

The Freethinker

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LAST century, the famous French Republican and anti-clerical political leader, Leon Gambetta, uttered the historic slogan, so often repeated since his day, "Clericalism, there's our main enemy." At the time when the great orator made this stirring declaration, the then recently founded French "Third Republic" was the scene of a fierce struggle for survival against the combined forces of Royalism and its ally, political Catholicism, or "Clericalism" as Gambetta called it. Eventually, under the dynamic leadership of Gambetta and Clemenceau, the French anti-clericals, republicans, and Freemasons, brought their defence of the Republic, and of its secular constitution to a successful conclusion. The "Third" French Republic survived the unsavoury Dreyfus Case, also a clerically-contrived plot against the Republic, and lasted down to the Nazi conquest in 1940.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The Struggle for the French Republic

By F. A. RIDLEY

Clericalism versus The "Fourth" Republic

One of the outstanding features of post-war Europe has been represented by the remarkable political offensive conducted from the Vatican. Political Catholicism "Clericalism," as Gambetta described it, has very cleverly taken advantage of the revolutionary crisis through which Europe is, at present, passing, to recover its former authority. As far as the Vatican is concerned, present-day Europe, like Gaul in the days of Julius Caesar, can be divided into three parts: in Spain, Portugal and Italy, the Roman Catholic Church is all-powerful or as near to it as makes no difference; whereas, east of the so-called "Iron Curtain," as also in the solidly Protestant Scandinavian lands, its power has been virtually extinguished; between these two areas, there is a third intermediate zone in which political Catholicism is, at present, fighting fiercely for supremacy. This zone comprises France, (Western) Germany, Austria, Switzerland—where the current struggle is over the re-admission of the hitherto illegal Jesuits—Holland, Belgium—recently on the verge of civil war over the question of secular education—and Luxembourg. In France, with which we are, at present concerned, the clerical forces are, at present, making a fierce attempt, hitherto by no means unsuccessful, to undermine the present secular constitution of the post-war "Fourth" Republic; just as in the days of Gambetta, Clericalism was hard at work trying to assert its supremacy over the "Third" Republic.

A French Anti-clerical

The urgent need for the anti-clerical forces to bestir themselves in the land of Voltaire, Renan, and Victor Hugo, is vividly indicated in a remarkable, and remarkably interesting, pamphlet recently published in Paris, *Signification internationale de la bataille laïque—The International Significance of the Struggle for Secularism*. The author Monsieur Marceau Pivert, is well-known socialist and anti-clerical personality, who is chairman of the Paris Socialist Party, and

a former chairman of the International Committee for a United Socialist States of Europe, in which latter capacity the present writer served under him. Monsieur Pivert is also the author of an important book—*L' Eglise et l' Ecole—The Church and the School*—to which the former French Prime Minister the late Monsieur Leon Blum, contributed a preface. In his present booklet, the author indicates the danger to the secular constitution of the French Republic and in particular, to secular education, at present represented by the aggressive counter-revolution conducted by French Clericalism. With only the notable exception of Monsieur Mendes - France every French Prime Minister

since the war has been a practising Catholic as is the present President of the Republic, Monsieur Coty. Marceau Pivert draws particular attention to the insidious Jesuitical "turning manoeuvre" by which the Clericals describe themselves as "Christian Democrats," and even as Socialists, in order to divide the formerly solidly anti-clerical parties of the Left. It must of course be remembered that, in France, as generally on the European Continent, the line of demarcation between the clerical and anti-clerical forces corresponds much more closely with their contemporary political divisions, between Left and Right, than is the case here. At least, that has been so in the past, but, as Marceau Pivert clearly indicates, Rome is, at present, seeking, not without success, to penetrate the French working class under a leftist guise. For example, the recently inaugurated Feast of "St. Joseph the Workman," and the recent experiment of the French "Worker Priests," constitute current illustrations of this leftist "turning movement" on the part of Vatican political strategy in "The century of the Common Man"!

Clerical versus Anti-clerical

In his book, *The Republican Tradition in Europe*, the well-known Oxford historian, the late H.A.L. Fisher, has given a classical description of the traditional bifurcation of French society between the conflicting forces of Clericalism versus Anti-clericalism. Fisher writes: "A French child must either be brought up a Roman Catholic or he must be brought up a Republican. There is no real alternative. In the first case he will learn that the French Revolution was the crime of crimes, that divorce is a sin, that civil marriage is a sin, that monarchy is the best form of government, that liberty is an alias for wanton pride, and that, with the exception of two brief interludes, the whole history of France since 1789 has been one ghastly aberration from the path of godly duty, and in the second case he will learn just the opposite of all this, that the Church in all ages has been the enemy of freedom and progress, that the civil code is the charter of social emancipation and that the French Revolution was the discovery of social justice upon earth. The Third Republic—our author was writing in 1911—F.A.R.—has captured the schools, dissolved the (religious

F.A.R.) congregations, and disestablished the Church, but it still rules over a divided nation." (cf. H.A.L. Fisher—*The Republican Tradition in Europe*—pp. 253-4.)

Secular Education

Elsewhere in the same book the author points out that, in the opinion of French Republicans, "a republic could never be established unless it were supported by a system of free secular education." Marceau Pivert's pamphlet makes this point abundantly clear; it is the School which forms the decisive point at issue between the competing forces of French Clericalism and Anti-clericalism. This has, as Dr. Fisher indicated, been so ever since 1789, and it is so in 1955, as the Pivert pamphlet makes perfectly clear. Ever since Loyola stated the Jesuit claim to control secular education, the Church has realised, and has consistently acted upon, his historic dictum, "Give me the child until the age of seven, and he is mine for life." In current French politics the application of this slogan consists in continuous pressure on the part of the clericals for subsidies to the "private" that is, confessional schools, in opposition to the State-controlled "public schools"—it must, of course, always be remembered that, in France as in America, the "public schools" are so in reality as well as name, and are not expensive private schools as they are here! Secular education is guaranteed

by the present French constitution, in contrast to the clerical Fascist regime of the late, unlamented, Marshal Petain during the Nazi occupation. However, clerical "pressure groups" appear to be gradually whittling away the secular State and the secular Constitution of the Fourth Republic.

Clericalism is the Enemy—Still!

It is clear that in contemporary France, it is still true that, in Gambetta's phrase, "Clericalism is the enemy," and not only in France. In the Tribunal of the French Parliament, described by Marceau Pivert as a parliament of a most reactionary and pro-clerical nature, one of Pivert's socialist colleagues, Monsieur Deixonne, recently recalled Gambetta's historic phrase. It is a sign of the times, and of *French* politics, for certainly one could not imagine an English Labour M.P. or indeed, an M.P. of any party, coming out in the House of Commons with an open attack on the Church. Here, we no longer produce Bradlaughs, or, if we do, we no longer elect them as M.P.s! Here, Secularism and the Secular State are not—more's the pity—political issues. In France, they are; in the land of Voltaire, anti-clericalism is still fighting back, as our author makes clear. The result of this conflict for, what we may perhaps term the "soul" of the French Republic, will have effects that will by no means be confined to France.

Lucretius

By "MIMNERMUS SECUNDUS"

THE personality of Lucretius is one of the most extraordinary and one of the vaguest in the whole world of literature. He comes before us in his great poem, *De Rerum Naturæ* (On the Nature of Things), very distinctly. He is, as it were, always present, but the details of his life are so shadowy. This is not to be wondered at, for Lucretius wrote half a century before the alleged birth of the mythical Christ. Yet, in some ways, this old-world Freethinker comes closer to our modern sympathies than many others who sang of fair ladies and Falernian wine in that far-off time in which they lived. Across the gulf of twenty centuries, across the far deeper abyss of an older civilisation and an alien language, we recognise in him a brave soldier in the Army of Human Liberation.

The name of Lucretius is immortalised by his Atheistic work, *De Rerum Naturæ*, which remains the finest didactic poem in any language. In this truly wonderful poem, for whole pages together, he reads like a modern author rather than a Roman poet of the Classic period. We may gain some notion of the general effect of this masterpiece if we conceive Tennyson to have devoted his rare genius to versifying Spencer's "Synthetic Philosophy," or Swinburne to have subordinated his splendid gifts to the poetic presentation of the Darwinian Theory. The central idea which lay at the heart of the magnificent poem of Lucretius was that the universe is ruled by natural law, and that mankind is free to work out its own destiny, unhampered by any supernatural "guidance."

Lucretius denied the doctrine of a future life and its ethical usefulness. He declared this promised hereafter to be a fable and a dream. Moreover, and this is truly astonishing, he anticipated some of the scientific ideas of the nineteenth century. Writing two thousand years ago Lucretius perceived the truth of evolution, the indestructibility of substance, survival of the fittest, the origin of language and the progress of society. To us these things are but comparatively recent tidings, but they dawned twenty centuries ago on the prophetic mind of this great Latin poet dreaming on things to come.

It will be seen that Lucretius is so much more than a

singer writing odes to his mistress's eyebrows. He disclaimed to carve cherrystones; he elected to hew granite. He is man's champion against priestcraft. According to him, the greatest curse of human nature is religion, which priests use to fool and to degrade mankind. Now and again his cheek flushes with anger, as when he records, in lines of great beauty, the terrible guilt prompted by religion against the most sacred ties of humanity. No poet has presented us with a picture more finished than that of the sacrifice of Iphigenia to the "gods." It is a story "too deep for tears." We see the hapless maiden trembling by the altar without power of speech, the murderous priest, the sorrowing father, the strong men powerless, and the awful end. Lucretius concludes his account with lines that make us feel his heart throb with indignation as we read:—

"Learn thou then
To what damned deeds religion urges men."

A most marked characteristic of Lucretius was his passionate love of humanity. Listen to his beautiful words on death, and note how he insists that it is but dreamless rest:—

"Thou not again shalt see thy dear home's door,
Nor thy sweet wife and children come to throw
Their arms round thee, and ask for kisses more,
And through thy heart make quiet comfort go,
Out of thy hands hath slipped the precious store.
Thou hoardest for thine own, men say, and lo!
All thou desired is gone. But never say
All the desire as well hath passed away."

His pathos and tenderness in contemplating the riddle of life have already been noted. His large, brave heart felt sympathy with the animals as well as with humanity, and he voices the helpless grief of brutes sorrowing for their young. His ever-present ardour for knowledge, his austerity of character, rank him among the really great poets, who shine star-like in the firmament of art.

When we reflect on the present condition of priest-ridden Ireland, Spain, Portugal, and Italy; when we recall the struggle of reason and religion, written in blood and fire during the centuries, we feel it is but just to acknowledge that this old-world Freethinker fought the battle for Free-

(Concluded on next page)

Einstein's Impact on Physical Science

By J. GORDON

MR. G. H. TAYLOR'S two articles on Einstein and his influence on modern scientific and philosophic thought came as a timely reminder of one who did more to shape current ideas in physical science than any other person before or since.

Any layman knows why Einstein became famous, but even yet the full value of his major contribution to science, "The Theory of Relativity," has yet to be realised and its implications understood. It is, perhaps, a symptom of the comparatively greater toleration of unorthodox ideas in the present age that Einstein, the bold innovator and original thinker, achieved fame at the beginning of his career in contra-distinction to his illustrious predecessors, Galileo and Copernicus, whose work came to temporary grief against the impenetrable "wisdom" of the Catholic Church. Perhaps the truly alien character of Einstein's new concepts failed to register with the religious mind of the time, although some Jesuit later on described Einstein's theory as "a ghastly apparition of Atheism." The main opposition actually came from scientists themselves, chiefly from the older generation of classical physicists who found the new concepts of time and space baffling in their originality. These men were unable to achieve that reorientation of thought necessary even to begin to perceive the meaning which lay behind the new symbols. They had too much to "unlearn." To-day, Einstein's theory of relativity is part of the curriculum of University science students at an advanced level and may be understood by anyone possessing the necessary mathematical background.

Apart from his epoch-making "Theory of Relativity," Einstein made notable contributions to that other great pillar of modern physics known as the Quantum Theory. In some ways the basic ideas of Quantum Physics are even more revolutionary than the theory of relativity. This arises from the fact that in the study of atomic phenomena which lies within the domain of Quantum theory, the principle of Determinism has had to be abandoned. It may be judicious to explain at this point just how this has come about. Atomic nuclei are often pictured as being like miniature solar systems, a number of electrons revolving round a nucleus of protons and neutrons in the same manner as planets revolve round a sun, a gross over-simplification, of course. Now, in astronomical calculations, it is possible, if one knows the position and orbital velocity of a planet, to predict with certainty the position of the planet at any future assigned time, this being so because the set-up at any given moment is completely determined by the conditions existing previously. However, when we come to apply these ideas at the atomic level, it is found that no matter how delicately the experiment is performed or how refined a technique is employed, the very act of making a measurement disturbs the quantity being measured and results in an uncertainty which can only be interpreted by using statistical methods which yield results described in terms of probabilities. This now famous uncertainty relation is what constitutes Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. It is imperative to mention, to avoid misunderstanding, that Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is a perfect scientific theory. Unfortunately the theory has been polluted by certain popularisers of science in this country, ably abetted by certain of the clergy and inspired by some of the writings of Eddington and Jeans in their lighter moments, in so far as they have purported to see in the Uncertainty Principle a loop-hole for the Christian idea of free will. Apart from Einstein who has castigated this as "objectionable nonsense," Heisenberg himself and one or

two other front rank physicists have contemptuously rejected the idea that electrons have free will and have stoutly maintained that the abandonment of determinism is not synonymous with giving up the concept of causality itself. Classical physics identified causality with determinism and since determinism was now inadmissible in quantum mechanics, the doom of causality was hailed with delight by the backward-looking religious world. Indeterminism may be a difficult concept to grasp, but at least it is not palpably idiotic as is the notion that things are basically "uncaused."

Einstein himself never accepted the view that indeterminism had come to stay in the new physics. While admitting the logic behind their arguments, Einstein differed from the majority of contemporary physicists in claiming that in principle atomic phenomena were *indeterminable* rather than *indeterminate* and that if only we were clever enough we could determine such conjugates as time-energy or co-ordinate-momentum with as much precision in the atomic domain as elsewhere. To the aim of evolving a comprehensive system which would unify gravitation and atomic phenomena in one single theory in a deterministic framework, Einstein devoted the later part of his life. In 1949 he published what he thinks will be the answer—"A Generalised Theory of Gravitation." Owing to mathematical difficulties neither he nor his followers have succeeded in confronting the theory with experimental evidence. Should the theory ever be proved, it will rank as one of the greatest intellectual syntheses of all time.

It would be fitting to conclude by a glance at Einstein the man. Of the highest integrity and moral courage, Einstein was utterly uncompromising when it was a matter of scientific truth and especially so with himself. A man of strong democratic convictions and a passionate upholder of justice, he never hesitated to condemn intolerance and brutality in whatever form they were expressed, and in defence of his principles he could stand alone if need be against the mobilised forces of militarism and fascism. In the fitting words of President Eisenhower, "No man was more modest in the possession of the power that is knowledge more sure that power without wisdom is deadly. To all who live in this nuclear age, Albert Einstein exemplified the mighty creative ability of the individual in a free society."

It is Secularism

General Booth gave utterance to a real or pretended Salvation Army belief as follows: "We resolve all sin into selfishness, and all selfishness into sin, and we resolve all religion into benevolence, and all true benevolence into religion". But this is not Christianity. It is Secularism. Ingersoll says it over and over again in the cities and towns of America. It expresses the essence of modern humanitarianism. And the fact that it has penetrated the orthodoxy of the Salvation Army shows that what is sometimes called "the spirit of the age" is more potent than all the creeds that swear by the wisdom and revelations of antiquity.—G. W. FOOTE.

Lucretius

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dom. The passage of the centuries also helps us to understand the magnitude of the struggle between knowledge and ignorance. In his days, each, as it were, armed with the simplest weapons, fought together. Now, Freethought, armed with all the powerful resources of science, marches to battle in the confident hope of victory.

This Believing World

Although Bradlaugh's famous Oaths Act was passed in 1888, we cannot help wondering how many of the non-believing Members of Parliament, in taking their seats recently, insisted on affirming instead of swearing by God Almighty? Perhaps however there are no unbelieving M.P.'s. Perhaps the combined efforts of Billy Graham, the B.B.C. and regular Parliamentary morning prayers have shown them the True Light.

According to Mr. Aneurin Bevan, anyway, the members of the present Government are *not* Christians, and in this he is strongly supported by a one-time infidel-smasher, the Rev. Donald Soper, who fully agrees that Tories cannot be Christians. This means that the Opposition *must* be—and it would certainly be interesting to learn now whether any M.P.s, no matter of what party, solemnly refuse to take the oath. Bradlaugh died 64 years ago, and how very few M.P.s. have shown since, his courage and his sincerity—at least in matters of religion.

Our contemporary "John Bull" has joined the cry—"Back to the Bible!" Its leader writer, who obviously knows nothing whatever of Biblical criticism, not even that of Christians themselves, warmly welcomes the suggestion of Mr. W. J. Wolfenden, the Vice-Chancellor of Reading University, that every effort should be made to make people read the Bible as they used to last century. Why should people be ashamed caught reading the Bible, asks Mr. Wolfenden? and *John Bull* waxes quite indignant that, although Bibles are being sold in far greater numbers than ever, nobody seems to read them.

All this is quite true. The good old Family Bible which used to make such a splash on Grannie's sideboard, is mostly, these days (that is, if any survive) used for the family teapot or other purely secular uses; and the handy pocket Bibles usually printed in almost unreadable type are, in consequence, left unread. In any case, what with strikes, radio and TV, to say nothing of champion boxing matches, football finals, test cricket and pools, of what earthly use are the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the meals of Ezekiel, or the peregrinations of Jesus with a Devil? We wish *John Bull* would answer.

After being postponed for a month, the Oxford Union debate on whether "the Methods of Science are destructive of the Myths of Religion" was broadcast on the Third Programme recently. What a hullabaloo there would have been had it appeared on the Light or Home Programme. For here were Oxford undergraduates poking fun and wit at the *myths* of religion. Ye Gods!—was religion then mythical? You bet it was, according to the voting of many of those taking part in the debate.

We had two Professors in all their glory airing their views on opposite sides. Professor J. B. S. Haldane agreed that religious myths were destroyed by science, while Professor C. A. Coulson (as an active Methodist) claimed that this was impossible as science was essentially religious. Professor Coulson, who is almost as fundamentalist as the Rev. B. Graham, lacks unhappily the gift of making this clear, and for boring nonsense, his speech would be hard to beat. Naturally, as Oxford is the Home of Lost Causes, the debate ended with a vote in favour of religion, but it was by no means a walk-over for the believers. We are making progress—if slowly.

Our own spiritualist circles are not the only ones which can materialise the dead. A Kenya farmer recently gave an "inspiring" address pointing out how thoroughly spiritualistic was the Masai tribe. Their witch doctors held constant seances with dead people—the farmer himself often being present. He claimed he could never see any difference between the dead and the living—but after talking to the spirits, they just disappeared. But then don't all spirits, white or black, disappear? What a pity it is that the Masai spiritualists can't be brought over and arrange a fraternal conversazione—black and white spirits happily talking over their marvellous experiences in Summerland!

SCIENCE FRONT

"Continuous Creation"

A COSMOGRAPHER of Britain's Royal Observatory, Thomas Gold, is an upholder of the theory of "continuous creation." It will be remembered that a leading proponent of this theory is the Cambridge astronomer and mathematician, Fred Hoyle (*The Nature of the Universe*).

Gold does not believe that the universe came into being suddenly at some remote moment in the past.

Instead, he thinks that matter is still being created. It "appears" continuously in the form of single hydrogen atoms out in the empty reaches between the galaxies.

At first the lonely atoms form a very thin gas; they draw together by gravitational attraction. At last, after billions of years, the atoms gather into stars, and the stars into galaxies.

Because of some unknown property of large-scale space the galaxies fly apart, as they can be seen to do. But since new galaxies are formed continuously in the ever-growing voids between them, the "population density" of space remains about the same.

This process, says Gold, keeps the expanding universe in a steady state.

It has no beginning, and will have no end.

Open Letter

To the Organising Secretary of the National Equine Defence League.

DEAR SIR,

I must protest strongly against the narrow minded and ridiculous attitude of your Society in refusing any aid from *The Freethinker*. I am the daughter of a well known humanist writer, the late Lady Simon, who was a life-long worker for the cause of decent treatment of animals and whose name is honoured by the R.S.P.C.A., the International League for the Protection of Horses and other societies she worked for. I, too, am Chairman of an E.C. of the R.S.P.C.A. and do a lot of animal protection work.

I would point out that in Christian Spain, horses and bulls are tortured to death in the bull ring with the full approval of the Church. I can assure the N.E.D.L., that they would do well to reconsider their attitude to their humanist and free-thinking helpers. I am afraid they have already lost one legacy.

Yours truly,
S. W.

—NEXT WEEK—

LET US SAVE JESUS
By C. G. L. DU CANN

THE FREETHINKER

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Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.
Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
Manchester Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, 3 p.m., Platt Fields: 7-30 p.m., St. Mary's Blitzed Site: Speakers, Messrs. McCALL, MILLS, or WOODCOCK. Every weekday, Deansgate Blitzed Site, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.
Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday and Sunday at 8 p.m. Messrs. PARRY, THOMPSON, and other speakers.
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. RIDLEY, EBURY, O'NEILL and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday June 26, 7 p.m.: E. RAVENHILL, "Impressions from a Visit to America".
Friday Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—June 24: Discussion on "Separate Tables".
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street).—Thursday, July 7, 7.30 p.m.: F. GOODLIFE, "Quaker Religion".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 26, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "World War or World Peace".

Notes and News

Will members of the National Secular Society please note, that as Mr. P. Victor Morris is no longer General Secretary of the N.S.S., all letters for the Society should be addressed, The Acting Secretary, Mr. David Francis.

It is to be regretted that the Bradford Branch of the N.S.S. may temporarily have to lose the services of their principal speaker, the branch president Mr. H. Day, who has been advised by the doctor to suspend open-air work for some time. We are voicing the feelings of all supporters of the movement, both inside and outside Bradford, in wishing Mr. Day an effective recovery, even if it has to be a protracted one, from his illness, which has affected his throat. We shall hope to report better news of him in due course.

Reynolds News of May 22, contained an attack on the Graham crusade by a psychologist, Dr. B. Welbeck, whose article bore the title, "Billy Graham has HARMED the Churches." The writer has much scorn for the dogmatism and outdated theology which features Billy's meetings, and quotes remarks made to him when he interviewed "converts," such as "It didn't mean a thing," "I acted on the spur of the moment," etc.

Some months ago we referred to the rude shock sustained by the readers of a Bognor Regis newspaper when a letter from Mr. Hall, in support of Mrs. Knight's broadcasts, had by "an oversight in the sub-editing department," been allowed to slip into print intact. Another local freethinker, Mr. White, has been endeavouring to persuade the Bognor Regis library committee to accept *The Freethinker*. The committee were "unable to approve."

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £871 7s. 11d.; James F. Kirkham (Canada), £5; Mrs. S. Winckworth, 10s.; S. Trent, 4s. 9d.; A. Gregory, 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s. Total to date: £877 6s. 2d.

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

N.S.S. Annual Conference

Held in the Royal Hotel, London,
May 29, 1955

THERE is no doubt that the rail strike seriously affected attendance at the Conference. Yet some members were able to attend from fairly long distances, including two members present from Ireland.

The Minutes of the 1954 Conference having been adopted, the President, Mr. Ridley, read the Executive's Annual Report, which will be circulated to members. A discussion ensued as to whether the Report should be of a more domestic character, dealing with more matters specifically the concern of the Society. Mr. Collins and others thought that international affairs had been given too much prominence, but Mr. Shaw was anxious that the Report should not become too parochial. Messrs. McCall, Warner, Shephard and Challand thought the Report should be re-drafted, but Mr. Johnson pointed out that Conference only met annually. Mr. A. R. Williams suggested the idea of two Reports, one by the President and one by the Secretary, differing in character. The Report, after a narrow division, carried intact.

In discussing the Financial Report some members suggested that the Annual Dinner should not be subsidised, but the Treasurer maintained that it had a propaganda value which could not be assessed in terms of immediate financial return. Mrs. Rogals was of opinion that a Dinner Dance would be preferable. Mrs. Ebury asked whether increased subscription rates had affected the membership, and the Secretary replied that there had been no adverse effect. The Report was unanimously adopted.

For the election of President the Chair was taken by Mr. Ebury as a Vice-President. He ruled that Mr. Ridley's election was automatic because there was no other nomination and the Rules said the Society should have a President. Some discussion ensued and Mr. Ebury said it was unnecessary to vote because he was ruling that Mr. Ridley had been returned unopposed.

The voting for two Vice-Presidents was decided by the narrowest possible margin between Messrs. C. McCall, L. Ebury and T. Mosley, the first two being elected.

There was no nomination for the post of Secretary in view of a later motion to transfer the power of appointment from Conference to the Executive. Mr. W. Griffiths was re-elected Treasurer, Messrs. Wright, Fairbrother and Steel Auditors, and the E.C. as follows: Messrs. Arthur (North-East), Taylor (North-West), Hornibrook (Midlands), Tiley (Yorkshire), Shaw (South London), Ebury (North London), Cleaver (West London), Johnson (Scotland), Griffiths and Barker (Parent Branch) and Mrs. Venton (East London).

The motion to alter the Rules governing the appointment of Secretary was moved by Mr. Griffiths for the E.C., who, he explained, were hampered by the existing Rules, yet were required by them to manage the affairs of the Society. Mr. McCall and others thought that Conference should retain the power to appoint a Secretary, but after much discussion the motion was passed. There followed a motion by the E.C. that a thorough revision of Rules should be prepared for the decision of the next Conference. It was moved by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Ebury and carried.

A motion from North London Branch to regulate the number of members from one Branch who could sit on the national Executive was also passed.

With constitutional business completed, Conference passed on to a motion from West London protesting

... against the insidious steps taken by municipal authorities and backed up by the police, to interfere with free speech. Certain sites in London which for many years have been used for public meetings are now becoming car parks. If this practice is not stopped the rights of open-air speakers will disappear.

This was moved by Mr. Cleaver, briefly supported and carried. A Manchester motion advised

... each Branch to write to its Regional Director of the B.B.C. requesting facilities for talks on Freethought and Secularism by speakers representing the N.S.S.

This soon carried, but the next motion gave rise to some controversy. Nottingham Branch moved

That this Conference recommends that the practice of discussing miscellaneous resolutions on topics not directly connected with the objects of the N.S.S. be discontinued and Conference business be devoted to detailed discussion on *one* or *two* lines of inquiry chosen by the E.C. as having direct practical bearing on our propaganda work.

Mr. Challand, in moving, said this would break with tradition, but would be more profitable than deploring, advising, recommending and protesting, and would get rid of pious motions by substituting an intensive interchange of ideas on concentrated topics. Mr. Ebury said he strongly opposed the motion, and who was going to decide what were important subjects? With a few dissentients, however, the motion carried.

To save time, Kingston Branch withdrew a motion, and then came a motion in two parts seeking to raise the President's honorarium. Mr. Johnson explained that a sub-committee was sitting to consider the matter and had not yet declared its recommendation. It was agreed that Conference should wait for the findings of this sub-committee.

Motion by Glasgow Secular Society—

"That a committee be appointed to explore the possibilities for the use of films for Freethought propaganda."

In being passed, it was agreed that the Committee should be a national one.

The last five motions, which there was no time to discuss, were referred to the Executive. They were as follows:

Motion by North London Branch—

"That this Conference of the N.S.S. recognises that the gesture of the B.B.C. in allowing the broadcast of Mrs. Knight was a step in the right direction. But strongly protests at the continued lack of facilities allowed to minority movements. It claims that much more can and must be done to allow full expression of political, ethical and secular points of view. This Conference, therefore, calls upon all Members of Parliament and all people of goodwill to insist that freedom for all to express their views be made the active policy of the B.B.C."

Motion by the Executive Committee—

"That all buildings used for cultural or recreational purposes and not primarily based on a profit motive, should be exempted from the payment of rates."

Motion by Manchester Branch—

"That this Conference recommends the issuing of Branch Bulletins to members in order to encourage and maintain interest in activities."

Motion by North London Branch—

"That this Conference of the N.S.S., alarmed at the international arms race and the decision of the British Government to manufacture the hydrogen bomb, conflicting as they do with our 'Immediate Practical Object' No. 1, stating that 'modern war is futile and can only bring about the ultimate destruction of civilisation,' registers its uncompromising hostility to this prostitution of science and calls upon our Movement to work for, and associate with all Movements and individuals working for, disarmament and the maintenance of peace."

Motion by North London Branch—

"That this Conference considers it incumbent upon Branch Delegates to the Executive Committee to report their work and activities to their respective branches."

The extension of time having expired, the President then declared the meeting closed. G.H.T.

Henri Frédéric Amiel

By G. I. BENNETT

(Concluded from page 191)

As for Amiel's second stumbling-block—his passion for the ideal—this explains as well as anything could his curious hesitations in regard to love, marriage, and family life, which, as he admits again and again in his Journal, all made an attractive appeal to his nature. He sought the perfect on earth, and when he knew that that was ever beyond his grasp he took refuge in inactivity and renunciation. As a young man he was writing in his Journal:

"What might be spoils me for what is. What ought to be consumes me with sadness. . . . The ideal poisons for me all imperfect possession." "I have found it easier to give up a wish than satisfy it," he noted many years later. And towards the end of his life we have this all-revealing entry: "I have made use of the ideal to keep me from any kind of bondage. It was thus with marriage. Only perfection would have satisfied me; on the other hand, I was not worthy of perfection. . . . So that, finding no satisfaction in things, I tried to extirpate desire by which things enslave us. Independence has been my refuge; detachment my stronghold. I have lived the impersonal life; in the world, yet not of it; thinking much, desiring nothing. It is a state of mind which corresponds with what in women is called a broken heart, and it is in fact like it, since the characteristic common to both is despair. When one knows that one will never possess what one could have loved, and that one can be content with nothing less, one has, so to speak, left the world. . . ."

In the grip of an idea so absolute as the ideal, it is hardly surprising that Amiel's life was ineffectual and frustrated. Hesitating initially to take the helm of his vessel Destiny, he drifted. Beginning by failure, and having an early

premonition of ultimate failure, he allowed failure to become a creeping paralysis. "Self-distrust is destroying you," he told himself in his mid-thirties when there was yet time to pull himself together. But in vain. Disqualified by temperament for practical life, as the years passed he withdrew more and more into himself. He confessed he was without the driving-force, the ambitions, the moving passions that concert and direct other men's lives. He had abandoned himself to contemplation, being "rather a spectator than an actor," seeking "rather to understand than achieve." And yet he would not have been indifferent to the esteem and acclaim of the world had they come his way. But a man who habitually retreats into the still domains of pure thought; who falls victim to a fatal inertia that shirks the effort necessary to real accomplishment; who at every crucial moment of his life lacks confidence in himself to dare and do—such a man can hardly hope for public recognition and success.

In his inmost being Amiel regretted the opportunities lost to make his mark and do something noteworthy; for towards the end he wrote: "A life of no account! When all is added up—nothing! And worse, it has not been a life used up in the service of some adored object or sacrificed to some future hope. . . ."

To read these lines of self-reproach, full of the realisation of wasted years, is to feel some measure of the Swiss

professor's personal tragedy—his failure to be a man of achievement.

So far we have said nothing about Amiel's views on religion, but, now we know something of the man and his background, it is time we took a look at these.

Mrs. Humphry Ward's opinion was that his "life and thought are steeped in Christianity." And yet she has to avow that "as soon as his reasoning faculty has reached its maturity (he) never deceives himself as to the special claims of the religion which by instinct and inheritance he lives; he makes no compromise with dogma or with miracles."

It cannot be denied that Amiel's mind had a religious cast, and one feels that had he been able to believe he would have believed with ardour. He tried as hard as any could to resign himself to God, "to live and die in God"; but, in possession of an intellect that probed and questioned everything, he was a freethinker against his will.

"To win true peace a man needs to feel himself directed, pardoned, and sustained by a Supreme Power," he says in one place. "This faith gives strength and calm. I have not got it. All that is seems to me arbitrary and fortuitous. It may as well not be, as be . . ."

In another place: "Sacrifice is easy when asked for by a fatherly God; but I know nothing of this religious joy." Elsewhere, after a discussion in which he opines that Mosaism,¹ Christianity, and Islam are "founded upon an infantile cosmogony and upon a chimerical history of humanity," he pulls himself up with: "My thoughts are straying in vague paths. Why? Because I have no creed. All my studies end in notes of interrogation; and so that I may not draw premature or arbitrary conclusions I draw none."

These utterances in themselves are remarkable enough; but let us see what he has to say about that great pillar of the religious life, the world to come.

In 1859 when he was 37 years of age he noted: "To be born, to struggle, to disappear—there is the whole ephemeral drama of human life. Except in a few hearts, and not always in one, our memory passes like a ripple on the water or a breeze in the air. If nothing in us is immortal, what a small thing is life!"

If nothing in us is immortal . . . Did Amiel suspect, or even really believe, at that time that nothing is? It seems likely, for a few years later he was moved to reflect that the "relegation of life to some distant future (is) a false religious conception." And finally he wrote:

"I have defended the cause of immortality of the soul against those who questioned it; and yet, when I have reduced them to silence, I have scarcely known whether at bottom I was not, after all, on their side. I try to do without hope, but it is possible I no longer have the strength for it . . . It takes so much to maintain oneself in an exceptional point of view that one falls back into prejudice through sheer exhaustion . . . What is to become of us without hope?"

There can surely be no clearer evidence than this that the Genevese thinker, if he had once known faith (he had had a Calvinistic upbringing), had virtually lost it in the early years of manhood; and some of the most melancholy passages of the *Journal Intime* probably owe their inspiration largely to the unbelief of the author. He saw "on what a spider thread is hung our individual existence." He perceived that "the only certainty in this world of vain agitations and anxieties is the certainty of death, and that which is the foretaste and small change of death—pain." He felt all human hope beyond this life to be full of illusion: "Each one unwinds his special reel of hope, and as soon as he has come to the end of it he sits down to die."

Yet intermixed with much that is acutely penetrating and profoundly thoughtful, with much that is sad and nostalgic, there are occasional passages of rare charm that not only tell of the writer's delight in Nature, but reveal his descriptive powers. Take for instance:

"After dinner I passed my time with the birds in the open air, wandering in the shady walks which wind along under Pressy. The sun was brilliant and the air clear. The mid-day orchestra of Nature was at its best. Against the humming background made by

a thousand invisible insects there rose the delicate caprices and improvisations of the nightingale singing from the ash-trees, or of the hedge-sparrows and the chaffinches in their nests. The hedges are hung with wild roses, the scent of the acacia still perfumes the paths; the light down of the poplar seeds floated in the air like a kind of warm, fair-weather snow . . ."

Or these lines portraying mountain grandeur:

"A marvellous view of blinding and bewildering beauty. Above a milky sea of cloud, flooded with morning light, the rolling waves of which are beating up against the base of the wooded steeps of the Weissenstein, the vast circle of the Alps soars to a sublime height. The eastern side of the horizon is drowned in the splendours of the rising mists; but from the Tödi westward, the whole chain floats pure and clear between the milky plain and the pale blue sky . . ."

Or this pen-picture of hoar-frost and fog:

"This silvery landscape has a dreamy grace, a fanciful charm, which is unknown both to the countries of the sun and to those of coal-smoke. The trees seem to belong to another creation in which white has taken the place of green. As one gazes at these alleys, these clumps, these groves and arcades, these lace-like garlands and festoons, one feels no wish for anything else. Their beauty is original and self-sufficing—all the more because the ground powdered with snow, the sky dimmed with mist, and the smooth soft distances, combine to form a general scale of colour, and a harmonious whole, which charms the eye . . ."

It is tempting to quote more, but these extracts must do. And actually they serve quite well to show that, in outlook, Amiel was a poet as well as thinker and idealist—a poet for whom beauty was rendered poignant by the omnipresence of suffering, disease, and decay, and the all-destroying hand of time. It was an ever-painful awareness of this sorrowful complementary aspect of beauty that made him—a kind, gentle, solitary fellow whom Renan described as "almost a saint"—see in goodness the redemption of life, which otherwise remained for him a poor and lamentable existence. "Oh, do not let us await," he cried, "to be just or pitiful or demonstrative towards those we love until they or we are struck down by illness or threatened with death! Life is short. We have never too much time for gladdening the hearts of those who are travelling the dark journey with us. Oh, be swift to love, make haste to be kind!"

Leicester Revival

OPEN air evangelism has come to Leicester, Canon Eaton having decided that God wishes him to act as a small-scale Billy Graham. The first Sunday, amid rows of empty seats, about 400 people, largely selected, heard God speak (through the Canon, of course). The devil (it must have been), doing his best to gum up the works, afflicted the Canon with haemorrhage of the nose, and he had to go into the Infirmary. But the Lord triumphed, and had him out again in time.

What was this stirring message which (they hope) will pack all the Leicester churches to suffocation? Alas, . . . the mixture as before. The same dreary, outdated theology we've always had, without even the showmanship of the redoubtable Billy to enliven the proceedings.

The message was, "Consider the lilies how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin" . . . "Take no thought for tomorrow." Fine sentiments from a church which considers itself a cut above fundamentalism, and of what use is this ancient nonsense? Then came the hymn:

"Father of Jesus, love's reward, what rapture it will be,
Prostrate before thy throne to lie, and gaze and gaze on Thee."

If this is Heaven, count me out. Even if the Almighty looks like a certain Miss Monroe, gazing will not satisfy for eternity.
C.H.H.

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Correspondence

THE REV. J. L. BROOM—APPRECIATIONS

I read with great interest the article by the Rev. John L. Broom, M.A., on Billy Graham's crusade in Scotland. I, of course, do not agree with the campaign, and consider Mr. Graham a performing showman. The Rev. John Broom must certainly be a very broad-minded man, and one wonders how the Church he belongs to allows him to express such views. I remember reading two previous articles of his in the *Freethinker*, the last one was on "Gambling"; a very sensible article, too.

I am a Rationalist, but have been getting the *Freethinker* for some time now and find it very instructive and interesting.

With best wishes—Yours faithfully,

B. ASHWORTH (Mrs.)

[We have also received appreciations of Mr. Broom's writing from Mrs. M. Roche and others.—EDITOR.]

The Gospels

Having just received *The Freethinker* (April 8) I find on reading "Some Notes on a New Gospel" that it is stated that Codex Sinaiticus (which is in the B.M.) is the "Sinaitic Syriac." The Codex Sinaiticus is a Greek codex, found by Tischendorf about a century ago in a monastery on Mt. Sinai. It is generally called Aleph to distinguish it from A which was previously believed to be the oldest Greek codex.

If the Gospels were really written by Aramaic-speaking disciples they would presumably have been written in Aramaic (Syriac), so a Syriac version could reasonably be called "The Original," and errors would be copying errors, but a translation may be inferior due to bad understanding of shades of meaning by a translator, or even a misunderstanding of the meaning of any word. For example, a foreigner seeing the English statement "he had a very bad cold" might think it meant "he was frost-bitten," that is, suffering from the effects of cold temperature, not the disease we call "a cold" (a stuffy nose).

The Syriac version is called the *Peshitta* (N-Tsyrrian in the language. There is another called *da Mepharreshê* (see col. 4999, Ency. Biblica). When we consider the question of Gospel-writing in general, we must feel that the condition that they are in, and the gross contradictions such as Matthew's and Luke's birth stories, which are in violent contradiction, shows that God was careless in inspiring the Gospels, especially as regards Matthew's description of the Flight into Egypt; waiting there until Herod's death, and then proceeding to Galilee, taking care *not* to go into Judca, and then choosing Nazareth because of the "he shall be called a Nazarene" prophecy; while Luke says he was living at Nazareth, went south to Bethlehem, then in due course to Jerusalem (for ceremonial reasons) and back to Nazareth. Luke's *Census* made by "Cyrenius" (Quirinius is the proper Latin spelling of the Roman Governor's name) was about ten years later than Herod's death, and when the Christian Emperors decided to make the A.D. calendar, and the history was looked into, they decided to split the difference, giving the new A.D. 1 four years later than Herod's death, and six years earlier than the *Census*. Our modern Bibles, therefore, are put in the dilemma of dating Herod's death 4 B.C., as they decided to plump for Matthew, and pretend that the Church made a mistake in calculation of the Era. There was no mistake; it was a genuine difficulty, but it was absurd to split the difference. So in our Bibles the date 4 B.C. is also given in the margin of Luke, which is TEN YEARS out. Any reliable history of the period gives the *Census* as A.D. 6. It was well known and the cause of much rioting; mentioned in Jewish history.

The later Church could have been saved the difficulties of determining Creeds by defining them right at the beginning, incorporated in this one definite Gospel. An exact statement on His Mother's status would have saved a lot of bloodshed, burning, etc., later on; and his present Holiness the Pope would have been saved the trouble of defining the Assumption if He (Jesus) had dictated it later on as an inspired addition to this One True Gospel, immediately after her death, instead of letting it hang over for five centuries and then only in a book described by Pope Gelasius as apocryphal.

It always astonishes me that the earlier Christians, many scholarly men, could have failed to see the absurdity of these glaring contradictions; perhaps some did and that is, I think, why they showed such vindictive temper against their opponents. The ancient Greeks and Romans never seemed to have come to blows about the relative position of different gods; as to which would be best to pray to when going to war, etc.

When the Romans conquered their enemies they did not try to compel them to worship the Roman gods; rather they tried to

identify their Jove with the Greek Zeus, their Diana with Greek Artemis, their Neptune with Greek Poseidon, etc. Yet the later Roman and Greek Churches split on the matter of whether the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father and the Son (Roman fancy) or from the Father only (the Greek idea).

An impartial Hindu or Chinese would think it shows their minds had been made insane by Christianity.

And so say all of us Freethinkers.

MAURICE BAKER.

[The article in question does *not* say that the Codex Sinaiticus is the Sinaitic Syriac. It says the exact opposite.—ED.]

OVER-POPULATION

The article "The Material Basis of Culture and Morality" (3rd June) is rather too sweeping.

Regarding "The more the merrier!" in connection with population, I appreciate that the Roman Catholic Church opposes birth control, but it seems to be the non-Christian East which chiefly puts the maxim into effect. Are not the largest national populations in the world those of China and India?

It is not to the West (Christian or not) that your contributor's advice should be given, but to the East. There, population was kept down by famine, war and disease, and to the extent that the West introduced (in India, for example), irrigation schemes, the rule of law, and some degree of sanitation and medical treatment, we may be regarded as partly responsible for the increase, but to suggest that this is a matter for blame is to imply that the previous conditions were preferable. Surely this is not intended.

It is from the West that almost all technical advance, in the last few centuries, has come, and in particular, its keynote (despite failures) is that each person matters. It would indeed be sad if the West limited its population, while the Eastern millions continued to increase (with, I believe, in the case of one or two large Communist nations, government encouragement!) —Yours, etc.

G. W. CLARK.

OBITUARY

Miss Gertrude Emily Vaughan, aunt of Mr. H. V. Creech, a member of Manchester Branch, passed away 31st May, after a short illness. Although not a member of the Society, her sympathies lay with Freethinkers. A secular service held at Manchester Crematorium on 2nd June, 1955, was conducted by Mrs. M. McCall.

Members of Manchester Branch extend their sincere condolences to the family.

H. M. ROGALS.

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