any evidence that the 'laying on of hands'" can cure disease, and found that "the state of their bodies was really unchanged in most cases" after treatment by a "spirit healer." In fact, many of the people who felt "improved" a little were still *undergoing hospital treatment*. People who threw away crutches at meetings were only temporarily relieved. As we have said many times in these columns—only when "laying on of hands" either by a parson or "spirit" healer can clear out patients in wards in hospitals can it be said that "spirits" cure incurable diseases.

At last we have a parson lashing out at what is rapidly becoming a national institution—T.V. The Rev. J. H. Jacques, Rector of Witham in Lincolnshire, asked his congregation why they were content to spend their lives "looking at this dreary rubbish." This must be a smack in the eye for the many entertainers earning good money helping to entertain millions of viewers every evening as well as for the actors and playwrights who are responsible for the dramatic items.

But, of course, it is all a question of competition in business. Mr. Jacques can't get children for choir practice—they much prefer "Andy Pandy" or "Muffin the Mule" to praising Jesus in—what must be to them—unintelligible hymns. And their elders find angry politicians ranting at each other in "In the News" far more interesting than the quarrels of Paul and Barnabas, to say nothing of the "intellectual" quality of so many Sunday sermons and their utter fatuity.

The Rev. B. Graham—known more affectionately as Billy—claims that "he had drawn four million listeners to his revival meetings this year in Europe and the United States"—and we have no doubt that this is true. But exactly how many converts has he made? Not converts from Christianity, but converts from Freethought? Of course he had "listeners"—we listened ourselves—but we registered only extreme contempt for his infantile and fantastic nonsense. What good can belief in Devils, Hell, Angels, Heaven, and Miracles do? The only good we can think of is that there are mugs enough to pay Mr. Graham very well for spouting Fundamentalist superstition.

Oh dear, this secularisation of the Sabbath Day! It is dreadful for genuine Christians like the Rev. W. H. Thomas of Needham Market to find so many shops and cinemas open on the Holy Day—he would have all shops and

cinemas shut on Sundays and then, as they did when he was a boy, everybody would go to church. Mr. Thomas must be living in a world a few "light years" away from this one. Those happy days when everybody went to church—or were forced to go—have gone for ever. Most of us these days prefer a good exciting gangster film or, in summer, a day out at the sea or country side. We wonder how far Needham Market is away from civilisation?

The Bishop of Durham is terribly upset. He has just discovered that our national life is no longer moulded by the Bible—so unlike that great Golden Age one hundred years ago when every house in Britain owned a Bible, and we were all a God-fearing and Bible-soaked nation. And now? "In thousands of homes," he moaned the other week, "there was no Bible, and in many more the dust rested upon it." Alas, how true—though in actual fact, as a good Family Bible made an excellent resting place for the family teapot, it was always regularly dusted. Perhaps our own *Bible Handbook* which has been a "best seller" for nearly eighty years may have had no small share in debunking the Precious Word.

N.S.S. Executive Committee

8th December, 1954

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Ebury, Taylor, Hornibrook, Shaw, Johnson, Corstorphine, Barker, King, and the Secretary.

Fifteen new members were admitted to the Parent, Manchester, Bradford, West London, Birmingham, Nottingham and North London Branches. It was reported that Mr. Adrian Brunel had accepted an invitation to attend the Annual Dinner as Guest of Honour. The Dinner Sub-Committee submitted alternative proposals for a Dance and Entertainment combined and a full Concert to follow the Dinner, together with letters received in response to a paragraph published in *The Freethinker* on the subject. The Concert was chosen. The President and Secretary were appointed to represent the Society on the Committee of the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, which had not been active for some years. A proposal to advertise the N.S.S. in conjunction with an offer by the *New Statesman* of prizes for the best essays on "Faith and Reason" was approved. A gift from Miss E. H. Warner of a four-drawer oak card-index cabinet for use in the office was accepted with appreciation.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, *Secretary*.

SWINBURNE'S ATHEISM

As my antitheism has been so much babbled about, perhaps I may here say what I really think on religious matters. Having been as a child and boy brought up as a quasi-Catholic, of course I went in for that as passionately as for other things (e.g.) well nigh to unaffected and unashamed ecstasies of adoration when receiving the Sacrament, then when this was naturally stark dead and buried, it left nothing to me but a turbid Nihilism; for a Theist I never was. I always felt by instinct and perceived by reason that no man could conceive of a *personal* God except by crude superstition or else by true supernatural revelation; that a natural God was the absurdest of all human figments; because no man could by other than apocalyptic means—by other means than a violation of the laws and order of nature—conceive of any other sort of Divine person than a man with a difference—man with some qualities intensified and some qualities suppressed—man with the good in him exaggerated and the evil excised. This, I say, I have always seen and avowed since my mind was ripe enough to think freely.—LETTERS OF CHARLES ALGERNON SWINBURNE, Vol. 1, pp. 208-9.

The history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom.—HEGEL.

NEXT WEEK

"HOW GREEK SCIENCE PASSED TO THE ARABS"

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE FREETHINKER

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Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (*Home and Abroad*): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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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.

F. M. BLAKE.—Sorry, but "R.C." and "A.C." are only as different as Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY, K. LIDAKS, J. TOUDIC, W. W. VAUGHAN, F. BURGESS. Many thanks for letters and cuttings.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, December 19, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, December 19, 7 p.m.: Open Discussion: "Christianity in Modern Society."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute, Second Floor).—Sunday, December 19, 6-45 p.m.: H. DAY, "Looking Forward to Christmas."

Junior Discussion Group (South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall).—Friday, December 17, 7-15 p.m.: Major G. ADCOCK, "The Evolution of Sex."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 19, 6-30 p.m.: T. MOSLEY, "Marx and Spencer."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, December 19, 2-30 p.m.: Councillor B. M. KEEGAN, "The Conservative Party: Its Faith and Policy."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, December 19, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Mithra and the Christmas Festival."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1, five minutes from Edgware Road Station).—Sunday, December 19, 7-15 p.m.: ERIC KENTON (Editor, *South London Press*), "Freedom of the Press."

Notes and News

Here is an excellent suggestion from America. Meanwhile *The Freethinker* is available by postal subscription, 3 dollars 50 cents:—

THE FREETHINKER IN THE U.S.A.

In connection with the current effort to place *The Freethinker* on a sound financial footing I believe it might be worth while to try to introduce the paper to a wider circle of American readers. There is a great upsurge of official religion in America at the present time in conjunction with the current anti-Communist campaign. The Post Office Department has recently issued a stamp bearing the words: In God We Trust. The words "under God" have just been added to the official pledge of allegiance to the flag.

All of this is greatly to the disgust of American freethinkers and most liberals. Yet, as you know,

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £647 3s. 3d.; F. W. Harper, £1 1s.; McNeil, £1; A. Addison, £1; A. George, 6s.; A. L. Jones (Southern Rhodesia), 16s.; E. Scholl (U.S.A.), 6s. 6d.; P. M. Jackson, 7s. 6d.; Dr. W. H. Cilliers (South Africa), £2 2s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; A. E. Stringer (Dublin), 16s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; D. F. Gloak, £1. Total to date, £656 1s. 9.

Donations should be sent to "The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund" and cheques made out accordingly.

the American freethought press is weak. If Americans could be made aware of the existence of a high class, uncompromisingly anti-religious weekly through a modest announcement run regularly in some of the progressive papers I am of the opinion that a substantial number of them would want to subscribe.

H. A. DAVIS.

Illinois, U.S.A.

The Roman Church and Dutch Socialists

By M. G. WARFFEMIUS

BEFORE the war, the Dutch Socialist Party sometimes showed anti-religious tendencies. However, they were only seemingly anti-religious: in reality, they were directed against the use of theological doctrines and church organisation for political party purposes. Thus the political struggle was often transferred to the field of religion, so hampering true insight both in religious and in political matters.

In the reconstruction of the Dutch Socialist Party after the war, it shed some characteristics that were out of date and not essential to Socialism. Moreover, during and even before the war, many church-going people realised that the attack from the Christian armoury did not penetrate to the essence of Socialism. They joined the S.D.A.P. (the pre-war Dutch Labour Party). After this war, this party was liquidated and the P.V.D.A. was formed in its place and acquired support from the church-going part of the population. Of about 30 Labour M.P.s there are four Roman Catholics as well as three Protestants and three Humanists; while others are either Liberal Christians or not classifiable. In the Upper House there is a Catholic, a Protestant and two Humanists as well as a number of Liberal Christians and members indifferent to religion. In many Town Councils there are several Roman Catholics as representatives of the Dutch Labour Party, while there are also some on the general committee of the party.

This new development in Holland ("Doorbraak"—or break-through—as we express it) with its concentration on those common ethical principles which unite men rather than on the dogmas that divide them has naturally worried the political parties attached to a particular religion. The Roman Catholic Church has now suddenly intervened in the situation. On Ascension Day this year a booklet was handed out in all churches: "The Roman Catholic in contemporary public life." This booklet was an episcopal letter from the seven Dutch Bishops to their faithful. As such it might be a purely clerical matter. But in this serious publication the believers were urged to determine their place in public life in accordance with the regulations given by the bishops. They were called upon to do their duty as Catholics and obey their bishops.

Among these regulations are some about the membership of political parties and trade unions, about listening to radio broadcasts and reading certain newspapers. For

instance, it is not allowed to be a member of trade unions belonging to the N.V.V. (the Socialist T.U.C.) at the peril of the sacraments and funeral rites being withheld. It is not actually forbidden to be a member of the Labour Party but people are seriously warned against it. The alleged dangers resulting from this membership are pointed out. Listening regularly to the broadcasting of the V.A.R.A. (the Socialist Broadcasting Corporation) is forbidden, as is the reading of Socialist papers. There is an ardent appeal to maintain Catholic unity in every field. What this, among other things, boils down to is that he who obeys the bishops ought to be a member of the K.V.P. (Catholic Party) and the K.A.B. (Catholic trade unions).

The episcopal letter says:

"We assert, firstly, that a 'break-through' to the P.V.D.A. is the breakdown of one's own Catholic Party.

"Secondly, that the consequence of such a 'break-through' cannot be imagined, especially as regards the realisation of a Catholic social programme on which so much depends. This is even more important, because this 'break-through' will not be limited to the political party but will undoubtedly spread to the Socialist trade unions, the Press and other fields of public life.

"Thirdly, that this party does not offer any basis or guarantee for a really Christian policy.

"Fourthly, that the membership of Catholics of this party entails serious responsibility, because of the support this party gives, directly or indirectly, to non-Christian trends."

The gravity of this attack on the political freedom of Catholics will be appreciated in Great Britain which has long thrown off the pretensions of the Roman Catholic Church to interfere in civic matters. At a time when democratic institutions are threatened by totalitarian Communism or alternatively a relapse into the pre-war domination of "big business," it is tragic that the minds of men should be turned away from the unity of purpose which they have found in the ethical principles of Socialism. There are, however, signs that the Dutch Bishops may have over-reached themselves in this attack on the political freedom of their followers. The Catholics in the P.V.D.A. have thought about their position and have stated unambiguously that a return to the K.V.P. is out of the question.

One reaction to the Bishops' letter is unexpected and deplorable as it emphasises the danger to the unity of the workers. The leader of the Protestant Trade Unions regrets that Protestantism has not been powerful enough to publish a similar letter to its members. It seemed to him a good weapon in the fight against the Dutch Labour Party, the free trade unions and Socialism. But not all Protestants think like that. Many have uttered warnings that the letter impairs freedom of thought.

It is too soon to judge of the full results of this attack on the industrial and political liberty of Dutch Catholics. Probably many Roman Catholic electors will submit and make decisions on grounds other than their real political insight and the merits of the case. This means a degeneration in Dutch democracy. It will also confuse the discussion between Socialists and non-Socialists. Lastly, it will harm the Catholic Church itself. Many Catholics will not be able to bear the compulsion of acting against their better judgment and may leave the Church.

The more carefully the Christian legislation of the (Roman) Empire is examined . . . the more evident, I think, it will appear that the golden age of Roman Law was not Christian, but Pagan.
—LECKY.

To assert that Christianity communicated to man moral truths previously unknown, argues on the part of the asserter either gross ignorance or else wilful fraud.—BUCKLE.

Dirge for the Falcon

I.

High on a mountain in the trackless south,
Above a deep, damp gorge, a grass-snake lay,
A reptile with no neck and harmless mouth,
A legless lizard, so the savants say;
Three feet in length, with scales of greenish-grey,
Upon a grass-grown shelf, curled in a knot,
Basking, he enjoyed the noon-day heat.

Beneath that shelf a foaming torrent roars
Down that ravine, rushing to the sea;
Over great boulders, a mighty river pours,
By white foam covered, howling angrily,
From steep escarpments seeking to be free
In the vast ocean, where all rivers die,
Or lose, at any rate, identity.

Suddenly there dropped from out the sky
A stricken falcon wounded in his breast;
With feathers streaked with blood, and sharp, shrill cry,
He fell on to a ledge, as on a nest.
The grass-snake frightened was, and much distressed;
He crept away that hidden he might lie,
But soon he understood the bird must die.

He crept up nearer to the wounded bird;
A pause, then hissed he straight into his eye,
"Well, are you dying?" query most absurd,
It patent was that hapless bird would die.
"Yes, I am dying," the falcon made reply,
"I saw the sky, fought bravely, happy was;
Poor thing, you cannot know that joy the sky is."
"Know of the sky? That lonely, empty space!
Tell me, good Falcon, how could I creep there?
Wonderful I find this pleasant place:
Warm and damp, it suits me, but in the air
I should be cold; no, I prefer it here!"
Thus answered grass-snake to the once-free bird,
And chuckled over ravings so absurd.

And thought he thus: "When life draws to its end,
Flying or creeping, all return to dust,
All living-things will then lie in the ground
From which all came; return because they must
Come back to Mother Earth, dust unto dust."
And while he mused, that free, courageous bird
Looked round the gorge, then spoke; the snake this
heard.

"Oh, could I once more rise into the sky
To press against my breast my crewhile foe,
My blood would choke him; I content would die,
For I the bliss of combat then would know,
And not in vain my blood would from me flow."
The grass-snake thought, "He truly loves the sky
To wish to fly there yet before he die!"

He to the free bird offered this advice,
"Move to the gorge's brim, and yourself throw
Down to the torrent, and within a trice
The answer to your longings you will know;
Whether your wings sustain, that you may go
Unto your element and live awhile,
Or perish quickly in this deep defile."

The falcon started up and proudly cried,
"I thank you, Snake," and struggled on his way
To the sheer drop; he either flew or died,
And if he flew his end would then be gay;
Falling, or flying, death won anyway.
Down the declivity, on slimy stones
He slipped, but his eyes flashed, despite his groans.

The edge achieved, with a full-breasted sigh,
 And blazing eyes, he spread his mighty wings,
 He, ere he sprang, cast one look on the sky,
 With one last thought of all the goodly things
 His aerial life to the free falcon brings:
 He leapt; fell like a stone, striking jagged crags;
 And reached the torrent, smashed and torn to rags.

The torrent caught him, washed away his blood,
 Battered and smashed, it whirled his corse away;
 In liquid clothing, made of foam and mud,
 It rushed the falcon headlong to the sea;
 His end most certainly was far from gay.
 The waves him greet with melancholy roar,
 And the wind sighed, and he was seen no more.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

(To be concluded)

Review

By G. H. TAYLOR

Essentials of Humanism, by H. J. Blackham (Humanist Thought and Action pamphlets, No. 1. Published at 1s. 3d. by the Ethical Union, Stanton Coit House, Prince of Wales Terrace, W.8).

SINCE the war Humanist movements have been formed in Holland and India, and these have joined existing movements in America and England to form an international union whose first congress was held at Amsterdam in 1952. In preparation for a second congress Humanists are busy putting their house in order by the preparation of policies and programmes. In U.S.A., where the late John Dewey did much to encourage a world movement, the work of formulating a theoretical structure has been advanced by Corliss Lamont (*Humanism as a Philosophy*). In England the prophet of the new Humanism is Mr. H. J. Blackham.

In the past, the writings of Humanists have too often been characterised by harmless moralising and a general vagueness, containing little to disagree with and nothing to get excited about. Religious piety minus religious doctrine. One comes to regard a Humanist as a disappointed mystic—disappointed in finding nothing to be mystical about.

It is therefore refreshing that Mr. Blackham's expositions always contain less air and more meat; less sermonising and more body and purpose. In his impeccable prose he lays down in 20 pages a general substructure of Humanist theory.

He sees Humanism as "by no means the easy state of those who have lapsed from the beliefs and the demands of traditional religion." One can only regard this as a brave reading of the short history of humanist organisations, and a charitable estimate of most humanists. It seems hardly to be in accord with the facts. But then, Mr. Blackham is not overawed by facts. The facts "being settled does not settle how we shall live with them."

"Nothing will serve for truth but empirical, corrigible scientific investigation. The mischief of other claims to truth cannot be exaggerated." That being understood, what is really important, he rightly contends, is our *attitude* to the facts, and so, for Mr. Blackham, Humanism becomes "a hard-won faith which has ceaselessly to justify itself in argument and action."

But this is a ticket which covers Secularism and all secular progress in the wider sense. As applied, more narrowly, to the Humanist movement, it is a bold myth. But even a myth can be a springboard. Let us therefore grant Mr. Blackham his attitude to the facts and look for its justification in the new-style Humanist action.

Mr. Blackham looks to "science and democratic plan-

ning on a world scale" for the betterment of human society.

"Planning is as much feared and abused to-day as science is, and its case requires the same careful restatement by Humanists. It is the administrative counterpart of science, both because it is itself scientific in technique and also because science is destructive unless prompted and controlled by a social initiative."

It is the task of Humanism, he contends, to ensure that Planning does not lose sight of the individual, because nations and policies are to be "judged by their effects on the fulfilment of individuals."

"For the peace of the world will never be established by dramatic top-level decisions—If the cold war ended tomorrow its equivalent would soon enough take its place; there is no escape from the long-term problem, which is a personal task. Human behaviour is largely a response to situations, but situations are largely the outcome of what persons are and do. Peace and civilisation cannot be made out of helpless and frustrated persons; they are the work of free and creative persons, and of none other."

In the production of such persons "Humanism has its own part to play: in promoting the development and influence of the social sciences." And "unless Humanists now strive to gain the initiative the world will be made by other influences." It is for the Humanist to save this age which now threatens to end with a bang.

Humanists do not set out to "disseminate a body of doctrine," we learn, much less to attack the doctrines of others.

The convenience of having no doctrines, of course, is that there are none to attack. The critic is somewhat disarmed. He can, at least, be a friendly spectator. Forward to the Second Congress!

On Censorship Again

One enchanting characteristic shared by all Totalitarians is personal abuse, and I have no intention of following Mr. W. Auld in this. His article can be judged by his criticism of what I said—that you cannot in Russia give a reasoned attack on Lenin on the wireless—"And in Great Britain you cannot give a reasoned lecture *against* God or the Church on the wireless." Wherein lies the difference, asks Mr. Auld? Now, is not that clever of him? The B.B.C. is more or less dominated by religion and so long as most of our population profess religion, so long will the B.B.C. give it to them. But outside the B.B.C., I *can* give a reasoned attack on God Almighty Jehovah and Jesus and their teaching. I *can* get a book published against them. I *can*, indoors and outdoors, attack their religion, and lecture to my heart's content against Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or any other religion. And in Russia or Poland you cannot attack God Almighty Lenin, or Marx, or Stalin, or Malenkov, in a book or article or lecture. My whole point was that in England there is less "censorship" these days than in any other country in the world, and if Mr. Auld did not know it before, he knows it now. The rest of his diatribe is quite irrelevant and not worth even referring to.

H. CUTNER.

Correspondence

INSOMNIA—AN APPEAL

It is now long since I contributed to your columns for I have been addicted to the devilish complaint of insomnia. Nobody seems to know any cure and one does not die of it; one must live with it, but it takes all the savour out of life and makes one interested in nothing but the possibility of sleep.

It is possible that some reader of *The Freethinker* who has suffered similarly can suggest a cure or effective pills. If so, I should be greatly obliged to hear from him at 71, Union Road, London, S.W.4.—Yours, etc.,

WM. KENT.

ATHEISTS IN HOSPITAL

I have noted that an eminent member of the N.S.S. recently entered a hospital as a patient and an atheist. I only hope he has as much fun as I did because I also entered as an atheist, and the consequence was I had every type of religion given to me, which gave me the opportunity to discuss the matter with all of them. This was an opportunity I could never have had in any other way, and in such a comfortable way, if you can say being in plaster from head to foot was comfortable. At least I was in bed, and *they* came to me.

After a few months they all gave me up except an old Church

of England parson. He was a great sport, he tried to the end, and we used to exchange jokes, and mine were so "Wicked" that he used to go and tell the doctors and nurses and especially the library people who used to come to me afterwards and tell me one. My jokes were usually about religion in some way and that pleased the old man because he had never heard anything like them before. I am quite sure he learned more from me than I did from him: he spent much of the time with me that he should have used on saving the other patients' souls.

I do hope that if our N.S.S. comrade finds it difficult to read he will at least have some fun with those people. They are sure to try to convert him, and if he can make them think as they have never done before he will then decide it was worth while to be in hospital for a time. I feel I did quite a bit of good work, and it took my mind off the awful pain. You see, God didn't attempt to help me, or perhaps he did by sending me so many of his servants! They did indeed comfort me. I don't think I gave them much comfort, but I gave them food for thought.—Yours, etc.,

(Mrs.) KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS.

FLYING SAUCERS

I suggest that if you had read *Flying Saucers from Outer Space* by Major Donald Keyhoe, of the U.S. Air Force intelligence service, you might have hesitated before italicising the last three words in K. F. Davidson's letter.

The alternative to believing these inaptly named objects to be from another world, is to believe that a possibly hostile power has evolved machines capable of flight at speeds up to 9,000 m.p.h. and at altitudes up to 60 miles, as recorded by radar.

It seems reasonably certain such another world does not exist in the solar system, but there is ample room elsewhere, and planets are known to revolve round some of the nearest of the 30,000 million or so stars in our little corner of the universe, although the distances to our idea seem prohibitive.

The official U.S. view quoted in the above book is that if the saucers are intelligently controlled machines they must come from another world. The data in the book, which includes much evidence from highly-trained pilots and observers, leave little room for doubt that they are such machines.

It has just been announced that Avro Canada have abandoned the project of building flying saucers after spending 100 million

dollars in 18 months. They, however, went far enough to prove that they could fly, which is interesting as the experiment embodied the propulsive power believed to be used by the hypothetical visitors from outer space, which is entirely different from any in use in our aircraft.

I entirely agree with K. F. Davidson that the words "credulity" and "gullibility" were out of place, pending further evidence on this subject.—Yours, etc.,

G. S. BROWN.

[Travelling at the speed of light, 186,000 miles a second, it would take the space-voyagers $4\frac{1}{2}$ years to come from the nearest star to the earth. Some journey!—Ed.]

INTELLIGENCE AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

I fully accord with what Mr. Collin Coates writes on this subject. My purpose was simply to show the important part emotion frequently has in determining a person's beliefs, irrespective of his innate intelligence.

As to Miss Belchamber's point about the need to face the complete truth, I think that no one—believer or unbeliever—will disagree. Issue is joined only on what constitutes the complete truth. My view is that the truth lies largely with the freethinker. But it is well to be charitable and concede that truth may have more than one facet. The religious experience of the mystic cannot be lightly dismissed as intellectual error. To one who feels about life broadly as I do, the explanation of existence—as far as we can hope to explain existence—in purely rational terms is not difficult to accept. It is otherwise with the man of mystical cast of mind to whom, let us remember, the creeds of the churches often mean little or nothing. Say what I may, I can as soon persuade him of the rightness of my thinking as he can persuade me of the rightness of his.—Yours, etc.,

G. I. BENNETT.

[This correspondence must now close.—EDITOR.]

CHRISMYTHRAS

I think picture postcards of the head of Mithras are still on sale. Would it not be a good idea to purchase a number of these and send them to all and sundry (not forgetting the Archbishop of Cant. . .) expressing the wish of a Merry Chrismythras and a Happy Freethinking New Year!—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE HILBINGER.

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