

# The Freethinker

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MODERNISM is actually a question of degree in theological belief, or unbelief. There are, however, certain definite attitudes which characterise all varieties of "Liberal Christians," from those who only deviate from orthodoxy on comparative minor issues, to those who border on rationalist and humanist positions. As Modernism, in the persons of the Rev. J. L. Broom and the Rev. John Rowland—the former a very advanced Modernist, one would imagine—has made its appearance in the columns of *The Freethinker*, some criticism of Modernist ideas may not be without practical interest, as well as speculative value.

Traditional "orthodox" Christianity has had many hard things said about it in this journal. However, one must at least grant traditional Christianity one merit; it was quite definite and one knew where one stood with it. It was based on certain concrete historical and theological propositions to which one could only answer Yes or No. There was a Creator, intelligent and omnipotent, who created everything; space, time and the universe; and, in particular mankind, for his own glory. There was a god-man, a Redeemer who descended from Heaven of his own free will, and who entered human history at a known date and place. Mankind, thanks to the Creator's arbitrary fiat, is endowed with an immortal soul, to be saved or damned as God or man—theological schools differ on this point—decide. There is an authentic revelation, accurate in every essential detail, of these august transactions, contained in the Bible, those "letters from our Heavenly country" as Newman described them. "Such is the Catholic Faith, outside which no salvation is given."

## A Logical System

There it is, all cut and dried, like a set of algebraic formulae or legal propositions. You either take it and are saved, or leave it and are damned. In common with most people who have studied the leading theological systems, the present writer confesses to a high regard for their logical thoroughness and ingenuity in dealing with every conceivable objection. In the hands of such masters as Thomas Aquinas, Calvin and Bishop Butler it is most impressive. Unfortunately one is compelled to add that, in view of the intellectual revolutions of more recent ages, the vast Gothic castles of logic erected by these old theologians frequently turn out to be castles of sand without visible means of support, or, to use a more apposite theological parallel, they resemble the legendary coffin of Muhammed, floating between earth and Heaven. The progress of modern knowledge has undermined their basic premises, their fundamental pillars.

## Modernism and Traditional Christianity

In dealing with most modernists it would not be necessary to insist that all the above statements are not literally true, and need not be taken as matters of fact. Though the

modernist movement has its own moderate and extreme wings, they concur in certain critical judgments. Incidentally, we shall, perhaps, be justified in regarding Mr. Broom as an "extreme" Modernist and Mr. Rowland as one of the more moderate variety. However, both would no doubt agree that the Bible is not literally inspired in every part, nor wholly accurate in every detail, and that the miracles, virgin birth and supernatural appearances of Jesus are the unhistorical legends of a credulous age. Bishop Barnes, at least explicitly admitted all the above propositions. Some, though by no means all, Modernists, would go further and doubt, or even deny, personality to God. None accepts all the fundamental dogmas of Christianity, whilst the most advanced accept hardly any. In the dissolving hands of the last-named group nothing much is left to Christianity, or even of religion itself, except a vague assortment of "spiritual values."

## Facts Versus Values

Historically, in the "modernist" movement of the Church of Rome, which made quite a stir at the turn of the present century, the then fashionable philosophy of Pragmatism, as expounded by William James, played an important part. In this philosophy, if one can accurately call it such, "values" are increasingly substituted for facts. "It is true to me, so it must be true." This point of view is explicitly stated in Mr. Rowland's recent article in *The Freethinker*. How, he asks, can one prove as a scientific fact that, say, Bach is a greater musician than Gerschwin? Yet this "value" is universally admitted. Actually all human "values" are just that, human values. We know of no other rational being capable of making such a comparison. The particular "value" in question is not the result of "instinct" of "intuition," but of the historic growth of human complexity and human culture. It is difficult to see what the fact that, say, Thomas Hardy is regarded by cultured people as a greater writer than Edgar Wallace—for this is presumably a fact?—has got to do with religion, or, indeed, with anything else except the evolution of a purely human culture.

## "On the Side of the Angels"

We repeat: the classical theologians who formulated the creed of orthodox Christianity did so because they believed that certain alleged facts were, if we may so express it, facts in fact! Nor were all these classic Christian thinkers the intellectual morons that some of their facile critics—who never appear to have read them—appear at times inclined to think. There has, for example, rarely been a more powerful logical intellect than Calvin's, or a more encyclopaedic one than that of Thomas Aquinas; whilst Bishop Butler demolished most of the arguments of the Deists, and incidentally a good many of Paine's in *The Age of Reason*, granting their deistic premises. It would never have occurred to these

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## Modernism

By F. A. RIDLEY

great men to defend a Christianity based, as the Modernists would base it, nowadays, on vague and individually fluctuating "values," or on records the historicity of which is admittedly doubtful. The present writer considers that the old theology, granting its premises, was more "rational" than the new! If the basic dogmas of religion cannot be rationally proved, what reason is there to accept them as true? Here the present writer is in the rather unusual position of being "on the side of the angels," for the foregoing is, since the Vatican Council of 1870, the officially endorsed intellectual position of the Roman Catholic Church.

### Why Call it Christianity?

The present writer has never been able to see, either in his day as a theological student or, more recently, as a critic of Christian theology as such why, when one has abandoned all the traditional bases of Christianity, one should continue

to call oneself a Christian. If Jesus, as presumably Mr. Rowland holds as a Unitarian, was not God, but a great man, why call oneself after him rather than after equally great, or perhaps greater, men? Apart from its theology there is nothing even apparently new in Christianity. Its morality is totally unoriginal and Jesus is made to talk like a perfectly orthodox, if iconoclastic, Pharisee in the Gospels. As the Jewish Rabbis said long ago about the New Testament, what is true in it is not new, and what is new is not true. As for religion in general, if one takes away, as most Modernists do, the certainty of a personal God and immortality, what is left except a vague congeries of personal emotions? The old Christian theology was at least logically consistent; Modernism appears to be an illogical half-way house, "a feather bed for falling Christians," as Erasmus Darwin once defined the Unitarian Church—which is unable, or unwilling, on perhaps emotional or professional rather than on strictly rational lines, to make the final break with religion or Christianity.

## Margaret Knight's Speech

(Conway Hall, Sunday, September 25)

AFTER an enthusiastic reception by an audience of some 700 people, Mrs. Knight began by examining certain contemporary attempts to render the terms "God" and "religion" acceptable. She followed by investigating the Christian "argument from utility," as distinct from truth, rounding off her points with witticisms much to the delight of, at least, the freethinking section of her hearers. Nor did Billy Graham and his supporters escape her rapier.

With a lucidity reminiscent of Chapman Cohen at his best, Mrs. Knight re-stated the Christian "argument from Value," and submitted it to a devastating analysis.

Coming to the factual test of the supposed need for religious sanctions, the lecturer gave figures which, even as samples, made poor reading from the Christian point of view. She also drew some interesting conclusions from her vast correspondence—now approaching 2,000 letters since the January broadcasts.

Speaking of certain aspects of behaviour among the higher animals, Mrs. Knight made interesting and pertinent references to Kohler's experiments with chimpanzees. A telling comparison was also made of the effects on morality worked respectively by religion and by public opinion.

Though most of the questions put to the lecturer at the conclusion of her address were what Chapman Cohen used to call clotted nonsense, certain points did emerge, or were extracted by Mrs. Knight, and the following are not verbatim, but dissected and simplified for clarity:

*Christian beliefs are held by intelligent people like C. S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers.*

Mrs. Knight replied that intelligent people had been known to hold all sorts of preposterous beliefs from time immemorial. The appeal to authority would in any case cut not ice, because names such as Russell, Huxley and Einstein could be quoted in opposition.

*Can you disprove the existence of God?*

If by God you mean an infinite being in control who is all-powerful and good, I need only take you to the nearest cancer hospital.

*Do not our own creative impulses prove there is a God?*

If creative impulses prove the existence of God, then destructive ability proves the existence of a Devil.

*Would you accept religion as "Morality touched with emotion"?*

Religion is essentially supernatural, and it is a linguistic fallacy to make it mean what you want it to mean. If a term is stretched too widely in meaning it ceases to have any useful

meaning at all.

*Would you consider a rapprochement with the Unitarians?*

A Unitarian is a Theist, and there is the fundamental difference. He also usually believes in a life hereafter, and any attempt to centre interest in the next world depresses the quality of this one.

*Are you in favour of any ritual?*

Ritual and ceremony satisfy a human need, but they need not be religious in character.

Another point made by the speaker in the course of her replies was that saints kissing the sores of lepers were possibly more concerned with raising their own score for sanctity than with helping the lepers.

All the replies of Mrs. Knight were applauded, and the meeting closed as enthusiastically as it had begun.

G. H. TAYLOR.

### LAY YOUR PLAYTHINGS BY

O priests! O pastors! "Spiritual Guides!"  
 "God's Husbandmen!"—and God knows what besides!  
 Think ye that awed wonderment shrinks the Sun  
 When ye hold forth concerning "Three-in-One"?  
 Think ye the swift tornado is less free  
 Because a carpenter died on a tree;  
 Or that the scorching desert will have ruth  
 Since groundlings think they've found "eternal truth"?  
 "Fell strife 'twixt gods and devils"; "cosmic wars";  
 Think ye that word of this has reached the stars?  
 Nature knows nought of your fantastic schemes;  
 Your old wives' fables and your old men's dreams,  
 Your preaching, praying, vigils, abstinence,  
 Your altars, candles, vestments, and incense,  
 Are brief-lived bubbles, transient nothings; straws  
 That Time's swift current whirls away; the laws,  
 Stern and inflexible, which Nature owns,  
 Remain unshaken by your pious groans!  
 Have done, for shame, and lay your playthings by;  
 'Tis only fools who crave help from the sky!

S. W. BROOKS.

NEXT WEEK

THE GRAHAM CRUSADE:  
 SOME FACTS AND FIGURES.

## Ask at Your Library

*The Irish and Catholic Power* by Paul Blanshard, published by Andre Deutsch, 12-14, Carlisle Street, Soho Square, London, W.1. Price 18/.

H. G. Wells, a wonderful prophet, once described The Roman Catholic Church as "the world's greatest evil." Any thinking man or woman will agree with this pronouncement, for the R.C. Church is numerically the largest, financially the richest and politically the most corrupt of all religious organisations in the world. It is led by men who possess a single-mindedness of purpose to impose their policies on all countries; but the methods employed differ. Where they are in a majority the Roman Catholics are tyrants; when in a minority they claim to be loyal citizens of that country and 100 per cent. democrats. When attacked for their political actions and intrigues, they immediately scream that it is their religion which is being attacked—religion being used as a cloak to hide their totalitarian activities.

Mr. Paul Blanshard, in his book "The Irish and Catholic Power" tears this pretence to pieces. He shows us, by indisputable evidence, taken from Catholic sources, that the Vatican is far more concerned with politics than it is with religion. He deals with the most ignorant and superstitious of all the Vatican followers—the Irish Catholics. He quotes from some of the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church.

He says: "Ireland, according to the Rt. Rev. Monsignor James Cotter, standing majestically among the wrecks of earth . . . is still brilliant apostle among the nations, still model of principle before those governments that ignore and disregard all principles."

"Ireland," says Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, "is the last bastion of Christian civilization in Western Europe."

"A Jesuit, Robert Gannon, former President of Fordham University, says Ireland is a lesson in true democracy."

The author shows us what democracy and liberty mean to the R.C. Church in Ireland and he truly remarks: "In terms of Catholic policy, it is triumphantly unique. It is the only modern democracy with no divorce, no legal birth control and no comprehensive public school system."

The wretched Irish do not resent this domination for, as Blanshard says "they permit ecclesiastical dictatorship and political democracy to live side by side without any sense of incongruity."

Dr. James Devane, one of Dublin's most noted champions of the Church says "Ireland is the most Catholic country in the world. Perhaps the Republic of Ireland, as it is constituted to-day, is the only integral Catholic State in the world; a Catholic culture as it existed in the Middle Ages."

So this Catholic champion boasts that the Irish Catholics are in the same stage of benighted ignorance as existed in the Middle Ages.

The author devotes pages to the books on the Index—books which can be bought in any bookshop in Britain.

The Catholic Church in Ireland boasts of an intensely ignorant following, and the great aim of the priests is to keep them ignorant.

The Church decides what books must be read or not read, and the same censorship applies as far as the cinema pictures to be seen.

The author writes "about nine-tenths of films shown in Ireland come from Hollywood via London and after the filtering, there is not much 'sin' left—and sometimes not much sense."

"From their first yell at birth," says Liam O'Flaherty, "until the sod falls on them in their graves, their actions and thoughts are under the priest's direction."

In this book Paul Blanshard makes this abundantly clear. He shows us, with a clarity not often realized in English-speaking countries, why it is that the Irish Catholic is so much more devout than his Italian compatriot; and he attributes this to the fact that "undoubtedly one of the reasons for the relative weakness of Catholicism amongst Italians is, that Italian nationalism was identified for half a century with anti-clerical sentiment. Italy was free from church control from 1870-1922, and during that period it had a chance to develop its own secular culture. The Italian hero of Italy's war of liberation was not the Pope but Garibaldi. The struggle for freedom was anti-Papal; the Irish struggle was not. The Church's penalised with excommunication the founders of the new Italian nation. The clash between the Italian clerical and anti clerical forces even spread to America, where Irish-Americans as well as Italian-American prelates condemned Garibaldi and Mazzini. (Earlier, 1851, they had condemned Louis Kossuth when he fought for the liberation of Hungary.)"

This book is the most illuminating of its kind ever written, especially from the standpoint of the Vatican's aim to undermine democracy in countries not under her control.

The Catholic M.P. will take off his hat when the British National Anthem is played, but he takes his politics from Rome. His first duty is to his Church, no matter what that Church may do, for the head of his Church is infallible and he must not question any of his decisions.

This book may not be read by Catholics, but it can and should be read by non-Catholics with great advantage. After reading it one will have more sympathy with Ulster's decision to resist being swallowed up by the Catholic South.

When Paul Blanshard interviewed de Valera on the subject of partition, he asked the President if the laws prevailing in the South against the legality of divorce and the giving of birth control information would also prevail in the North if partition was abolished.

To this question de Valera gave the usual wriggles and squirms that one would expect from a Catholic zealot.

Of course they would prevail in the North, and Protestants in Ulster would be dictated to by Catholic priests, pledged to celibacy, as to how their sex lives should be conducted.

It was rather amusing, after reading Paul Blanshard's book, to turn to the pages of the Communist *Daily Worker* which starred an article protesting in the name of liberty against the partition of Ireland.

What is the Irish idea of liberty as encouraged by their Church? This will show you—When Dean Hewlitt Johnson, who is one of the *Daily Worker's* stalwarts, tried to lecture on Russia in Dublin, he was prevented by a howling mob of ignorant savages and only protected from serious bodily harm by a strong force of police.

When a body of Irish Liberals inaugurated the Irish Rationalist Society, their meeting place was attacked and several of the members thrown into the Liffey and the work of the Society finished.

When an Irish Rationalist comes to England to speak at a Freethought meeting he does not dare to use his proper name, that would mean social and financial ruin on his return.

This book ought to be read by every man who values freedom. If the price is too high for the purses of some of our readers, ask for it at your library and keep on asking and get your friends to do the same. If there is a demand, libraries will, in most cases, procure the book.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

## This Believing World

The question of religion raised in a recent number of Sir Stephen King Hall's *News-Letter* brought him a sheaf of letters—much to his surprise. He never "anticipated the astonishing volume of correspondence" he tells us. Some of the writers accused him of "going mad." Others agreed with him; while others appeared to be angry that he was not a complete Fundamentalist. Sir Stephen, in short, was astonished at "the un-Christian attitude of many" of his correspondents. But surely what he calls "un-Christian" was in actual fact thoroughly Christian? The gross bigotry, intolerance, and anger, of whole-hearted believers—are not these religious traits of character genuinely Christian? Were they not the distinguishing features of "our Lord" himself?

Sir Stephen finds in "Christ the perfect man and God." Then why is he astonished at Christian outbursts of anger? Or of bigotry and intolerance? The "perfect man and God" could hardly contain himself denouncing the Pharisees and all other people who did not agree with him. "How can ye escape the damnation of Hell?" thundered Jesus. How can they, indeed?

But while we are in such passages reminded of the "essential" Jesus, the real Jesus, the Founder of true Christianity, some writers implore us to "remember what he didn't say." Everybody knows what he did say—the Gospels give his authentic words, of course. Ah—but what about the marvellous things you can find *underneath* all his Divine speeches? What about the "Unuttered Speeches"? Well, the answer is easy. Jesus is the greatest Speaker of Unuttered Speeches that ever lived.

Some kind reader has sent us a newspaper cutting describing the brilliant idea of a Bognor vicar, the Rev. Dr. Snow, blessing T.V. sets as if that was something astonishing or silly. Why, the truth is that vicars and priests have blessed almost everything under the sun, and they will go on blessing everything so long as there are idiots enough to help them. As Dr. Snow said, "Big business and Christianity should go hand in hand," and he is right. His Master, who founded Christianity, and thus gave the world perhaps the greatest and wealthiest of all Organisations, is rightly considered as the greatest Business Man the world has ever seen. So why shouldn't T.V. sets be blessed!

Methodists and other Christians are still at loggerheads in spite of all the pious attempts at "unity" a word which, at a recent Synod, one Methodist, a Mr. Maslen, hated. He was all against any attempts "for closer co-operation" between the Methodist Church and the Church of England. One parson at the meeting was all for "good literature," not "tracts"; and this good literature should be distributed in factories. Whether strict Methodists are capable of producing "good" literature was not discussed, though it was actually taken for granted that factory hands would be immediately "converted" if the literature was good or perhaps "good enough."

We suggest to Methodists to try converting members of the National Secular Society as a try-out. If they get, let us say, 70 or 80 per cent. of converts—or should we say 1 per cent?—then we can confidently declare the literature to be good. But why do so many parsons who talk so

eloquently of good Christian literature shirk the blessed infidels?

Then there is the case of the ineffable Mr. C. S. Lewis who got a fine Christian reputation by writing *The Screwtape Letters* and now imagines himself definitely as an incomparable infidel slayer. He is one of the shocking examples of what infidelity and Atheism can do for children, for in a recent Autobiography, he proudly declares himself as having been a blatant Atheist at 14 (or thereabouts) and, through reading one of the books by George Macdonald, found Christ and has ever since reposed in his Heavenly Bosom.

We are always infinitely intrigued at these full-blown Atheists at a tender age. Where did they study our infidel philosophy? Was it at school? Did they find our shocking literature behind the row of *Monthly Packets* in Dad's or Grand-dad's library? We sturdily refuse to believe that our books and pamphlets were handed out in Mr. Lewis's day to all and sundry from the local Free Library. And we find it—alas—difficult to understand how anybody who had mastered Atheism (as of course Mr. Lewis in knickerbockers at school obviously had) was converted by a book written by George Macdonald. Why were we not converted by the same book?

## Theological Masonry

PROFESSIONAL theologians and amateur "godslingers" have managed to establish the belief that by changing a small g into a capital G they have created an entity which is entitled to a proper name.

Instead, however, of explaining its validity, they proceed to build a tottering structure of God's World, God's Purpose, God's Will, God's Word, God's Wrath, God's Mercy, God's Goodness, God's Son, etc. They proceed further to mystify the populace by their invention of technical terms and phrases peculiar to their trade, like devils and angels, souls and spirits, heaven and hell, salvation and damnation, bliss and torment, divinity and holiness; and pompous, high-sounding expressions like "blessed assurance," "divine inspiration," "eternal verities," "Very God of Very God" *ad. lib., ad. naus.*

The average individual may not know a thing about the em or the adze, but a painter or carpenter is capable of explaining the terms and of demonstrating the use of these tools of a particular trade. Souls and Spirits, devils and angels, are the tools of the parson's sorry trade, but the parson can neither explain nor demonstrate them.

Once it is realised that *all* religions are man-made, and that *all* the gods and devils and angels and other paraphernalia of *all* the religions are equally man-made, we have reduced the Christian God to the lowest denominator.

It becomes just another god.

LUKE STRAIGHT.

## ABRACADABRA

For centuries, myriads of men and women were tortured and murdered simply because they questioned the abracadabra of the priests. Countless thousands of old women, the most helpless of their sex, were done to death foully as witches, because, forsooth, the Christian Bible countenanced witchcraft, which Selden tells us, gravely, "never had an existence." These Christian Churches are judge, jury, inquisitor, and executioner.—*Chapman Cohen.*

## THE FREETHINKER

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### To Correspondents

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken progaganda.

G. W. CLARK.—With regard to your query on Paul in Romans 3, 7. The difficulty is that translating Paul is a difficult job, and few, if any, people really knew or know what he meant. If you prefer Weymouth to the A.V.—that is all right with us. Lots of people still think that Paul defended lying if only it was done to glorify God.

### Lecture Notices, Etc.

#### OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, WHARRAD, NEWTON, SHEPPARD and MURPHY.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1.0 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK. Every Sunday: 8.0 p.m.: Messrs. MCCALL, MILLS and others.

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. ARTHUR, EBURY and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

#### INDOOR

Bradford N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, October 23, 6.45 p.m.: G. LIGHT, "Before and after Mau-Mau."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Tuesday, October 25, 7 p.m.: J. B. COATES, "Significant Trends in Philosophy Today."

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, October 23, 6.30 p.m.: Miss M. WHATELY, "East and South Africa, A Challenge to Democracy."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, October 23, 2.30 p.m.: Fr. B. RICKET, "Why is the Catholic Church Dogmatic?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, October 23, 11 a.m.: J. B. COATES, "The Spirit of the Age."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1.).—Sunday, October 23, 7.15 p.m.: DIANA PURCELL, "What I Believe in."

### Notes and News

MEMBERS of the Manchester and Glasgow branches have recently been active in endeavouring, with varied success, to persuade Library Committees to take *The Freethinker* and also Mrs. Knight's book, *Morals Without Religion*. In cases where the committees reply that there is "no demand," we hope members will team up to create that demand, and maintain the pressure at intervals. Among recent successes, Wigan Library have agreed to display the Manchester Branch Bulletin along with *The Freethinker*, and Ashton

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £965 14s 10d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; A. Faiers, 4s.; G. Seibel (U.S.A.), £1 7s. 6d.; Mr. & Mrs. McCorriskin (Dumbarton), 10s. Total to date: £967 17s. 4d.

### THE MEMORIAL FUND

With his cheque for the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund Mr. A. E. Smith writes:

"Chapman Cohen was a great man and it is fitting that his work among us should not go unmarked. As in the case of thousands of others, his writing have had a profound influence on my life. He gave me freedom from the Gods and taught me how to think.

His kind are few in number. I doubt that I shall see his like again."

At the request of many subscribers, the Fund is being extended beyond the originally intended closing date and it is hoped that the four figure mark will not be long delayed.

under-Lyne Library have agreed to take *The Freethinker*. These successes reward the persistence of Mrs. Hilda Rogals and Mr. James McGrowan.

In the Quarterly Journal of the National Union of Metal Workers recently appeared an excellent appreciation of Richard Carlile (who had been a tinsmith in his younger days) and the courageous stand he made against the whole force of the British Government for the right of free speech and free publication. Carlile served over nine years of his life in prison and his undaunted stand brought him a long line of supporters who also went to prison; and to him perhaps more than to any other man is our much vaunted "free press" due. Carlile brought out the *Age of Reason* and the works of Robert Taylor among other "blasphemous and seditious books." We wonder how many of the Metal Workers Union had ever heard of brave old Carlile?

We understand that the Merseyside Branch of the N.S.S. has secured in Mr. C. T. Salisbury an efficient speaker and debater. A few months ago he knew very little of Free-thought but his profound knowledge of ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, and Assyrian history, as well as archaeology, has made him a formidable opponent of Christianity, and given him some splendid audiences—especially from the many people who come over from the Catholic Evidence Guild. We hope to hear more from the Merseyside Branch and of Mr. Salisbury during the coming winter.

It will be remembered that in July we published the Presidential Address at the Meerut Convention, delivered by Mr. S. Ramanathan, President of the Indian Rationalist Association. Expressing his pleasure at our references to the activities of the Indian Rationalists, Mr. Ramanathan writes, "Such references draw together the progressive forces in India and in Great Britain and are visible indications that the world whose size is shrinking by the discoveries of science is also achieving unity by the spread of freethought."

We were pleased to hear from the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. that Mr. F. A. Hornibrook's meeting in Birmingham on October 9 attracted a packed audience and, according to its energetic Secretary, Mr. J. Millington, "went down very well indeed." Reports from other Branches also detail excellent progress.

## Review

*Morality Fair: Vagaries of Social Conduct as Reflected in the Press* by Geoffrey Williamson. Watts & Co. 260 pages. 15s. net.

This is a most entertaining and witty book on what one might call the Sexual Life of our Time—mostly, however, in England. It recalls that powerful work by Iwan Bloch which, when first published in this country—nearly 50 years ago—the lay public was prohibited from buying; but Mr. Williamson has a lighter touch and, in any case, the times have completely changed since Bloch wrote. Discussions on all sorts and conditions of the sexual problem are openly encouraged and there is a franker and a far more uninhibited approach.

To take one example only. A body of eminent men have just openly declared that the present laws on homosexuality are out of date, and that what adults privately do should no longer be punishable by law. It may still be a long and bitter fight to alter that law; but it certainly will be done. That such a pronouncement could be publicly made at all shows how far we have advanced in these matters.

Mr. Williamson's book proves how much modern society is preoccupied with sex and its various manifestations; but it would be a mistake to imagine that society in ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in the middle ages, did not share the same problems. There is one book (*Manual of Classical Erotology* by Karl Forberg) in which is collected all the references to sex found in the ancient classics and they show that Greece and Rome were not at all behind the moderns in studying sex problems. As a very famous French writer, Feuillet de Conches, in his *La Cité Antique* pointed out, "In antique society, sex was a science and an art just as philosophy and poetry are." And Boccaccio, and the many writers who followed him with "merry" tales, could hardly write on anything else. When you go through the ages to the eighteenth century you are faced with one word—certainly in France, as those famous writers, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt recognised—the word "voluptuousness." It is, they said, "the secret, the charm, and the soul" of that century. As for the nineteenth century, one must go to Iwan Bloch's *Sexual Life of our Times* for a scientific and superbly documented account from the point of view of a great medical sexologist.

Mr. Williamson, however, is much more light-hearted, and follows sex in various chapters dealing with Nudism, Sadism, Sacred and Profane Love, Sex Cults and Claptrap, among other things, and they are all worth reading. We are told about the growth of Nudism and its ardent reformers who so love to talk about its health-regenerating properties, etc. Of course, Nudism began in the Garden of Eden, though it ended there in a way which all modern nudists would violently oppose. Still, the Bible gave us more than once such strictly religious and moral sects as the Adamites and the Anabaptists. I believe I am right in adding the Shakers to Nudism. Of course in India there are a number of nudist priests—who thus sear fleshly temptation. Here in Europe, all nudists claim the highest moral motives—how can anybody question the beauty of Man made in the image of God? We all should go nude in our homes, and get people used to seeing the nude in all its wonderful beauty. As an artist myself who has drawn from the nude many, many times, I'm sorry to say I cannot always subscribe to Nudism's highly moral platitudes.

One of Mr. Williamson's most interesting chapters is, in my opinion, his description of "some ardent reformers." I am always intrigued at our many reformers. We get them all around us, ready to help us to abolish tea-drinking,

for example, or white bread, or atomic bombs, and imploring us to wipe epidemic diseases off the earth with all sorts of weird concoctions called "injections." Some reformers get their reforms passed by law and then it is "compulsory." But I do not want to be thought attacking reforms in general. The fact that the average age at death in civilised countries has increased so much during the last century proves how well reforms have served the community.

But it is a fact that divorce is on the increase in spite of the many excellent societies advising unhappy couples how to make their marriage a success. The whole question of marriage and divorce had—more or less—been left in the hands of the various Churches for centuries, and they managed to get it into such an unholy mess that at last divorce reformers, many of whom were not Christians, had a terrible time in drawing public attention to the necessity of a change in our laws. Our Bishops and Cardinals always fell back on what Jesus is supposed to have said—as if we knew what he said, or as if what a celibate preacher said 2,000 years ago mattered two hoots to an unhappy couple this century.

This little review gives a very inadequate view of Mr. Williamson's book which is packed with views and opinions not only of his own, but of many people, books, and journals. It is excellently printed, and has a fine selection of photographs admirably illustrating his subject. He gives us no dry-as-dust disquisitions on sex and sex subjects, but a lively account of their impact on modern society. His book does for 1955 what the work of Iwan Bloch did for his own time fifty years ago.

H. CUTNER.

## The World Union of Freethinkers

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

THE General Committee met at Brussels on Saturday, September 10th, and Sunday, September 11th, at the Institute of Higher Studies very suitably placed in the rue de la Concorde. This is where the committees of the International have met for many a long year, till the older members, which is most of them, feel that their lightest word is a Higher Study: and certainly, though there may be, and usually are, some points of disagreement, the general atmosphere is one of concord. In this the most recent meeting was unexceptional. The President, C. Bradlaugh Bonner, duly presided, supported by the vice-presidents André Lorulot and Jean Gremling, the Hon. Secretary, Mlle. Pardon, the Hon. Treasurer, Louis Courtois, and by fellow Committee men, Arnold Boulanger, Jean Cotereau, Francis Ridley, Herbert Freistuhler, Jan de Ronde et Gerhard Rausch. Only one was missing, and that by doctor's orders, namely Professor Angelo Crippa, to whom we sent a message wishing him a speedy recovery and thanking him for the letter giving his opinions on the subjects of the agenda and hoping to see him again at Amsterdam next year.

The President, after welcoming his colleagues, paid a solemn tribute to those leading members who had died since the last meeting, viz. Prof. Prosper Alfarcic, Joseph McCabe, Lord Horder, Sir Arthur Keith, Prof. Becquerel and Prof. Flugel, and then offered congratulations of the Union to M. Boulanger on attaining his 80th birthday and quarter of century as President of the Belgian Federation; to M. Lorulot on reaching 70 years of age and on fifty years of freethought activity;

lastly he reminded the Committee that the International had now completed three-quarters of a century of existence, having been founded in 1880.

The Treasurer's report, as ever clear and concise, and as ever sad in tone, but perhaps a shade less dismal than in the preceding post-war years, was accepted and it was further resolved to propose to the 1956 congress to raise the subscription to 1½ Belgian francs per head of membership, i.e., by half a franc, or less than one English penny (If any reader cares to send 3d. it will pay his share of the British contribution for 1956. What about it, friends?). It was also decided to invite the affiliated societies to add something to their subscription for 1955 over and above the due franc per member. One country did this the same day.

In the Secretary's report, last year's congress at Luxemburg naturally came first and the Committee renewed the messages of thanks and congratulations to the organising committee, especially to Charles Knaf and Jean Gremling; for in all important points this conference was a success. As usual there were complaints in connection with translation. In every case where speakers had supplied either the full text of their discourse or a summary, this had been translated into two or three languages and the translations distributed to those who required them. There were more than the numbers present yet nevertheless some congress members apparently missed them. The difficulty is with those speakers who do not supply texts beforehand, or do not keep to the texts which they supply, and with speakers from the body of the hall joining in discussion.

It was decided, if the necessary funds were forthcoming to print summarized reports of the sessions, if possible in three languages. If not, it might be possible to reprint reports from the national organs, i.e., in English from *The Freethinker*, using the standing type. In pre-war times the inviting country had usually published a full report in its own language and the International had published one in French at least.

The Secretary regretted that there was no longer any contact with European Freethinkers east of the iron curtain; that the German Swiss association still was unwilling to renew its affiliation, while in French Switzerland the movement was still only loosely organised, though the Geneva branch had been revived in the past year and was in touch with the French Haute-Savoie society. A reference to the Humanist conference at Antwerp, which was attended by M. Cotereau and by Dr. Noordenbos, the president of the Dutch Dageraad, led to an expression of deep regret that through differences arising from a misunderstanding of the older, much older, international, through a different use of words such as "religion," through a desire, profoundly mistaken as the World Union feels it to be, to collaborate with the Churches, the Humanists (no more "humanist" than the Freethinkers) should have chosen to set up their own organisation at a time when the greatest effort and the most effective co-operation was needed from all progressive thinkers in face of immense and sustained activity on the part of reactionary bodies such as the Roman Catholic Church and Islam. Still it had to be faced that there are persons, who are not prepared to call themselves Freethinkers, though in every essential they are so. It was better that they should be organised rather than that they should remain isolated and ineffective. But the Humanists must realise, and the Churches will soon make them realise, that philosophically and eventually in much that is political, e.g., Marriage and Divorce, they are anti-clerical. The President thought it important to keep in touch with the Humanist organisation

and, if possible, to form a joint committee for possible collaboration. It is just this question of sexual relations which has become a matter of burning importance in many countries. In Belgium the present anti-clerical government is endeavouring to modify the marriage laws to make them more just and more humane, recognising the rights of women. In Germany the Churches were campaigning against Civil Marriage, and in Austria too. In Luxemburg the matter had been brought to a head at the recent wedding of the Crown Prince with a Belgian Princess, when the officiating bishop spoke of the young "affianced" pair after the civil marriage ceremony which had made them a "married" pair. Maître Gremling had made a formal protest to which the government had replied that it was a personal oversight and not an intentional slight to the law, for which the government could be held in any way responsible. On the other hand the Roman Church had inspired a violent campaign against divorce in the Grand Duchy. In Holland a peculiar scandalous case had recently occurred; a man lived apart from his wife without being divorced, became a Catholic and wished to remarry in the second case with a Catholic woman. The pair were assured by a priest that the earlier marriage was no marriage; the priest performed the marriage ceremony and declared to the first wife that her marriage was dissolved when her husband became converted. The first wife took the matter into the courts, but the priest has disappeared and cannot now be found.

(To be concluded)

## Waves from the West

THE recent meeting at the Kingsley Hall, which followed the British Association meetings, and which was addressed by Dr. J. Bronowski, Julian Huxley and Ritchie Calder, will, it is hoped have had a beneficial effect on freethought in the Bristol area. Secularists, Rationalists and Ethicists have found it practical to join forces, and there exists a broad Humanist group which is holding regular monthly meetings, and the prospects of expansion are now brightening. Meanwhile, *The Freethinker* is prepared to act as liaison officer for the purposes of putting readers in touch who are willing to associate themselves with the at present loose organization.

One immediate target might well be the *Bristol Evening Post*, in which every Saturday a whole page is devoted to "News from the Churches," together with a religious article.

Two religious "shows" have been running in Bristol, one a "Religious Vocation Exhibition" organised by the Catholics, and the other, "The Way," by a "united" group of Churches. Many thousands of schoolchildren from all parts of Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire, visited the Vocation Exhibition, which portrayed (favourably, of course) the life of priests, nuns and brothers. Various bishops officiated at the Benediction which closed each day. The Bishop of Clifton told the *Evening Post*, "I am glad that the education authorities had the vision to see that this was educational work and allowed school work to be interrupted so that parties could be sent here." The concern shown by our bishops for education certainly seems more acute when it can be mixed with Christian propaganda—at public expense.

Among the exhibits at Filton Methodist Church harvest festival was a model of the Bristol Britannia, the minister defending its congruity thus: "The majority of our congregation are employed at the B.A.C. and we thought it a good idea to exhibit a model of their industry." With equal

relevance to that aim he could have displayed a model bomber!

Plymouth Methodists were told at their September Synod that the Billy Graham crusade has produced "a quickening of life" in "several circuits." This is delightfully vague, so let us go to Exeter for more concrete examples of this "quickenings." An Exeter vicar, in the official organ of the Education Committee Community Centre, reported on results after the previous crusade, and said:

The great majority of those who attend the meetings and make "decisions" are already zealous and enthusiastic members of a religious denomination, and the meetings were largely a "rally of the faithful." Many attended all the meetings, so that the congregation was composed of those who came before. Some who made "decisions" had made similar previous "decisions." To bring people to a "decision" was one of the easiest parts of the meetings.

The real struggle was evidently to make these "decisions," removed from the excitement of the meetings, mean something. He continues:

In fact, of the eight cards I have up to now received (from the previous campaign), six were young children who "went up" together because they had gone to the meeting together and "saw the others going up." One was a churchwoman who said she had gone up to see what they would say, and the other I couldn't trace. But they are still included in the official figures of "decisions."

Congratulating Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Ratcliffe on the celebration of their Diamond Wedding, the *London Home Magazine* says:

Clevedon, the quiet, attractive resort on the Bristol Channel, is an admirable haven for those who have led vigorous, active lives. Here lives 86-year-old Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, co-operative pioneer, poet, author, song-writer, secularist, and Hyde Park orator. Mr. and Mrs. Ratcliffe form a charming and delightful couple. To meet them in their home is a morally inspiring experience.

A well-known freethinker and debater in the London area, he was President of the Metropolitan Secular Society, and organising secretary of the Holloway Ethical Society. His story of how he was once arrested by the police, as a Hyde Park speaker, is a grim reminder of the struggles for free speech that were experienced in more turbulent times.

Apparently, the Church authorities had been concerned at the speeches being made in Hyde Park by "Aliens, atheists, and traitors." A press campaign had compelled the police to make one or two arrests and, as is usually the case, in such circumstances, innocent victims were brought before the courts. Arriving at the park one Sunday evening, Mr. Ratcliffe found a large crowd around an empty platform—the speaker had been arrested. Pressed by the crowd into "having a go" Mr. Ratcliffe soon found himself pulled from the box by two policemen when he began to expound his views on the universe. Later he was charged, to his great surprise with "using insulting language and behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace."

This charge really dumbfounded him, for he had done no more than express his opinions on religion and life. However, after calling witnesses he was let off with a caution, and advised to keep out of Hyde Park.

His novel-length book "Circumstantial Evidence" is a well-written book, auto-biographical style, in which Mr. Ratcliffe's philosophy is clearly brought out. The underlying themes of all his songs, poems, pamphlets, and newspaper articles are international friendship, co-operation, and free thought.

For both husband and wife to lead active, varied lives and to be fit and well at the age of 85 and 86 is no mean achievement. Both have made a commendable contribution to social development. All readers of the *London Home Magazine* will assuredly wish them continued good health and happiness."

## Correspondence

### RULES FOR RATIONALISTS

1. You may, if you like, doubt the existence of God providing you retain a wholesome respect for such belief.
2. You may de-mythologise Jesus, so to strip Him of supernatural attributes, providing you still acknowledge Him as Our Lord and, above all, never doubt His actual existence.
3. You must realise that Bible Christianity is a thing of the past. No one believes the Bible, so there is no need to refute it. No one taking his stand on the Bible could possibly get a hearing in this enlightened age.
4. Remember that atoms are no billiard balls, so materialism is dead.
5. Never proselytise. It is bad form. Show the Christian some pretty Rationalist pictures instead.
6. The following are naughty words: Atheist, freethinker, materialist, militant, propaganda, Bradlaugh, Foote, Robertson, McCabe, Cohen.

## Obituary

We greatly regret the passing of Mrs. C. E. Ratcliffe (so soon after her Diamond Wedding) on October 6 last. The cremation took place on October 8. At her request there was no religious service and no flowers or mourning. We tender Mr. Ratcliffe and his family our deepest sympathies.

### N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING, October 5, 1955

The Chair was again taken, in the absence of the President, by Mr. Ebury, and Mr. R. Johnson again acted as Secretary. Present: Mrs. Venton and Messrs. Griffiths, Hornibrook, Gordon, Tiley, Barker, Taylor and Arthur.

Motions left over from the Annual Conference were discussed and passed. In connection with these, it was decided to contact Mr. Adrian Brunel for information regarding the use of films for freethought purposes: the Manchester Branch was congratulated on its periodical Branch Bulletin, an example which might, it was thought, profitably be followed in other branches.

Other matters discussed were the question of the appointment of a new secretary who should have a well-attested Freethought background, and also the possibility of now being able to engage a travelling propagandist during the summer.

Mr. Taylor was appointed to serve with Mr. Ridley as representative on the Humanist Council.

The next E.C. meeting was fixed for October 19. G.H.T.

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