

The Freethinker

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EVER since the scribe Ezra commanded the Jews to put away their heathen wives and to consider themselves as a "Chosen Race" Israel has been paying the penalty. In our own time, we have seen "The Chosen Race"—Semitic version—nearly exterminated in Europe by the Nazi "Chosen Race"—Aryan version. A hardly less terrible, and much more persistent enemy of the Jews has been the Roman Catholic Church, itself allegedly founded by a Jew! The attitude of Catholic fanaticism throughout the ages has been accurately summarised in the remark of one of Anatole France's fictitious characters, a French Catholic officer: "Wretched men, you have killed my god, and now I am going to kill you!"

The Spanish Inquisition

It is accordingly a matter of much interest to find a Jewish view of perhaps the most terrible engine of repression ever directed against the Jews, prior to the Nazi regime, with its gas-chambers and death-camps. This was the celebrated Spanish Inquisition, the most famous, or infamous, organ of religious persecution known in the annals of mankind. For though the Spanish Inquisition, like its still more ruthless successor, the Gestapo, was not exclusively organised to deal with the Jews, they, in both cases, were its principal victims. Moreover, in the case of the Spanish institution, the Inquisition originated as a kind of special ecclesiastical secret-police primarily dealing with the Jewish problem, which then assumed a special importance in the territories of "The Most Catholic Kings" of fifteenth-century Spain.

A Jewish View

Accordingly, it was with a special interest and pleasure that we recently had the opportunity to read *The Spanish Inquisition* by the distinguished Jewish scholar Mr. Cecil Roth. Mr. Roth's learned and penetrating study is actually, not a new book, but one that appeared originally in 1937. It is particularly timely. The fiery history of the Spanish Inquisition, indeed, represents a well-worn theme, upon which many historians have commented. But it is peculiarly apposite that a scientific historian of Jewish antecedents should comment from the point of view of his own people, upon an institution from which the Jews, whether considered primarily as a race or as a special religious cult, once suffered so grievously, and for so long. The Nazi regime, fortunately, only lasted for a matter of years. The horrors of the Spanish Inquisition were a matter of centuries.

The Problem of the "Marranos"

The Spanish Inquisition was set up or, rather, revived, since there was also a mediæval institution of a similar nature, at the end of the fifteenth century. This era also marked a decisive turning-point in Spanish history since it marked the end of the "Eight Hundred Years War"

(711-1492) to expel the Muslim Arabs and Moors from Spanish soil: Granada, the last Moorish kingdom, finally surrendered in 1492. The foundation of the Inquisition in this self-same period, was intimately connected with this political event. The Moors had left behind them a large Moorish and Jewish population only superficially converted to Christianity. In particular, this was so with regard to the "Marranos," or the converted Jews. This problem, to deal with which the Inquisition was originally created, was as much political as religious. For at this period the Turkish Empire was at the zenith of its power, and this great Muslim power virtually controlled the Mediterranean

Sea. Both the Moors and the Jews were regarded by the Christian Spaniards as a potential "Fifth Column," which might at any time, open the gates of Spain to the Muslim Turks, just as, nearly eight centuries before (711), the Jews had then opened the way for the original conquest of Spain by the Arab Muslims.

The Record of the Inquisition

The Inquisition itself was a purely Spanish institution which, though originally authorised by Rome, was effectively independent of the Vatican and, in practice, was closely linked with the Spanish Monarchy; though it is, perhaps, a moot point whether the State ran the Inquisition or the Inquisition the State. Certainly, there were periods when the Grand Inquisitor, the professional head of the institution, actually seemed to possess more power than the reigning Spanish monarch. The Inquisition lasted from its revival under Torquemada in 1480, until its official dissolution by order of the French conqueror of Spain, Napoleon, in 1808. Subsequent attempts to revive it proved unsuccessful; though we are informed by Mr. Gerald Brennan that the Carlist ultra-reactionaries even in the present century, placed upon their programme, the restoration of the Inquisition, "that august tribunal which angels brought down from Heaven."

The Policy of the Inquisition

On "the aims and objects" of the Inquisition, there has been a good deal of misunderstanding amongst its critics. The primary aim of the inquisitorial procedure was *not* to burn people alive in its lurid *autos da fé*, as is often supposed; paradoxically, every heretic burnt alive represented a confession of *failure*! For the professed aim of the Inquisition was to *save* souls from Hell, *not* to send them there! Successively, the Inquisition sought to save Spain from firstly, Jewish and Muslim converts who "relapsed" back to their original faiths, and later, from the Protestant Reformation, which was virtually exterminated throughout the Spanish world-empire, wherever the effective jurisdiction of the Inquisition ran. For this reason, the inquisitors sought by intimidation and torture to break the will of their victims. It was only where they *failed* to accom-

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Spanish Inquisition —A Jewish View

By F. A. RIDLEY

plish this end, that the unrepentant heretic was finally consigned to the flames; from, we repeat, the point of view of the inquisitors themselves, an open confession of failure! It must also, of course, be remembered that many of the prosecutions conducted by the dreaded Tribunal were really more *political* than religious in character: the Spanish Monarchy used the machinery of the Holy (*sic*) Office to get rid of inconvenient *political* critics.

An Apology for the Inquisition

With an objectivity that reflects infinite credit upon a Jewish scholar, Mr. Roth discusses the good, as well as the bad points in the aims and procedure of the Spanish Inquisition. Actually there is not very much that can be said on behalf of Torquemada and of his successors. Their cold-blooded fanaticism corresponded with the prevailing ideas of their contemporaries; probably this was so. Their procedure was superior to that of some political regimes in our own day. Torture could only be inflicted under the supervision of an inquisitor and in conformity with a *written* code, which *did* contain a *few* humane features, viz., people suffering from rupture had to wear a truss under torture; except in the case of "relapsed" heretics, heretics charged a *second* time, for whom there could be no pardon. The accused could purchase his or her life by a timely recantation even at the last moment at the stake. This is more than could be said, say for the Gestapo. However, it does not amount to much of a defence. About the only concrete case of humane procedure which Mr. Roth can advance in extenuation for the horrors of the "Holy" Tribunal, is that the Inquisition did show some common sense in dealing with cases of the then ubiquitous crime of "witchcraft" as and when compared with a contemporary Protestant land like Scotland. For example, relatively few witches were executed in the *autos da fe* of the Spanish Inquisition. This represents a solitary instance of humanity.

Some Statistics

The records of the Inquisition are far from exact. But a critical computation, which, according to our authority, renders it probable that 31,912 heretics were actually burned at the stake in Spain alone between 1480 and 1808, is not much exaggerated. For the small country of Portugal, a more reliable estimate amounts to 1,808 actually burned alive in about two centuries. This figure, of course, is relatively small compared with the total number of tortures, imprisonments and confiscations inflicted throughout the same period of activity. Again, these figures have been far surpassed in our own time by the Gestapo, with its untold millions of victims, Jewish and otherwise. However, this again is hardly an adequate defence of the "august tribunal." As Mr. Roth himself very aptly remarks, "the institution was an abomination on the face of the earth, whether its victims were reckoned in hundreds or in thousands."

FOR LIBERTY

2. WENDELL PHILLIPS

If there is anything that cannot bear free thought, let it crack.

Nothing but Freedom, Justice and Truth is of any permanent advantage to the mass of mankind. To these, society, left to itself is always tending.

"The right to think, to know, to utter" as John Milton said, is the dearest of all liberties. Without this right there can be no liberty to any people; with it there can be no slavery.

The manna of liberty must be gathered each day, or it is rotten.

Some Christian Reactions

DURING the past week or two I have derived a good deal of interest and amusement from a survey of some Christian reactions to Mrs. Knight's series of broadcasts.

These reactions have ranged from anger and despair on the part of those who take their Bible and religion literally, to condescending pooh-poohs on the part of the intellectual type of Christian who thinks that Rationalist criticism can be answered by a few 20-year old quotations from scientists of the Jeans era.

Among the professionals is Dr. Garbett, the Archbishop of York, who is quoted by the *Manchester Guardian* as saying that Mrs. Knight's arguments were the stock in trade of Atheists and Agnostics for at least two centuries and had been answered "again and again." One may well ask "What answers, and by whom?" More than once, Dr. Garbett has been offered the pages of *The Freethinker* to try out his answers on the late Chapman Cohen, amongst others, an invitation which I never saw accepted. Dr. Garbett's fellow clerics have been equally shy at coming forward in response to appeals in *The Freethinker* and elsewhere. Such reticence on the part of those who claim to know all the answers is most surprising. Dr. Garbett further thought that Mrs. Knight's "provocative addresses" should be answered as soon as possible by some competent layman.

If the clergy are shy, the amateurs rush in where professionals fear to tread. Many are assured of a good press. In particular, one lady who writes a regular feature in the *Daily Mail* under the name of Ann Temple, gets four columns to point out "Mrs. Knight's Big Blunder." Ann Temple runs the *Mail's* "Human Casebook" in which she answers problems as diverse as entertaining the boss at one's home and developing natural charm and personality.

Whatever *she* may have developed, an understanding of religion would not appear to be part of it. After telling us each child has a soul which must not be allowed to grow up "spiritually neutral," we are warned of the perils that lie in store for the child whose parents, being Atheists, reply to the child's questions by saying "We don't believe in a God, but other people do." This will, we are told, sow the seeds of conflict in the child's mind, from which may spring the "inhibitions and complexes and mental illnesses of which we hear so much to-day." Thus we are asked to believe that while a child may grow up and discover differences of opinion between his parents and other people on matters of sport, politics, entertainment and the hundred and one usages of social life, without having the balance of his mind disturbed, yet the mere fact of finding out a difference of opinion between his parents and other people on the existence of God, may derange his mind in later life! The child's deepest need is of the "Beyond." "To give him the gift of prayer to the Beyond *he understands so well* (my italics) is to make him whole, individual in his spirit, quiet in his mind." Finally Ann Temple asks if any parents claim to know a better way of enabling their children to meet "the challenge of the life of the spirit." One can have nothing but pity for any so-called intelligent woman who can thus write. I would ask her just one question. If a child has an earthly human father who is kind, loving, intelligent and understanding, of what possible use to the child is the concept of a heavenly father who cannot be seen, heard, touched, or in any way perceived by the senses and who cannot be relied upon to perform even a child's most simple request? If Ann Temple or anyone else can think of a possible use to which an earthly father, like myself, can put a heavenly one, I should be glad to hear of it.

JACK GORDON.

Catholicism in Portugal

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

[The following is an extract from a book to be published in a few days' time, *Portuguese Panorama*, by Oswell Blakeston; Burke Publishing Co., 18s. The book is a survey of the political and artistic life of Portugal, describing the underworlds and social occasions and recording surviving festivals which are given a Christian disguise.—ED.]

THE rich say they can live in Portugal with all the comforts of the eighteenth century. Portuguese servants are churned out by the Catholic institutions and then are given wages of about eight shillings a month.

In hotels, at any hour of the night, a Portuguese servant may be woken to pour out a glass of water for her mistress. The Catholic Church is a powerful instrument for keeping the rich in their ascendancy. The Church has a vested interest; and not the smallest item in the clerical budget must be the profits on the sale of Fatima water to Brazil.

The Church does nothing to ameliorate the appalling conditions of the people. The Hierarchy is hand in glove with the Government. On church feast days in Portugal, the police wear specially smart uniforms; and these are the police who were personally trained by Himmler.

"Sometimes," a liberal Portuguese friend said to me, "I think the Catholics are no longer a religion but a political force. They have enormous political power in Ireland and Spain and Portugal; and to poor countries their political jurisdiction does not bring prosperity.

"Yet," he admitted, "one must be fair. There are individuals. Recently, the Bishop of Beja in his pastoral letter drew the attention of the wealthy to the sufferings of his flock; for the Alentejo is not like other districts, and the soil there is owned by a few absentee landlords who, when they feel their profits are not adequate, lay off the workers and leave them to starve without any land of their own to work." In the Alentejo conditions are particularly frightful, and it is hard even for a bishop to close his eyes.

"But," continued my friend, "one must give the man his due. He begged the Catholics in high positions to relieve the distress of his flock; but his message was ignored. Yet he had great courage to speak.

"So had the Bishop of Lisbon, a personal friend of Salazar, when recently he suggested that, for the spiritual health of the country, the time had come when there should be some genuine opposition in the National Assembly. He was brusquely informed by the dictator that there is no sensible opposition to the regime. The obnoxious subject was closed. It was what, in Portugal, we call The Law of the Corks. Difficult subjects are bottled up, and it is dangerous to speak of them."

In spite of a few cases of individual conscience, the Church flourishes with all the trappings of pomp and power and prosperity. The great churches glitter with gold, and the relics in their caskets are *chic voodoo*; while 60 per cent of the population of a European country cannot afford shoes.

At the Corpus Christi procession in Lisbon, the Patriarch appears under a canopy and is followed by Oriental palms—privileges won from Rome after much back-alter diplomacy and acrimony and enormous gifts to the Vatican coffers. And people come round collecting, saying: "If you don't want to give for God, give for your pride in Lisbon that she may have the best priests."

Then when I was in Coimbra, I found myself having a confidential chat with one of the professors at the university who secretly holds liberal views.

He said it was a fine state of affairs in a Catholic country when brothels are officially supervised and pay dues to the Catholic Government like any other business. Such is the

anomaly of the existing regulations that though it is prohibited for a minor to contract marriage without the consent of the parents, if the same minor wants to enter a house of prostitution there is nothing to prevent her doing so.

"The whole town," the professor told me, "has been laughing over something that happened a few weeks ago. You know the fuss they make in this country about giving some films adult certificates? A lot of eye-wash. The police stopped a girl going into a cinema. They told her she was too young to see an adults-only film. She brought out her official prostitute's card and said, 'You don't consider me too young for this sort of work, do you?'

"You won't believe me," he went on, "but the girls here can be forced to be prostitutes. If the police notice a young girl eyeing the boys, they'll give her a card. If she refuses to be conscripted, they shave her head and call her a 'moral danger.' Yet all the servants in this town were compelled to go to a special service in church and swear out loud that they would never wear short sleeves or short skirts.

"They say that Salazar rules by the three f's—football, fado (the popular song of Lisbon) and Fatima.

"Well, here's another story. It's about a young widow in this town who went into prostitution to give her daughter a good education. The girl was a slow starter; but recently as she has been doing well in her lessons, the Reverend Mother began to take an interest in her. She made inquiries about the child's background; and then she sent for the parent and lectured her. She said the mother was an infamy in the sight of God. The widow cried and declared that she would gladly give up her prostitution if the convent would keep her daughter at a reduced fee.

"The Mother-Superior said, 'My good woman, we couldn't possibly do a thing like that!'"

Everywhere in Portugal new Catholic churches are being built, one even in a village where the local doctor had gone down on his knees and begged, fruitlessly, that the authorities would institute a milk clinic for the starving children.

Should an Atheist Tell?

IN the *Daily Worker* (January 22), "Worker's Notebook," the writer considers whether unbelievers when asked for official purposes what their religion is should insist on their rights or let matters go as C. of E., etc., to save trouble.

He observes that "when one commits one's life to the care of some public service it is more obliging and trouble-saving to belong to some religious denomination. And it is so much more convenient to all concerned to know according to what rite the bits should be disposed of. So why be awkward?"

A reader of both the *Daily Worker* and *The Freethinker* sent the following reply:—

"As an admirer of the 'Workers' Notebook' and Walter Holmes, I was shocked to read the two paragraphs, 'Religion Obligatory' and 'Anything to oblige.' I have been into hospital and registered as an atheist. I was patient but insistent. My brother has also been in hospital and has registered as of no religion.

After the tremendous struggle Charles Bradlaugh had to win the right to affirm it seems to me like a betrayal not to exercise the right so dearly won. The Christian and the Jew proudly affirm their religion and I think the atheist, freethinker, agnostic, etc., should equally proudly affirm his non-belief.

I was equally surprised at Walter Holmes' asking, 'Why be awkward?' as I was at reading the other day that Jimmy Maxton had allowed a religion to be tagged on to his name. It may be more convenient but is it honest to declare oneself C. of E. or R.C. or any other religion when one is not? M. BURRIDGE (Mrs.)."

This Believing World

The Church in Wales has bought Bush House—the giant block of offices in Aldwych—for over £2,500,000. Why? It is to “modernise” their *investments* and because the purchase will bring in an increased revenue. We shudder to think what Jesus must be feeling at this determined onslaught by his pious followers on the strict injunction to “take no thought for the morrow.” And what about, “Sell that thou hast and give to the poor”? Are there not needy Christians who would jump for joy at the chance of sharing such an enormous sum of money? Strange how the beautiful and simple teaching of “our Lord” can be flouted so brazenly when it comes to money.

One can always depend on getting a letter into a provincial newspaper so long as it defends religion even with unmitigated lies. The *Hull Daily Mail*, for example, printed one the other day quoting an article from the *World Christian Digest* in which we are told that the Rev. H. Price Hughes was challenged by Charles Bradlaugh and “the challenge was immediately accepted.” No evidence was given, of course, but when the “conditions” were known, Bradlaugh immediately “withdrew his challenge” and “London smiled.”

This is one of those typical Christian lies which, once published, goes round the world in seven-league boots, and probably will never be caught. Bradlaugh, of course, never challenged Hughes but, if they had met, he would have metaphorically wiped the floor with this childish and ridiculous Fundamentalist. We, on this journal, can never forget the way G. W. Foote dealt with him. Hughes wrote a book about his “mission” converting an Atheist, and Foote scathingly exposed it as a huge Christian lie. Hughes had to withdraw his book. We doubt whether the Rev. H. Price Hughes ever outlived his reputation as the champion Christian liar of his day.

Almost every young man has to do his National Service, except “ministers of religion”—though we have never been able to see why they should be exempt. Needless to say, the Christ-like members of Jehovah’s Witnesses who, in any case, oppose orthodox Christianity quite as strongly as Freethinkers, just hate the idea of doing their bit like other young men and make desperate attempts to prove they are regular “ministers.” In a recent case in which one of the pious Witnesses pleaded he was a “regular” minister, the judge, Lord Strachan, while recognising the sect as “religious,” refused to recognise the young man as a minister; and it is quite amusing to find that the appointment as a minister was by a mere “stereotyped” letter. But after all, is this kind of religious fraud much worse than the “laying on of hands”?

Founded in London in 1919, the “Interdenominational Church Ministers’ World Fraternal Guild” is still another one of the hundreds of religious sects constantly at work perpetuating the old myths and traditions. We all must work together “in the name of God and Truth” but it is not at all clear whether this God is the good old Jehovah-Elohim of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ of the New, Allah of the Koran, or any other one of the numerous religions we are cursed with. After reading all about its “Universal Religious Alliance,” its “Interfaith Ministerial Order of World Servers,” its “Spiritual Dynamics,” its “Cosmic Voice,” and its “Eternal Spiritual Covenant,” we can only say “Thank God” for Freethought!

The Religious Director of the B.B.C. must have been

nodding the other week for he allowed a broadcast in French to schoolchildren on Diderot and his famous Encyclopedia. Diderot was an Atheist, and his Encyclopedia was mostly written by Atheists. It was as complete a challenge to the Roman Church as was possible in those days, and a great forerunner of the Encyclopedia of Larousse. In the broadcast, Diderot’s anti-Christian views were admitted—but as very few children could have understood the lecturer’s French, and probably never had heard of Diderot, little “harm” was done. But had Mrs. Knight lectured on the great Frenchman as openly we wonder what the Christian reaction would have been?

Review

Notes on Theosophy by “Novo.” Arthur’s Press Ltd.; 1s.

AS a change from Spiritualism which is very strident these days, we have in Theosophy an equally “fancy” religion or philosophy or whatever you like to call it. In this little pamphlet, Novo, who calls himself a “layman,” does his best to expound its mysteries basing nearly everything he has to say on the redoubtable Mme. Blavatsky and, strangely enough, does not even mention the equally redoubtable Mrs. Besant. We shudder to think what she is saying about this in the esoteric regions to which she was wafted when she passed on and in which, according to Novo, all Theosophists and everybody else have to wait before being incarnated. I could fancy no more horrible fate than this. Mrs. Besant was one of the most fluent talkers who ever trod a platform—fancy hearing her again in those probably inhospitable domains telling us the same old tale she spent over forty years of her life propounding to all who listened to her here on earth.

Most of Novo’s pamphlet is a rehash of both the estimable ladies sprinkled with an attempt to explain what Theosophical jargon really means. Most of us, I suspect, after reading these explanations, would like to have an explanation of his explanations. But no doubt there are plenty of people who talk just as glibly as does Novo of spiritual entities, pre-existing physical birth, incarnate man, the astral double, the animal soul, the higher immortal principles, the spiritual soul, universal all-pervading spirit, the divine immortal reincarnating Ego, the Masters of Wisdom or Mahatmas, Karma, Devachan, and many other beautiful things.

You will never understand true Theosophy unless you can rattle off all these distinguishing and distinguished terms like a Mahatma, and thus confound Theosophy’s arch enemy—Materialism. All our religions, even the most fanciful ones, hate Materialism with a violent hatred—and all of them are ready to tell us all about it. Novo devotes a chapter to the beastly “philosophy,” detailing principally “the Materialist’s View of Man.” He does not, naturally, quote any authorities, but that is a small matter. He does not even show the slightest possible acquaintance of any of the teachings of Materialism, but why should he when addressing Theosophists? His opening sentence is a gem—“Materialists are the Great Deniers; they deny everything except matter.” Is it necessary even in these columns to deal with this kind of thing? Against downright ignorance, said Schiller, in an oft-quoted aphorism, even the very Gods cannot make headway.

Some of us, let me assure Novo, know Theosophy quite as well as he does—perhaps much better. I also can quote *The Secret Doctrine* or *Isis Unveiled* or even *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, to say nothing of Mrs. Besant’s estimable books and pamphlets. In all charity I advise Novo to read about Materialism before he ventures to write about it. There is no excuse in these days of free libraries.

H. C.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

C. A. SWEETMAN.—See Wells on Christianity, this issue.

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 week-day, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, February 20, 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 Cafe, 40, Cannon St., off New St.).—Sunday, February 20, 7 p.m.: G. BRIDGEN, "Atheism Challenges the Church."
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, February 20, 6-45 p.m.: C. KEARMAN, "G. B. Shaw's Creative Evolution."
Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 22, 7 p.m.: Rev. C. M. COLTMAN, M.A., "Cyprus—Its People and Problems." (With lantern slides.)
Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, February 25, 7-15 p.m.: J. ADDISON, "What is the Value of History?"
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 20, 6-30 p.m.: Dr. STARK MURRAY, "What More Can We Prevent?"
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (New Millgate Hotel, Long Millgate, Manchester, 3).—Sunday, February 20, 7 p.m.: GEORGE WHITEHEAD, "Materialistic and Other Interpretations of History."
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland St.).—Thursday, February 24, 7-30 p.m.: C. McMANUS, "Man in History."
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, February 20, 2-30 p.m.: Prof. W. J. H. SPROTT, M.A., "A Philosopher Looks at the U.S.S.R."
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 20, 11 a.m.: Lord CHORLEY, M.A., "The Population Problem."
Streatham Debating Society (White Lion Hotel, Streatham High Road).—Friday, February 25, 7-45 p.m.: "That the Doctrine of Evolution Disproves the Creation of Man." For: F. A. RIDLEY; Against: B. H. NORRIS.
West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre).—Thursday, February 24, 8 p.m.: P. VICTOR MORRIS, "Can the Truth Prevail?"
West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, February 20, 7-15 p.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Reformation." A Speakers' Class will be held on Saturday, February 19, at 7-30 p.m., under the direction of Bonar Thompson. Fee 1s.

Notes and News

Some weeks ago we published an account of his visit to Mexico by Robert H. Scott, who is referred to in the November issue of the American radical journal *Expose* as "the Scott of the celebrated 'Scott decision' made by the Federal Communications Commission in 1946." This decision held that "an organisation or idea may be projected into the realm of controversy by virtue of being attacked. The holders of a belief should not be denied the right to answer attacks upon them or their belief simply because they are few in numbers." It was the Scott decision which permitted Mr. Scott to make the first broadcast in support of atheism in the history of American radio.

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £777 1s. 2d.; W. H. D., 5s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1; E. W. Shaw, 6s.; P. Reid, 5s.; Miss R. Dumont, 2s. 6d.; Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Cartwright, 15s.; Mr. and Mrs. S. W. Warner, 10s.; E. C. Merrifield, 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; F. E. Begley, 1s.; Joseph A. White, £1 1s. Total: £781 10s. 2d.

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

The broadcast was made in San Francisco. It was widely publicised throughout the world. Since then, the F.C.C. has failed to enforce its own decision. It avoids any head-on collision with its own words by filing and forgetting all complaints against stations which won't grant equal time in controversies. Sending his donation to the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund, Mr. Scott informs us that "various sources, including the American Civil Liberties Union, are 'needling' the F.C.C. into doing something about the dangerous abuse of radio and television in the U.S.A., equal time for the 'other side' being denied. The A.L.C.U. even goes so far as to include atheism in this category of protest, a radical departure from its hitherto milquetoast approach." We do not doubt that Mr. Scott's own persistent agitations have played their part in this salutary change of policy.

Mr. W. J. O'Neill, the well-known N.S.S. outdoor speaker, is now on a business trip to South Africa, and is expecting to be back in England in May. We all wish him every success and a pleasant sojournment. He will, of course, be in close touch with *The Freethinker* and the Movement.

Joseph McCabe

A TRIBUTE FROM NEW ZEALAND

It is with deep regret that New Zealand Rationalists have learned of the death of that Grand Old Man of Rationalism, Joseph McCabe.

His brilliant gifts, his magnificent zeal, his utter fearlessness, long ago won our respect and esteem; he passes into Freethought history as one of its truly great sons. His amazing industry, the breadth and erudition of his writing, have played a notable part in the emancipation of the mind and the enthronement of reason and truth.

His work for the best of causes will be abiding and profound, and his name will shine clear and bright across the years.

A. O'HALLORAN.

President, New Zealand Rationalist Association.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

49th Annual Dinner & Concert

on Saturday, 26th February, 1955

at THE HANWAY ROOM, Oxford Corner House
Tottenham Court Road, London, W.1

Reception
6-30 p.m.

Evening Dress
Optional

Dinner
7 p.m.

All welcome. Special menu for Vegetarians

Concert arranged by Miss Eileen Cusack

Guest of Honour
Mr. Adrian Brunel

Chairman
Mr. F. A. Ridley

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N.S.S., 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1



Some Provincial Reactions to Mrs. Knight

[This composite article is by readers themselves, being taken from information supplied, and opinions expressed, by them, and of which we have space for only a small, but we hope representative, fraction. Our function has been merely one of collection and selection.—ED.]

THE broadcasts of Mrs. Knight probably reached only a small minority of northern homes; the power of the London Regional transmitter is such that its output cannot always be dissociated from the mush of Continental broadcasts.

The wide dissemination of Mrs. Knight's talks was therefore due to the Press. Many local Press controversies followed and, despite the usual barring and cutting of letters from Freethinkers, their efforts produced reasonably good results in some areas.

LIVERPOOL

The *Daily Post* leader drew a congratulatory letter from R. G. Kitchen (N.S.S.), in which he said the B.B.C. must never be a closed shop. The *Post* has also made some show of tolerance by allowing a Humanist (Mr. Phelps) to contribute an article, in which he regrets that Humanism, unlike religion, has nothing "to offer to the sorrowing heart."

If the *Daily Post* is genuinely willing to present the unbeliever's case to its readers, it should come to the proper source—the N.S.S. and *The Freethinker*. We entirely dissociate ourselves from the article in question.

The *Liverpool Echo* is also running a series of articles, apparently all by religious believers, led by an R.C. (Fr. Christie), who said that

if a child is not introduced to religious teaching and practice early in life it is unlikely that a desire for it will develop later on.

What, then, becomes of the "ineradicable religious sense" which Christian apologists are always telling us about? Evidently Christians don't really believe it exists by nature, and therefore intend to get it well pumped into the young.

The Archbishop of Liverpool wailed:—

On Christmas afternoon we heard the Queen refer to the light that streamed from Bethlehem. Yet a few weeks later we are told that all this is legend and our people who listened with great respect to the Queen are shaken.

It is nominally a Christian country and we do not expect that teachings lying so deeply in our hearts can be criticised in that way—by means that reach into almost every home in the land.

He is presumably in favour of free speech for Mrs. Knight, so long as nobody can hear her.

BOLTON

The Vicar of Bolton stands in contrast. "The B.B.C. is not the monopoly of Christians," he said, and Mrs. Knight's standpoint

should not be dismissed as nonsense or rubbish. It is not. It is worthy of respect. It is the sincere belief of those who cannot, unfortunately, honestly believe in God and yet who believe kindness, tolerance, truthfulness and all the social virtues should be cultivated.

"And they are right in saying that man, whatever his state of belief or unbelief, ought to limit his selfishness, ought to say 'No' to himself, ought to be true and tender and honest and brave. We need no religion to tell us these things ought to be practised in our lives.

The Bolton *Evening News* gave Freethinkers an excellent show (on other papers' standards). "Unbeliever" (a *Freethinker* reader) wrote (January 19):—

First, Mrs. Knight is accused of having old-fashioned ideas. Well, what is more old-fashioned than the nearly 2,000-years-old Christian religion, apart from two or three older world religions? Secondly, why do our believer friends always quote the nice sunsets, the beautiful flowers, etc., as a proof of God (meaning goodness). Do they never think of the

1,001 scourges from which humanity suffers? If God has created good and wonderful things, He has also created all that is bad and cruel. Have we to thank him for that, too? Thirdly, the way our Christian friends have sprung to their feet to attack the B.B.C. for allowing different views to be broadcast, does not show a spirit of tolerance—which has never been a Christian virtue, but is perhaps the main humanist one. . . .

Another letter contains the following:—

Since Mrs. Knight after her broadcast is in no danger of being burnt as a heretic, we may conclude that the philosophy of scientific humanism is now a mental habit of most people, whether they are religious or not. We note, too, how words like "hell" and "heaven" are given less prominence than a generation ago, and how the emphasis is now on State pensions, pre- and ante-natal care, children's allowances and the like, rather than individual acts of grace, as a remedy for the maldistribution of wealth. We can hardly quarrel with the results of applied scientific humanism in the social field.

From yet another good letter comes this:—

It is a matter of simple fact that a large proportion of the people do not believe the official theology. . . . It is, of course, unusual for the B.B.C. to recognise the existence of rationalism, which no doubt accounts for the outburst of fury among clericalists who have, in all conscience, enough time allotted to them for expounding their own views.

One more extract from the same newspaper:—

The pillars of the Christian Church in their efforts to dictate what the people should read, see, hear, and do, should remember that it was religious tyranny and persecution that was responsible for the fall of the Roman Empire. Christendom is rapidly disintegrating. . . .

YORKSHIRE

There were several fairly reasonable editorial comments among the Yorkshire papers which also opened their columns to controversy, though the freethought letters were generally mild on leaving the editorial blue pencil. From the *Argus* we take the following:—

The size of a Sunday congregation should at least give some hint of the beliefs of a vast majority which the B.B.C. is expected to cater for.

Another Bradford reader:—

Morality and Christianity are used as synonyms far too often by the type of people whose views Mr. Jennings's argument typifies. The inference that all Christians are moral and that non-Christians are not is the smug insular intolerance of those who have never considered the existence of other faiths. And yet how often does one hear the phrase "an un-Christian action" used?

BRISTOL

The *Evening Post*, with the largest circulation in S.W. England, first mentioned the broadcasts on January 14 (after the second talk) by way of an editorial; the broadcasts themselves had not been reported. The article said:

We believe that Christians everywhere will reply to this attack with spirit.

No doubt. But it would be more to the point if they would reply to it with argument. Meanwhile, the *Evening Post* has seen to it that no freethought reply has appeared in its columns (to January 31 at any rate). What it did allow to appear was an attack on Mrs. Knight's views by a preacher, and another attack by a contributor. It thus banned freedom of speech (except, of course, to Christians).

BLASPHEMY AT BOGNOR REGIS

The biggest laugh of the whole business occurred at Bognor Regis. Note particularly the last paragraph of this letter in the Bognor Regis *Post* (January 22):—

We don't have totalitarianism in politics. Why should we put up with it in religion? To do so is to take a leaf out of Hitler's book.

I notice parsons in the newspapers lambasting divorce, declining moral standards, Paganism, exploitings of sex, and everything else under the sun. But rarely is a letter published lambasting the parsons and Christianity. Why? Why should

the Church have all the say? If we fought a war for free speech, where is it?

One cleric called our young women "painted little trollops, with enough powder on their faces to blow us all to smithereens," just because they queued up for the cinema on Sunday.

Yet if I write a letter calling Christ an anaemic, narrow-minded milk-sop, trying to impose His overbearing dictatorial views on everybody else, like Hitler, it is not printed. Why?

E. G. HALL.

Then the balloon went up. The respectable Christian citizens of Bognor Regis could hardly believe their eyes. Letters from outraged Piety poured into the office, and the editor, apparently blushing with shame and confusion, and grovelling with the humblest apologies, explained that there had been a most serious oversight in the sub-editing department! At Bognor Regis of all places. Tut! Tut!

Many other good letters, too numerous to record, appeared in various places, and members of our movement were much to the fore—in the *Manchester Evening News*,

A Challenge

OUR attention has been drawn to the following letter in the *News Chronicle*:—

I throw out a challenge to all atheists: I am prepared to give £5 for every hospital, home for aged, for children, for blind, deaf and dumb, and other sufferers, founded by atheists if they will give £5 for every one founded by Christians.

A. SMITH.

Here is a counter challenge. Will this *News Chronicle* reader pay £5 for every butchery committed by Christians if we do the same for freethinkers? Will he pay £5 for every war started by Christians? £5 for every pogrom against the Jews? £5 for every massacre of heretics, £5 for every burning at the stake, £5 for every Inquisitional torture, for every imprisonment, for every book-burning, for every—but why should we proceed further? Mr. Smith would have been bankrupt long ago. The crimes of Christians are well known to informed people if not to Mr. Smith.

And he knows very well that hospitals are supported by Christians and Atheists alike. As for "starting" them, where does he suppose atheists would get the money from?

The salary of one Church dignitary alone (the Archbishop of Canterbury) for one year would keep *The Freethinker* going for the best part of ten.

Atheist hospitals are all over the land, started by people who thought they were Christians and discovered they were humanitarians, engaged in keeping people out of Heaven.

Finally, as the *News Chronicle* appears to like "challenges" we challenge them to reprint this.

G.H.T.

Wells on Christianity

LOOK at the Archbishop of Canterbury all dressed up to kill, cope and mitre and holy wigs and all the ancient spiritual gadgets. Look at the Pope in his canonicals. B.C. all of it from start to finish. Do you believe any of these fellow are mentally straight? Who told them they were entitled to speak for that Galilean Radical? If they had lived in his time they would have been on the bench with Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. They think they can put up their bluff upon the masses and they aren't afraid of God looking at them—for a very good reason. Long ago they said in their hearts: "There is no God." That is why they won't have these things talked about plainly. That is why they insist on reverence, sacred names and all that. A sacred thing is a protected thing, a thing in retreat. When you want to argue, they say, "Hush!

the *South Western Star*, and many Midland papers. Mr. T. M. Mosley pointed out that—

We are often told by representatives of the Churches that religion is man's civilising agency, but it is the other way about; it is mankind that has civilised and humanised his religious creeds. What a gulf between the God of a Jonathan Edwards and the God of Bishop Barnes. Religion may be the last thing that man will civilise.

Mr. P. E. Newell (in *South Western Star*) wrote:—

What do they (religious bigots) fear? The truth? Perhaps they know that most people—though not so vocal as Mrs. Knight—no longer believe in gods and devils, or heaven and hell. Perhaps the majority no longer believe there ever was a Jesus Christ, or that it makes any difference if there was. A few centuries ago Mrs. Knight would have been burned at the stake. To-day our Christian defenders of "democracy" and "civilisation" still try to crush or suppress any opposing point of view.

Congratulations—whether they were lucky enough to be published or not—to all letter writers, not forgetting the luckiest, the Bognor Blasphemer.

Reverence please. Lower your voices so that nobody can hear the awful things you are saying. Not so loud please, and above all, not so plain."

These bishops and parsons with their beloved Christianity are like a man who has poisoned his wife and says that her body is too sacred for a post-mortem. *Nowadays, by the light we have, any ecclesiastic must be born blind or an intellectual rascal.* The world's had this apostolic succession of oily old humbugs from early Egypt onwards, trying to come it over the people. Antiquity is no excuse. A sham is no better for being six thousand years stale. *Christianity is no more use to us than the Pyramids.*

H. G. WELLS.

Correspondence

ATHEISM AND NAZISM

During my discussions with representatives of some Christian sects, our opponents have tried to identify the acts of the Nazis as the work of Atheists, thus persuading themselves to believe that all Atheists are Nazis and vice versa. Presumably other Freethinkers have experienced this form of slander. If so, the following facts may be of use:—

(1) Adolf Hitler, the head of the Nazi creed, was also a member of the Catholic Church, and remained so until his death in the debris of the Chancellory in Berlin. Never was he reproved or excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church for the misdeeds ascribed to him.

(2) Hans Frank, Gauleiter of Poland, and arch-exponent of the infamous crime "Genocide," sentenced to death at Nuremburg on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, was also a Catholic. Frank stated that he "would relinquish his faith only if the Vatican supplied any documentary evidence against him."

(3) Heinrich Himmler, chief of the Gestapo, was described by Frank Buchman of the Oxford Group, as "A great guy, and a good potential convert." Himmler described himself thus in April, 1945: "I am generally regarded as a heedless pagan, but in the depths of my heart I am a believer. I believe in God and providence. In the course of the last year I have learned to believe in miracles again."

The miracles referred to are the unsuccessful bomb attempt on Hitler's life in July, 1944, and the sudden thaw that held up the advance of the Russian armies.

D. J. CROWLE.

CENSORSHIP

Referring to Mr. Cutner's statement that "we" (whoever "we" may be) "are the freest nation in the world," all I can say is that of nine pamphlets written by me on ordinary political matters, six were suppressed by seizure or prosecution by the authorities!

C. H. NORMAN.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE BLUESTOCKING LEGACY

By VICTOR E. NEUBURG

THIS DARING AGE

It appears that at long last the agitation by *The Freethinker* directed at the B.B.C. is paying dividends.

I do not doubt, however, that the hysterical wrath waged by adherents of the so-called God of Peace against the Corporation will ensure, as in the case of Royle, that Mrs. Knight's voice, expressing the views of thousands, will not be heard again now the present series is completed.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. POTHECARY.

ATHEISM

In *Look* magazine, Bertrand Russell says that the Atheist says he knows there is no god. That's not so, though the wily Church has put the idea out for ages. Gods are so plainly man-made that no reasonable person can believe in them. As they're stamped on every link as manufactured, the Atheist naturally does not believe in their objective existence. That is Atheism—not the dogmatic assertion of direct knowledge. As an Atheist I dislike the idea of being rated among the stupid dogma fans.

J. F. KIRKHAM.

RATIONALISM

As one who was a member of the R.P.A. up to the end of 1954, I agree with your correspondent M. B. Drapier in what he says about the "suicide" of the R.P.A. One need only compare the 1953 "Guide" with that of late 1954 to see the change.

It is difficult for one as a member of the R.P.A. to protest against this change because of the definition given to Rationalism by the R.P.A. Any viewpoint which is reasonable will be accepted, and it need not of necessity show the slightest antagonism to religion.

There is a moral here for the N.S.S. and *The Freethinker*. Having maintained their uncompromising attitude since 1866 and 1881 respectively let them not now be persuaded to alter it.

I am grateful to the R.P.A. because through it I joined the N.S.S. To other hesitant Rationalists I advise the same course. Secularism is clearly defined, and its aims also. It is perhaps not easy to be a secularist, but having accepted its implications with determination, it seems the only rational point of view for those who reject supernaturalism in all its forms.

G. DICKINSON.

SIR A. KEITH

As one who has read deeply into the late Sir Arthur Keith's evolutionary writings, I indeed enjoyed Mr. G. H. Taylor's *Estimate*; and I could not but agree that Keith lacked forthrightness in matters of religion. Mr. Taylor did not quote from Keith's *Autobiography*; perhaps I may be allowed to do so. Although himself an unbeliever, Keith approached religion in (to use his own words) a "non-aggressive, indeed rather apologetic" way, for he "desired not to disturb the faith of those who could honestly believe—especially relatives and friends." To me it seems that at least some of his tenderness towards religion was occasioned by his having a wife "inwardly and mutely religious." There appears to have been an eminently happy partnership in which mutual tolerance in diversity of belief was maintained unbroken up to Lady Celia Keith's death in 1934. "I respected her convictions," Keith writes, "and she said neither yea nor nay to mine."

For all his curious reticence in expressing himself about religion, Keith rejected the supernatural as completely as we do. His reading of the Good Book led him to the "conviction that the Word of God is of human origin. It is strange that the study of the Bible should so often give rise to unbelief."

G. I. BENNETT.

THE HUMANIST BROADCASTS

How is it that a hitherto unknown lady like Mrs. Knight was able to penetrate the previously religious Iron Curtain of the B.B.C. to broadcast anti-religious views when, apparently, all attempts from any properly accredited speaker from, say, the N.S.S. has up till been unable to gain admittance to the Holy of Holies? But possibly the reason is not very hard to seek—the views or statements of an out-and-out atheist might be regarded as too extreme.

The good lady certainly did her best on Wednesday last, and possibly said as much as she was allowed to, for it was known beforehand that the debate was to be carefully "vetted," apparently to prevent anything too awful being said by Mrs. Knight, and, that being so, moderation had to be observed, with the result that the debate resolved itself into the resemblance of two nice, friendly ladies having a cosy chat over a cup of tea. Still, it was a start, and now the word should be: "On, on, into the breach!"—Yours, etc.,

CHARLES A. SWEETMAN.

RELIGION NEEDED BY SOME?

Beliefs are merely the outward manifestations of our attempts to fulfil basic needs. The religious man believes in God because he wants to. The realisation of his own impotence has been forced upon him by experience. The child feels the need for protection, and this role is adequately filled by the father at first. Later the father must take on spiritual attributes and be possessed of divine understanding when our problems become more emotionally complex. We need, in short, a heavenly father, and what better than one who we are taught, is love.

God offers justice. The wrongs done to us in this life and the indignities we suffer will earn us a crown of gold in the after life. Everything is neatly balanced. Even in this life we are told that an empty pocket makes for a happy heart, and that rich men have next to no chance of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. These comforting thoughts arise from man's need to reconcile himself to whatever hardships he might encounter in this world.

This theme of comfort is in fact of central importance to Christianity. It is something that comes to the sick or aged, a knowledge of the nearness of God, and the thought that they can speak to Him in their prayers and that He will answer. You and I may be quite sure that this is all delusion. We may be right to call it wishful thinking, but I should not care to be the person who took this comfort away from such people.

Christianity not only supplies the need for comfort. It is also a father's job to chastise, and if we have any guilty feelings, only retribution can persuade us that our sins are expiated and we can start afresh. The Catholic Church with its confessional is the clearest example of this, appealing to the masochistic element in us.

And what has Freethought to offer? We cannot offer everlasting life to allay the fear of death.

Neither have we any simple allegorical explanations for the presence of good and evil.

We have no ready-made moral code, no redemption to offer because of one man's death, and where comfort is concerned, I very much doubt whether communing with the Holy Ghost of Charles Bradlaugh will be of much avail to me in the throes of toothache. No wonder people prefer Christianity! The need for religion is a natural thing, arising out of our fears and desires.

A. N. EVANS.

BIBLE A BEST SELLER!

A vast army of salesmen, approximately 373,000, composed of parsons, Bible-whackers, missionaries, fundamentalists, Sunday school teachers, evangelists, quacks, Bible Societies and Billy Graham, are engaged full time in disposing of Bibles to the credulous, superstitious and backward races of Africa and Asia. Crackpots leave huge sums of money in their wills to purchase Bibles, the Bible Societies dump the book by the hundred thousand in pagan lands, the Americans dropped 500,000 over Korea in the late war alone. Every child attending Sunday school is required to have one, children at boarding schools must be provided with Bibles. Every pew in every church has a Bible. Vast sums of money are collected from churchgoers to purchase Bibles. What a profitable racket!

Of course, it is a best seller, a wonderful business proposition.

B. O'LONEY.

N.S.S. Executive Committee, 9th February

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Ebury, Taylor, Hornibrook, Shaw, Johnson, Corstorphine, Barker, Draper, Arthur and the Secretary. Fourteen new members were admitted to the Parent, Nottingham and Fyzabad Branches. Final arrangements were made for the Annual Dinner. Manchester Branch had expressed willingness for the Annual Conference to be held there again, but it was decided to hold it in London. The President reported that he had a number of lecture engagements arranged, including a debate with an R.C. Canon at Bethnal Green; and the Secretary reported that he had given a talk at the Discussion Group of the Central London Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. the previous evening on "Should the B.B.C. Permit the Broadcasting of Secularist Views?"

Plans were made for a public meeting to be held at the Conway Hall on March 16 relating to the broadcasting issue, the speakers to be Messrs. Ridley, Ebury and Morris, with Mr. Taylor presiding. Mr. Griffiths submitted a statement of the general financial position of the movement, and a sub-committee consisting of Messrs. Griffiths, Barker and Shaw was appointed to consider financial policy.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.