

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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AS we go through life there comes a time to all progressive-minded people, a time of dismay and despair. We feel that the cause that we have set our minds on is making no headway; indeed, that it is slipping back. We hear our enemies mock us, and our false friends urge us to give up futile struggle. As Tom Paine wrote during the darkest hour in the American War of Independence, "These are the times that try men's souls."

Of course, this feeling, this mood—for it is primarily a matter of emotion—may be due to some general emotional change in ourselves—induced by staleness or ill-health. But there may be more solid grounds for our momentary despair. Our Cause may not be going well; it may be marking-time or slipping back. We may find too that our colleagues and comrades share our feeling. Anybody familiar with the Law of Growth knows that growth in a living thing proceeds by jumps; goes by fits and starts. There are periods of exhaustion, when the organism recruits its strength for a further leap forward. At such a time there may even be apparent retrogression. If we were rational beings we should not let these periods disturb our equanimity, knowing them to be but natural periods, such as sleep or hibernation. But when the mood of depression comes it cannot be *reasoned* away, and in any case man being the poor fish that he is, is not greatly given to rationalism.

Since this feeling cannot be reasoned away, what then are we to do? Yield to the despair, throw up the sponge; or, on the other hand, fight it? There is much to be said for both attitudes. Nothing endures; moods pass—sometimes as quickly as they come—and we are again back in the fighting-line. But those of more heroic build—shall we say, like those reading these lines?—will probably prefer to stand up to this despondency, and if they must go down, go down fighting.

For those, therefore, who would fight out this battle with themselves there are certain actions that may help us. In fact *activity* is a sovereign cure for moods. The active man has no time for the luxury of despondency. Activity is the cure prescribed by the gods themselves. Perhaps the classic case of despondency is that of the Hebrew prophet, Elijah, on Mount Horeb. You will remember that, fleeing from an irate woman called Jezebel, he went into the wilderness and lay under a juniper-tree. He requested that he might die, for, said he, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." Later, on the Mount, he told Jehovah that his prophets had been slain and "I, even I only, am left." Jehovah cured Elijah's black mood by giving him a good meal and told him to get busy on a new job. A good meal and a new job will often do the trick, and the modern Elijah will go off and find that, after all, he is not the only prophet of the true god, but that there are seven thousand others in Israel that have not bowed the knee to Baal.

Elijah's case was clearly one of low spirits due to improper or inadequate feeding, but there still remain more

substantial reasons for despair. The times may be out of joint. Most thoughtful people must assuredly feel that that is the case here and now, in the England of 1955. For this we need more than a "blow out," and a little exercise. The cure in this case is, I venture to suggest, a reading of the *Lives of the Saints*. If one is a Christian the Saints will naturally be those of that faith, and if one is a rebel against established order (as nearly all deep thinkers are, and should be) then our exemplars (from the study of whose lives we draw renewed vigour and refreshment), our exemplars, our saints, will be the great rebels of the past. Naturally it is best that they should be of our own race

and speak our own tongue, for then they are more likely to encounter our particular difficulties. If, too, they belong to our sex and class, still better. The English progressive of to-day has a large number of secular saints from which to choose. The one about whom I am going to seek to interest you is Thomas Paine, more frequently referred to by the briefer name of Tom Paine. This abridgement of his first name, of course, gives us a hint as to how his countrymen regarded him, for such a shortening of a name is a sign of affection or of contempt. In this case it was both.

You may be wondering why among so many eligible names I should pick on that of Thomas Paine. Wordsworth, a poet, when he was distressed about the condition of England in his day, turned to Milton, another and greater poet. I think many of you will know his sonnet beginning: "Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour: England hath need of thee: she is a fen of stagnant waters," etc., etc. Wordsworth called on Milton "to raise us up, return to us again." Well, each man to his taste, to his hero. Wordsworth, a thoroughly respectable middle-class Anglican gentleman, turns to the respectable puritan Latin Secretary of Cromwell. But though Paine wrote some indifferent verse, I, as a poet, do not turn to him on that ground. Perhaps the fact that my first name is also Thomas has something to do with it. In any case both the Thomases are sceptics, like the late Thomas Didymus, the prototype of all doubting Thomases. More seriously, however, I have several reasons for my choice. It is time I told you something of the man himself. This is necessary for two reasons: (1) that this is an unlettered age in which a man who is not referred to by the B.B.C. has small chance of being remembered, and (2) that as our man is so thoroughly unrespectable there is little likelihood of the B.B.C. ever mentioning him.

Here is a brief outline of Tom Paine's career: Paine was born in England in 1737, over two hundred years ago, and he died in America in 1809. This is what a modern English writer has said of him:—

No writer in history has created such a stir in the world, and Napoleon the First declared that a statue of gold ought to be erected to Thomas Paine in every city in the universe. His pamphlet *Common Sense* united the Americans in 1776

## — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

### Tom Paine's Message to Our Day

— By BAYARD SIMMONS —

and caused them to fight for national independence. Then, at critical moments in the war that followed, he issued *The Crisis*, which stiffened the resistance of the nation and inspired it with confidence. George Washington paid tribute to the "powerful effect" of his writings, and it was said that the English people owed the loss of their American colonies more to Tom Paine than to anyone else; except, of course, George III.

Having lit the fire of freedom in the New World, he returned to England and would have provoked another revolution with his book *The Rights of Man*, if William Pitt had not silenced the clamour it created by declaring war on the French Republic. Paine was outlawed by Great Britain, sat as a deputy in the French Convention, tried to save the life of Louis XVI, incurred the animosity of Robespierre, escaped the guillotine by a miracle, made Napoleon lose his temper, and wrote *The Age of Reason*, which aroused such a storm in the religious world that he became the most unpopular figure on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

That puts the matter succinctly, but I want to emphasise four words in the last sentence "*The most unpopular figure.*" I'll say he was. In England we have two ways for dealing with those who are unpopular, that offend our notions of what is proper. One is to burn them in effigy, another to boycott them. Paine was quite used to the first form of disapproval. For many years he lived at Lewes, in Sussex. As you probably know that delightful old city is famous for the number of effigies of Guido Fawkes that it burns on November 5 in each year. Mr. Paul Varney has recently reminded us in these columns of a similar effigy-burning in Cardiff. The word boycott had not been

invented in Paine's time, but the boycott was a real thing. Of the two methods of disapproval the boycott is undoubtedly the most powerful in its effect.

"*The most unpopular figure.*" Why, you may ask should that fact so arouse my enthusiasm? As Earl Balfour once said of Epstein's panel "Rima" (on the Hudson Memorial in Hyde Park), "A work of art is not necessarily good because it is disliked." True; but if we inquire into the exact connotation of the word "unpopular," light begins to dawn. The longer we live the more do we recognise that *method of fighting which is calculated to hurt the enemy most* is precisely that which he denounces as most ungentlemanly. In the First World War (1914) the German policy of unlimited employment of submarines in sinking our merchant ships was the most "caddish" thing they did. for it nearly won the war for them. The same indignation was heaped on Franco for introducing machine-gunning of peasants in the fields and refugees on the roads; but this ungentlemanly conduct of this "Christian gentleman" contributed greatly to winning his war. I only mention these matters, not to excuse them, but as illustrations of my thesis that that which we most dislike in our enemy is probably his strongest and most efficient contribution to whatever struggle he may engaged in. I conclude, therefore, that that part of Paine's activities that caused him to be so unpopular was by far the most valuable, and probably the best weapon he could use.

(To be continued)

## The Blue Stocking Legacy

By VICTOR E. NEUBURG

*The British Working Class Reader*, by R. K. Webb. Allen and Unwin. 18s.

THE ascendancy of the ballad-sheet and chapbook as a medium of popular reading passed with the last decade of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth centuries. The Industrial Revolution had changed beyond recognition the public, which had for so long been content with unsophisticated tales. In the crowded, rapidly growing towns of the Industrial North, there was an entirely new public, different indeed from the rustic villagers who had awaited with impatience the arrival of the hawker or pedlar with his gossip and budget of new books priced at one penny each. Moreover, since the Revolution had gathered momentum, and spread over large regions, most village communities were no longer so isolated. One of the radical effects of this change in the structure of society was the creation of a large class of industrial workers. Inevitably, social unrest accompanied the change, and failure of crops leading to a food crisis, together with mass unemployment caused by the cessation of the French Wars, aggravated the transition.

A positive result of this upheaval was the impetus given to education. Already dames' schools and similar voluntary efforts, notably those of Hannah More, had produced a larger number of literates than the country had ever had before, so that the factory operative who could read, and was smarting under a sense of injustice turned readily to a paper-covered copy of *The Rights of Man*. It is with this new working-class public that this book is concerned. The author has limited his study to the period from 1790 to 1848. It was around this former date that the upper and middle classes discovered that there was a surprising degree of literacy amongst the poor. Dr. Webb first discusses the extent of this literacy, and then deals with the various attempts which were made to deal with this challenge.

\* \* \*

It is important at the outset to realise the dangers of

precarious generalisation in a detailed study such as this one. As the author says:—

"The working-class reading public was certainly no single whole. Many of them, even if able to read a little, did no reading at all, beyond normal daily encounters with handbills or advertising. Others read only newspapers still others read only to escape. As in any class at any time the number of students and eager or even moderately deep-thinkers was very small. And, if this public was to be addressed on behalf of one or another social or political idea, a single approach would hardly serve. One did not talk to William Lovett and a coster in the same way."

The first chapter, analysing the extent to which there was a reading public is excellent, and contains a good deal of information which has not previously been assembled in such convenient and attractive form.

Perhaps the first member of the more wealthy classes to become aware of the potential challenge to the established order which was implicit in mass literacy, was Hannah More. It is tempting to dismiss her contemptuously as a bluestocking, such an appraisal would however be misleading. Hannah More's attempts to reach a wide and impoverished public with her Cheap Repository Tracts represented the first attempt to produce serious books at the price of a penny or a halfpenny each. Crude and moralising as her evangelism must appear to the modern reader, it is worth while recalling her several titles on cottage-economy.

Mrs. More's success had many imitators, the Religious Tract Society notable among them. Most important of all was The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, with which Charles Knight was closely connected. *The Penny Magazine*, published by the Society, contained an enormous amount of information about various subjects. G. J. Holyoake recalled having given copies of it to a

fiddler in Derbyshire, who had never seen an illustrated paper before.

The attempts at indoctrination through "informal" education are discussed in later chapters. Then, too, there was an increase in social tension after the agricultural disturbances of 1830, and this in turn caused a fresh attempt at persuading the poor from seeking redress from their appalling conditions.

This study is an illuminating one. One might perhaps wish that publishers like James Watson and Henry Hetherington had been mentioned in more detail, and the important figure of Richard Carlile is dismissed in a somewhat summary fashion. An important lacuna is that of a

## A Buddhist General Council

By F. A. RIDLEY

WHILST the Christian Churches continue to claim a monopoly of religious truth, the great religions of the Orient appear to display a renewal of activity. I have alluded before to the current revival of Islam that has been manifest since the end of the last war, which itself had such momentous effects on the Asiatic peoples. Buddhism, the oldest of the world's cosmopolitan religions, likewise seems at present to be enjoying an "Indian summer," perhaps one ought to say, a Burmese one, since it is that country which seems to be taking the lead in the current Buddhist revival.

An important ecclesiastical event is, at present, taking place in Rangoon, the capital of the recently established republic of Burma. For that city is now the seat of a General Council of the Buddhist Sangha or "Church." This imposing ecclesiastical gathering opened last May, and, I understand, is destined to conclude its, no doubt, exhausting labours in May next year, which is supposed to be the 2,500th anniversary of the death of Gotama, the Buddha; or, as a devout Buddhist would express it, the 2,500th anniversary of the passing of "The Blessed One" into "Nirvana." There have been only five General Councils of the Buddhist Sangha during the 2,500 years of the existence of Buddhism. The last of these was held, also in Burma, nearly a century ago. The other four date back to the early days of Buddhism. At Rangoon to-day is sitting the Buddhist equivalent of the Christian Councils which began at Nicaea. It is much to be hoped that it turns out to be less disorderly than some of its Christian predecessors, when Holy Fathers "proved their doctrine orthodox by apostolic blows and knocks"!

One assumes that the calling together in 1954-5 of the Sixth General Council bears some relation to current political events. Recent years have seen Asia "put on the map" in the political sense. Buddhism, like Islam, has benefited from this change. New Buddhist states have come into existence such as Burma, Ceylon, Laos and Cambodia; whereas, prior to these events, Thailand (Siam) represented the only independent Buddhist state. It should be noted that all these lands adhere to the Theraveda, or Hinayana, School of Southern Buddhism, which represents at least, approximately, the "Early Church of Buddha." Now that Chinese Communism has "liberated" Tibet, the Northern or "Mahayana" School of Buddhism no longer possesses an independent political centre. The Council of Rangoon appears to represent the Theraveda "Churches" primarily, if not exclusively.

Buddhism seems to have been the oldest of the cosmopolitan religions; if we are to believe so careful a scholar as the late Prof. Rhys Davids, Buddha-like "Christ," a title not a personal name—was an historical character, who taught in the sixth century B.C. Though the oldest extant Buddhist inscriptions go back to the 3rd century B.C.

bibliography, indicating not only books and pamphlets, but also the scope and extent of collections of contemporary material held by such libraries as the author has consulted.

A good deal of work remains to be undertaken in this field. There is, for example, the whole question of popular fiction and its public, progressive journals, the various societies which were formed for undertaking agitation in specific controversies. Dr. Webb's book is an excellent first study, readable and thorough. The research on which the study was based was helped by a grant under the Fulbright Act, an example of American generosity which will be recalled long after "horror comics" and junior senators are forgotten. This reviewer at any rate wishes that this were a longer book.

Buddhism was then already a powerful institution. From what can be gathered about his oral teaching, for the teaching of the Founder was by word of mouth, Buddha, like Muhammad and Christ—if there actually was such a *person*?—does not seem to have intended to found a new religion. The Founder (or founders) of Buddhism was a religious reformer who opposed the then growing caste system and various other Hindu superstitions. As represented by the oldest records of his teaching, Buddha was a Rationalist and an Agnostic who denied the utility of discussing "Final Causes," and declared metaphysics to be a waste of time. The earliest, pre-ecclesiastical Buddhism appears to have been a form of "positivism," very similar to that of such modern thinkers as August Comte and Herbert Spencer. Buddha was, perhaps, the first Positivist.

*Philosophy* is one state of mind; *religion* is another. Whilst, in theory, Buddhism continues to revere, and to repeat, often mechanically, the teaching of the Founder, in practice, it has adopted a good many of the religious attitudes, whilst, it is true, "the Blessed Lord Buddha" is not actually *worshipped* as a god, one has the feeling that his godhead is only just round the corner; similarly, whilst the Buddhist scriptures are not actually regarded, like the Bible or the Koran, as "the Word of God," they are treated very much as if they were! At the present Council of Rangoon, one reads that there is a Bhikku (monk), who can repeat without a single mistake, the whole 38 books of the Buddhist Canon—an amazing feat of memory. Some might add, an astonishing waste of time! A more practical criticism can be directed against the monastic character of the Sangha, and its extreme asceticism, which appears to spring from an excessively pessimistic view of life. It is only fair to add that modern Buddhists complain that their western interpreters, of whom Schopenhauer still is, perhaps, the most famous, have exaggerated the pessimistic character of Buddhism.

Just as the Christianity of the New Testament eventually split into Catholicism and Protestantism, so Buddhism is divided into the Northern, Mahayana School, and the Southern, Hinayana or Theraveda, School. Northern Buddhism appears to be "Buddhist" only in name. This is certainly so with regard to Tibet, where, until the Chinese Communists took over, a god-king was both the political ruler of Tibet, the incarnation of Buddha, and the head of a primitive magical cult which ruled Tibet with absolute power. Other forms of Mahayana Buddhism appear to be deeply tinged with theosophical and theological ideas; and, to be theistic, and even polytheistic in character. The Southern School is, perhaps, Buddhistic, in a sense that the

(Continued on page 61)

## This Believing World

A recent broadcast to children by a Mr. Frost (who is "Tutor in Old Testament Studies at Didsbury College, Bristol," dealing with the Problem of Evil put the pious lecturer in a devil of a fix. He was discussing the celebrated temptation of Jesus by the Devil, hastily assuring his hearers that this particular Devil was not the one so thoroughly publicised as having two horns, a forked tail, and carrying a trident. But, as a well-worn adage insists, you can't have smoke without fire, so there must have been at least some kind of a Devil—only he was not sure what kind. Otherwise, how could gentle Jesus have been tempted? We give it up.

We can follow up this delightful example of rational thinking for schools with the way "the Padre in the Leicester *Evening Mail* proves to those silly doubters that the existence of Jesus Christ was "an historical fact." Why do you believe that Julius Cæsar or President Roosevelt really lived? You have never seen them; why, therefore, "do you believe in them?" The answer is Faith, pure unadulterated Faith. And so, if you have Faith, you are bound to believe that Jesus Christ really lived—it is just as simple as that.

Naturally, the Church does not want "blind Faith"; it demands Faith, of course, but most of all, it wants "understanding." If, therefore, your "understanding" conflicts with your "Faith" you must go into the Church and find out how to use your brains. "It is" insists the Padre, "folly to stay outside"—though he himself has found out that most church congregations "all too often seem to leave their brains on the church doorstep." Alas, how true! What a pity only Leicester's readers of the *Evening Mail* in the main can enjoy the Padre's superb and breezy exhibition of primitive Fundamentalism. It makes Billy Graham look like an ultra-Modernist.

In any case, how sacred and beautiful is Faith in Jesus Christ as proclaimed by Protestants and Roman Catholics—yea, even on the football field. The *Sunday Express* recently gave an account of the way the match between Glasgow Rangers and Glasgow Celtic—Protestant and Catholic—was played, and considered that the all-religious spectators formed "the world's worst crowd," and that the game was "90 minutes of Pure Hate." They were "the roughest, toughest crowd in the world," with "men obsessed with such loathing of the rival side that the air was thick with quite unprintable language." That's the stuff to give true religion. And it proves how well Christianity works when you get Jesus Christ to live with you. Hard lines that for once God Almighty was on the side of Protestantism—four goals to one—against the True Church.

It is good to find some writers "debunking" all sorts of legends which have been long accepted as "Gospel Truth." One of the latest is Dr. Bergen Evans who, in his *The Spoor of Spooks*, has little difficulty in disposing of scores of things—such as the famous saying of Voltaire, "I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it," which he never said; or Marie Antoinette's "The people have no bread? Let them eat cake"; and many other similar stories which have passed into "true" history.

Freethinkers have "debunked" Christianity and other religions in exactly the same way—but, while books like those of Dr. Evans are almost always fully reviewed these days, anything which casts doubt on Jesus and his Devils

and Miracles and Resurrections is rigorously excluded from our daily press if at all possible. How many of them noted the deaths of Chapman Cohen and Joseph McCabe, two of the most prominent "debunkers" of our generation? You need not believe that Cleopatra dissolved a pearl in wine for Anthony, but it's a crime not to believe that Jesus forced 2,000 Devils into pigs. No "debunking" here is allowed.

One of our all-believing military men in spooks is Brigadier C. A. Brownlow who, in *Psychic News* recently, wrote about the late Sir Arthur Keith quoting him as writing that "the life of man is like the flame of a burning candle. When the candle is burnt out the flame also is gone for ever." Brigadier Brownlow tried hard to controvert this undoubted fact but could find nothing beyond the usual "experience" he had in contacting spooks "countless" times. One can get materialisations and apparitions and messages and spirit cures and yards of ectoplasm; it all depends on the amount of gullibility in one's make-up. Apart from this gullibility, what Keith said still stands.—  
H.C.

## Tributes to Joseph McCabe

I NEVER had the pleasure of seeing Mr. McCabe but, in common with all other persons who are deeply interested in promoting Rationalism and destroying Religionism. I respected and admired that truly great atheist, a man who left the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church to become through more than half a century its most effective single opponent. Consequently I am saddened to learn that he is no more.

On the other hand I am heartened by my knowledge that Mr. McCabe's output of books, pamphlets, and articles is unparalleled in volume and scholarship, and that he was surpassed by none in the ability to carry conviction to honest and truth-seeking minds.

Had justice been done, every newspaper and every radio station in Great Britain and Canada and Australia and the United States would have made it a point to write or to speak in praise of that mind-emancipating man.

It may be that no public monument will be erected to the memory of Joseph McCabe in your country or in mine for many years to come; but he has, by his writings, erected for himself the best and most enduring of monuments. Moreover, being dead, he will not mind the long delay of the public recognition that will certainly some day be his, along with all the other great champions of Freethought that have ceased to live.

ROBERT H. SCOTT.

MY daily contacts with Joseph McCabe during his six weeks' tour of New Zealand in 1923, and before that in 1910 and 1913, were memorable in terms of the enrichment of my life and I shall never forget my gratitude to him.

Some day an historian will record the full measure of McCabe's life's work and this will amaze future generations, as to what one man can accomplish in a lifetime—given the wisdom and the courage to do it.

The world seems poorer now with the death of Joseph McCabe. As Swinburne expresses it:—

Our glorious century gone,  
Beheld no head that shone  
More clear across the storm, above the foam,  
More steadfast in the fight  
Of warring night and light,  
True to the truth whose star leads heroes home.

McCabe has now passed into history, and when the stupidity of our age yields to a more rational life for man, McCabe will take his rightful place as one of the greatest intellectual benefactors of mankind.

New Zealand.

E. J. BARRETT.

# THE FREETHINKER

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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. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

## To Correspondents

TWO INTERESTED THEOLOGS.—Please carefully re-examine your extracts, and you will see that our contributors G. I. Bennett and F. A. Ridley do not contradict one another on Christian origins.

## 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, February 27, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, February 27, 6-45 p.m.: A. N. EVANS, "The Apple of the Lord."
- Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 1, 7 p.m.: ALEC NOVE, "Contemporary Russian Literature and the State."
- Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, March 4, 7-15 p.m.: E. KORVING, F.R.A.S., "What did Happen in the Beginning?"
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 27, 6-30 p.m.: JOHN McNAIR, "The Future of Humanity."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, February 27, 2-30 p.m.: Rev. H. D. JERVIS, "Priests, People and Persecution."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 27, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Emotion and Reason."
- 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 London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, February 27, 7-15 p.m.: BONAR THOMPSON, "Optimism—its Cause and Cure."

## Notes and News

AS we go to press, we learn that tickets for the N.S.S. Annual Dinner have been practically all sold.

A recent meeting of the Manchester Branch, N.S.S., was visited by a reporter from the *Evening Chronicle*, with a resulting brief notice under the title "Church and State," the following being an extract—:

Manchester Cathedral bells were heralding evening service when I met the Manchester members of the National Secular Society ("the Society that agrees with Mrs. Margaret Knight") in a first-floor room of a nearby hotel. . . . Total (branch) membership, according to secretary Mrs. Hilda Rogals, verges on 60.

One of the aims of the Society, listed in a little booklet somebody handed to me, is the complete separation of the Church from the State and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations.

An article of F. A. Ridley's on India was reprinted in the *Indian Rationalist* for January; while articles by F. A. Hornibrook and G. H. Taylor appeared in *Liberal* (January) and *New Zealand Rationalist* (November), the latter also containing three other *Freethinker* features. Could

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £781 10s. 2d.: S. Wilson, £1; H. T. Derrett, 7s. 6d.; F. Brooks, 2s. 6d.; T. Candlish 10s.; "Skipper John," 10s.; W. MacKee, £1 3s. 6d.; Mr. and Mrs. G. C. Russell, 6s.; S. Hampson, 4s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; Mrs. M. Rupp, 4s.; M. Bittner, 7s.; Mrs. B. E. Thornton, £1; Mrs. H. B. Grant, £1 1s.; Mrs. J. Kilpatrick, 4s.; D. H. Kerr, £1; Merseyside Branch, 10s.; W. H. D., 2s. 6d. Total to date, £790 3s. 2d.

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

any of our overseas readers tell us in which journal G. I. Bennett's article on Stoicism was reprinted?

Some wretched Christian lies have recently been told in provincial newspapers about Bradlaugh. In the *Hull Daily Mail* (January 20) appeared a statement to the effect that Bradlaugh refused to debate with Hugh Price Hughes because the latter threatened to bring 100 Christian "converts" on to the platform. However, to the credit of the *Hull Daily Mail*, it is pleasing to record that on February 2 it published the following reply—

The Rev. L. A. Erving says—Viewpoints (January 26)—that Bradlaugh shirked a debate with Mr. Hughes. This is quite untrue. Bradlaugh never shirked a debate with anyone, and if any of your readers want to see what Bradlaugh did to Christians in debate, they should read these debates for themselves.

The idea of bringing 100 people to the platform to vouch for Christianity is childish in the extreme. Would 100 Buddhists, giving testimony, prove the validity of Buddhism?

And how would these people prove they had been atheists to start with? How would they prove their reformation could not have been achieved by secular means?

—G. H. Taylor (Chairman *ad interim*, Editorial Comm., *The Freethinker*).

Deleted from the letter was a reference to Foote's *A Lie in Five Chapters*, which exposed this same Hughes.

The debate on the motion that "Christianity cannot solve the intellectual and practical problems of the common man in the 20th century" drew freethinkers considerable distances to University House, Bethnal Green, on February 11, and the number of them who took part in a lively discussion largely exceeded that of the religious speakers. It is doubtful whether the facts and witticisms of Mr. F. A. Ridley, the proposer of the motion, or the eloquence and passion of Canon Fitzgerald, the opposer, affected the convictions of anyone present, and the motion was carried by 29 votes for to 12 against.

## A BUDDHIST GENERAL COUNCIL

(Concluded from page 59)

Founder might have recognised, it is not theistic, does not worship Buddha as a god, and professes to be a philosophy rather than a theology. Its monastic practices and its ethical code appear unduly pessimistic and ascetic by western standards; but it is, perhaps, as rationalistic as, say, modern Unitarianism, and not much less so than some of our "most reverend" Rationalists. It is not much of a religion in the dogmatic sense.

The Council of Rangoon appears to have been an impressive gathering. Thousands of monks were present, and messages of good will were received from many lands. The Council itself was opened with medieval pomp and circumstance. However, we are living in the modern world, and the Industrial Revolution is now reaching Asia. Its scientific basis and determinist philosophy have already played havoc with religion in the West; and the Oriental religions, including Buddhism, will soon be feeling its dynamic impact.

# Religious Attitudes to Mrs. Knight

By G. H. TAYLOR

## Roman Catholic

THE Vatican called for a full report of the broadcasts, and the Pope's secretary told the *Daily Sketch*:—

We are shocked to hear that there are broadcasts of this sort in England. . . . We are certain that good Catholics in England will not listen to broadcasts of this nature.

Bruno was burned; Mrs. Knight is to be switched off. The difference is merely one of time and place; the attitude is the same.

## C. of E.

There has been no general consistency, as with the Catholic Church. After Mrs. Knight's first talk a Highbury (London) Church Council made a frenzied protest as follows:—

We are shocked and horrified beyond anything that words can express, that a public responsible institution like the B.B.C. would dare to violate all the laws of decency and Christian conduct by broadcasting the pagan views of Mrs. Knight to the parents and children of Britain.

The resolution asks the B.B.C. "to cancel the other broadcasts, and apologise to the people of Britain for this unseemly conduct so alien to our people.

"By continuing these broadcasts you are contributing generously to the complete downfall of our whole Christian civilisation."

This protest was given wide publicity, the effect being to heighten public interest in the remaining two broadcasts.

A Catford (London) vicar, on the other hand, calls the Highbury attitude "arrant nonsense." In his church magazine this vicar makes the following startling admission:—

Very few people go to church nowadays. To profess a religious faith is to be regarded as a bit queer. Yet the majority of people are good citizens and lead decent, respectable lives.

For those words he earned applause from the Freethinking editor of the *South London Press* (Mr. E. Kinton), who on January 25 reminded his readers that "Civilisation is built up by man without help from the Church."

The *C. of E. Newspaper* deplored the "hysterical fuss" and itself showed a more tolerant spirit:—

If the Christian faith can only reply to such a person as Mrs. Knight with personal abuse and can find no compelling answer, it deserves to fail and will, in fact, disappear. Mrs. Knight was telling those who do not accept the Christian faith how to train their children. What reasonable objection can there be?

Here we have a state of affairs in which the B.B.C., the Press and education—in fact all the most influential means of mass communication—are Christian monopolies. (Can it be imagined that any of them would take a stand against Christianity?) From all of them proceeds constantly such a version of the Faith as Christian leaders imagine will commend itself to the public. A veritable Mississippi of propaganda pours out. Yet what an outcry when one feminine voice takes a different line!

Perhaps the reason is that Mrs. Knight was so forthright. She said that the Christian religion contained many myths and legends. (January 21.)

The *Church Times*, having described her opinions as "dangerous claptrap," promises in headline, "Archbishop of York answers Mrs. Knight." Evidently their idea of what an "answer" is differs from ours. He says: "The best reply would be to support and to strengthen the Sunday School and youth work." Not the slightest attempt is made to deal with Mrs. Knight's case. He throws a few adjectives at it in the approved style, but when will our Christian apologists learn that adjectives are no substitute for argument.

\* \* \* \*

The National Sunday School Union, representing most Anglican and Nonconformist Sunday Schools, has joined in the criticism. The official journal, *Sunday School Chronicle*, says:—

In a free country, we cannot possibly dispute the right of individuals to hold whatever opinions they choose.

But as Christians we are certainly entitled to protest against anti-Christian propaganda on the radio.

In other words, the Atheist may hold his opinions, especially if no one can hear him. This is also the attitude of *The Christian Herald* (January 29):—

Mrs. Knight is perfectly entitled to hold such beliefs. We are not living in a Police State where freedom of speech is prohibited. But what is entirely objectionable is that the B.B.C. should give anyone the freedom of the air for such undiluted blasphemy. At Broadcasting House there is a central Advisory Committee on Religious broadcasting, composed of Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Free Churchmen. . . . So far as I know, they were not consulted, *But someone read the script beforehand, and approved it.* He or she is the one who must be held responsible for such a glaring error of judgment, and should be relieved of this post, being too dangerous a person to be entrusted with the approval or disapproval of any statement on religion. In the meantime, we call upon the B.B.C. to repudiate such blasphemous views, and to take immediate steps to see that such an error of judgment and good taste is not repeated.

We are not told whose interests this "dangerous person" threatens, but it is easy to guess. Free speech is always a danger to established lies. The following, from the same article, throws some light:—

Twenty-seven years ago, the ban on religious controversy was lifted from the B.B.C., on the assumption that the good taste and sound judgment of the Corporation could be trusted. Two recent broadcast talks by Mrs. Margaret Knight . . . have demonstrated that such judgment is not to be trusted. As I listened to her amazing utterance, I could hardly believe my ears. . . .

"Not to be trusted" obviously means not to be trusted to protect Christianity. Conversely, it means "to be trusted to keep Atheism silent." Such is the Christians' weird notion of fair play.

## Nonconformist

The president of the Methodist Conference favoured giving Mrs. Knight a hearing, and in general the Nonconformist attitude was broader, though there were some discrepancies in semi-official pronouncements. (Only the R.C. Church took an unwavering line.) Several Methodist representatives took the "clever" line of welcoming Mrs. Knight's broadcasts as (to quote one) "excellent propaganda for the validity and efficacy of the Christian faith." (*Hull Daily Mail*, January 24.)

So Mrs. Knight, we are told, has done Christianity some good! Do they *really* think so? Well, there is an easy way of proving it. Let them ask the B.B.C. for more of her. Let these "clever" Christians prove their sincerity by pressing the B.B.C. to broadcast more scientific Humanism.

## Unitarian

Technically speaking, I suppose Unitarians are Nonconformists, but so vast is the difference in their attitude to Mrs. Knight, that I treat them as a sect apart. Whereas most Nonconformists, and some Church people, are prepared to *allow* an unbeliever to use the radio, the Unitarians *positively welcome* Mrs. Knight. In fact, Unitarianism, apart from its attenuated conception of a personal Deity, could almost embrace the beliefs of Mrs. Knight.

The *Inquirer* (January 22) congratulates the B.B.C. on the broadcasting of "an intelligent humanist lady," and deplors that

Some of the criticism—and how spiritually puffed-up some of it has been—comes from people who have a capacity for ignoring facts. Whatever may be the nature of the traditional Christian religion, it is plainly true that on the whole most educated people to-day reject its historic assumptions. . . . Educated opinion, not so long ago, supported what was believed about the origins and development of the Christian religion, and did not diverge from what the religion taught about the natural world. All that has gone. It is one of the plain facts of to-day. The revolution in history and science has destroyed the past suppositions. . . . The standards of evidence of orthodox Christian scholars, in many cases, are in painful contrast to those adopted by others. What can be made, for instance, of the devices adopted by Catholic historians to explain away the recorded fact that Jesus had brothers and sisters? This may be a small matter; but the exposition of the lady humanist of her own belief was straightforward and pure in comparison. . . . There is a wild contrast between the structure of what is officially called the Christian religion (and so frequently and with such assurance occupies the time of the B.B.C.), and the disturbed religion of so many questioning and sensitive people. Their beliefs, or what they hope to believe, cannot be fitted into the framework of the traditional religion.

How far, for instance, does the whole structure of the

Christmas festival fit in with any known facts of the past? . . . The dreary pretence that all is now as it was in the past, in the manner in which men express themselves, is banal, flabby and cowardly to many who desire the truth as it is.

A contributor to the *Inquirer* of January 29 writes:—

The very old argument has been resurrected that, without religion, men would revert to bestiality and unrestricted vice.

This contributor, in our eyes, grows in moral stature when he continues:—

I only wish that I could compare myself with some I know who find their inspiration in just those very facts to which Mrs. Knight appealed.

For that sentiment we metaphorically salute him.

**Jewish**

The only official Jewish comment on the broadcasts appears to be a repeated article by Rabbi Dr. Epstein. It contains the most appalling nonsense in what is intended as an attack on Atheism. Since he informs us that "Atheism is as old as the hills" one would legitimately suppose it had been in existence long enough for him to understand it. Instead, he has got Atheism confused, by some obscure process, with Nazism and Hitler's persecution of the Jews.

**An Open Letter to the "Gloucestershire Echo"**

SIR,—Since your columns are apparently closed to the Freethought point of view in the recent controversy over the broadcasts of Mrs. Margaret Knight, I can only have recourse to the present medium to remind you that we are not living in the 13th century—when both Mrs. Knight, and the writer, would probably have been tortured, or burned at the stake for expressing our unbelief.

No longer able to silence us for our heterodoxy by that barbaric method, the Christian press (speaking for the church-going community now estimated to be about ten per cent. of the population) manages to arrange matters so that the voice of unbelief shall "seldom be heard in the land."

Having regard to the flooding of religious broadcasts for many hours each week (with specially nauseating doses at Easter and Christmas) I thought the Humanist broadcasts of the courageous Mrs. Knight indicated a sign of the times—and a victory for fair play.

The B.B.C. is not a Christian monopoly and, on reflection by the majority of licence-holders (who, presumably, have some voice in "calling the tune") I am sure they would agree that even unbelievers have just as much right to have their opinions heard as the most rabid Christians. In other words, do we want the truth, or don't we?

DIDYMUS.

**If I were a God like you!**

If I were a God like you, and you were a man like me,  
 And in the dark you prayed and wept and I could hear and see,  
 The sorrow of your broken heart would darken all my day,  
 And never peace or pride were mine 'till it was smiled away—  
 I'd clear my Heaven above your head 'till all was bright and blue  
 If you were a man like me, and I were a God like you!  
 If I were a God like you, and you were a man like me,  
 Small need for those my might had made to bend the suppliant  
 knee;  
 I'd light no lamp in yonder Heaven to fade and disappear,  
 I'd break no promise to the Soul, yet keep it to the ear!  
 High as my heart I'd lift my child 'till all his dreams came true,  
 If you were a man like me, and I were a God like you!

Robert Buchanan.

**Correspondence**

TYPES OF BELIEVER

I, for one, welcome the appearance on the front page of *The Freethinker* of the article by the Rev. John L. Broom.

It is a complete answer to those superficial, self-styled "rationalists" who are so fond of assuring us that "of course," "religionists," especially "parsons," are all stupid and ignorant fanatics.

I suppose if one has encountered only the Billy Graham fundamentalist type of believer one can be excused for supposing that "religionists" are all credulous fools. People who act on this assumption, however, are due for a severe jolt when they come across the urbane, witty, scholarly type of Christian apologist.

In complete contrast to the crude vehemence of the "Brother-are-you-saved?" school, the intelligent apologist employs a disarmingly affable, conversational, "let's-be-reasonable" manner.

Instead of indulging in blood-curdling fire-and-brimstone rhetoric, he carefully maintains an air of down-to-earth, genial common sense.

Having met and argued with this type of believer, I can only express in advance my pity for those who will one day be rudely awakened to the fact that demolishing religious arguments and outwitting religious opponents is not nearly so easy as they would have us believe.

S. W. BROOKS.

A CORRECTOR CORRECTED

Mr. Paul Varney is mistaken in thinking that I misuse the term "hybrid." Biologists do not restrict it to mean a cross between individuals of different species. Dr. A. W. Haupt states quite clearly that: "A hybrid is simply an organism whose parents represent two distinctly different types of individuals. They may belong to the same species or to different species. . . ." (*Fundamentals of Biology*, McGraw-Hill, 1940). One sometimes has to make a distinction between intra-specific and inter-specific hybrids (C. D. Darlington in *The New Systematics*, Ed. Julian S. Huxley, Oxford, 1940), but this is clearly unnecessary when dealing with man.

Elsewhere, Dr. Darlington refers to heterosis or hybrid vigour resulting from "crossing inbred lines derived from different varieties, or, if from the same variety, separated early in the inbreeding programme." (*The Elements of Genetics* by C. D. Darlington and K. Mather, Allen and Unwin, 1949.) It will be seen, then, that my use of both "hybrid" and "heterosis" was biologically accurate.

COLIN MCCALL.

—NEXT WEEK—

**THE AUTHOR OF "1984"**

By COLIN MCCALL

“1984”

Appreciation of the limited space in *The Freethinker* justifies me in replying to H.C. with his distorted and evasive answer to my query. His definition of Totalitarianism is “complete power in the hands of a few people.” Agreed. Now H.C. tells us it was the “voluble Totalitarians” who raised the protest. (1) Now what was this complete power? (2) Does he mean that the R.C. Church, being totalitarian, were the objective? (3) What independence has the B.B.C.? (4) What books of Orwell proclaimed his Socialism? Really this typical Christian answer, refer to the Gospels, is not worthy of H.C.

The question that was too vague was, why is H.C. to accept the statements made by George Brown, M.P., and not the Pope? It is very doubtful if H.C. saw the film, if he did and could endorse it, then Bradlaugh, Foote and Cohen wasted their lives. The silliest part of this nonsense from H.C. is that less than 2 per cent. of readers have TV. To the reader abroad it must have been very instructive, and must have been as clear as the answers. I note that *The Freethinker* has now entered into political controversy, *Science in History*. I take it the columns will now be open to the four political parties to have a “do,” with H.C. giving the final verdict. It is time this gentleman took off his halo.

J. W. BARKER.

### RELIGION IN SCHOOL

As a result of getting some publicity for recent actions in getting myself (a teacher) and my children excused “from all participation in Christian observances in school” my attention has been called to your paper again. I may say that I used to receive it regularly in the pre-war years but got tired of it because I felt that it was too narrowly anti-Christian and not enough concerned with other very dangerous mental phenomena such as nationalism.

I am going to try your paper again for a six-month period in the hope that in its present outlook it will be prepared to deal with criticism of these things as well as face the problem of allowing positive alternatives to the old religious views. In my view this is quite essential. I do not think any man can live without a positive philosophy or ultimate aim (based upon assumption and therefore a faith) of some kind.

E. G. MACFARLANE.

### CHINA

Re the article “Communism and Religion,” it may well be that the influence of Christian missions has been destroyed in China, but I think that any Freethinker will find small satisfaction if (as seems probable) the methods were in any way on the lines of the ghastly experiences recounted in “Calgary in China,” by Fr. R. W. Greene. The “last state” of the people in the unhappy town of Tung-an seems to have been “worse than the first,” and whatever one’s religious views, the sympathies of any lover of justice and good feeling must be with a very courageous priest.

G. W. CLARK.

### RUSSIA AND RELIGION

The letter from K. Lidaks is confused and confusing. May I point out that in the Soviet Union there is no State-organised Church, no Patriarch “appointed from the Kremlin,” no Church called a “Holy Orthodox Soviet Church,” and even less a “Soviet” Church of Bulgaria.

In the U.S.S.R. there is freedom for both religious worship (equally applying to the various Christian sects, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, etc.) and anti-religious propaganda.

It is the official view of the ruling party that religious views are unscientific and reactionary, but that they should be combated by rational argument and not by persecution.

PAT SLOAN  
(Gen. Sec., B.S.F.S.)

### CANADIAN CANDOUR

Voice of a candid friend. Go “louder and funnier” and you’d sell like hot cakes! There’s too much detail and research, not enough general interest to appeal to the many. Why bother so much about the already converted? Why not do some recruiting? Much your most readable item is “This Believing World.” You have too many college men aboard: fellows who know the books but not folks. More pep and less science.

J. F. KIRKHAM.

### A RE-DEFINITION OF ATHEISM?

As soon as the Christian dupes realise the philological truth of what their own divines tell them nowadays, namely, that “the Lord” is a mistranslation of “Yahweh” and “God” is a misspelling of a generic noun (= *el* or *Na-elohim* = “the god-s”)—

which the Yahwist priests interpreted slyly as a synonym for their tabooed proper name, Yahweh, then it is *not* open to them to go on arguing with the help of this once respectable but now fallacious term “God.” This is plain common sense. The dupes *must* talk correctly: “an all-powerful god” or “gods” or “the god Yahweh, our own god,” and this will, of course, be plain mythology. But there is no return to the category-fallacy of “the god God.” Now, how do Atheists deal with the last prop of the Billy Graham salvation racket, the “religious (or mystical) experience” which is appealed to in arguing for “God’s existence”? Remembering that there exists no reality corresponding to the word “god” (misspelled as “God,” but perpetuated with the capital letter by a duped tradition), we shall be able to interpret scientifically the mystic’s utterance “I perceive God (or more vaguely: God’s presence).” Depending entirely on “the dominant ideas of the group to which the mystic belongs” (Raglan, *Origins of Religions*), we shall interpret what the mystic perceives and calls “God” as plain sun (if he is an ancient Egyptian), or a certain star (if a Babylonian), etc. In case it is an inner feeling of a Red Indian, it may be mesaline intoxication (see *Encyclopedia of Aberrations*, 1953). But whatever the psychological or physical reality (the “immaterial” drops out as another self-contradiction, meaning “existing nowhere at all”) as a cause of the mystic’s or the dupe’s rather *locally conditioned verbal behaviour*, it will never, never be a question (let alone a prop) of the existence of “the god God,” more exactly: of “the god god!” And that is why even an ex-Dean of Exeter now openly admits that religious experience “may conceivably be an illusion . . . a very large and a very old one. . . .” Even if a Christian dupe like Jeans—becoming desperate in his logical plight—drops the word “God” and substitutes a proper name, say, “Jehovah,” he will, of course, escape the frying pan of my category-fallacy, but will still land into the fire of plain mythology or fiction, whether ancient or home-made.—Yours, etc.,

GREGORY S. SMELTERS.

### Points from Letters

Billy Graham has said that the “spiritual mentality” of the average American is that of a twelve year old. Take heart, Billy—you may yet attain that level yourself.—T.G.

News of calamity comes from the Bible Belt. The student body at Toronto University is “religiously illiterate.” That’s the good word from the proxy to the press lately, and all Canada is appalled.—J. F. KIRKHAM.

The question of Capital Punishment makes a cross-split in the ranks of Christians and Secularists alike, with some of each on either side. It has therefore no relevance to the Christian v. Secularist controversy and should be dropped from the Secularist principles.—P. A. MACLAREN.

Women are much more religious than men. Is this because man is biologically more audacious? More venturesome and therefore more apt to doubt?—W. BURGESS.

When Mrs. Knight spoke on the B.B.C. one paper clamoured for “both sides to be heard.” When a Christian speaks it is satisfied with just the one side!—F. BURKE.

Letters in the Christian press, and comments by hysterical Christian journalists, on Mrs. Knight’s broadcasts, are a timely corrective to those who would tell us that the straight freethought attack is out of date. We must not relax!—A. BURKE (Mrs.).

In my view, to judge from this furore, the access of *real* hard-hitting freethought to the B.B.C. is farther off than we think. Meanwhile, *The Freethinker* is doing a great job, which no other journal is doing, or can do.—J. N. B. EGERTON.

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