

The Freethinker

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IN 1848, the unknown authors of the *Communist Manifesto* proclaimed, perhaps a trifle prematurely, that the word "communism" was on all lips, and that the Communists were an object of terror to all sections of the established order. Be that as it may, one existing organisation at least, had already realised the danger to its interests represented by the new doctrines shortly to be preached in the famous *Manifesto*. For only the previous year 1847, the then Pope, Pius the ninth (1846 to 78) had solemnly pronounced Communism to be "entirely destructive of the natural law, and absolutely ruinous to civil society." It was an historic affirmation to be repeated many times during the next century by this Pope's successors.

Communism Becomes a World Power

In the 19th century, Communism, however, was not yet a serious force, its tenets were only held by isolated groups of working men, impatient of the slow processes of liberal and democratic reforms. The classic works of Marx and Engels, were for example, originally written not for their present world-wide audience, but for a handful of extremist sectaries. It was not until the Russian Revolution of 1917 put Communism on the map, not only of Russia, but of the world, that Communism became a world power, and as such, an object of universal interest to that other world-wide International, "The Black International of Rome." Since 1917, the "Red International of Moscow" and the "Black International of Rome," the Kremlin and the Vatican, have faced each other as effective rivals for world-wide Totalitarian power. It is hardly necessary to emphasise how bitter that rivalry has now become. It would hardly be an exaggeration to state that the Catholic press today, mentions "godless Communism" ten times in comparison with its references to any other contemporary heresy.

The Vatican and the Russian Revolution

It will probably come as a surprise, even perhaps as something of a shock to a good many people, including even some readers of *The Freethinker*, to learn that this state of things has not always been so, and that actually, the Vatican originally welcomed the Russian revolution as "an act of God." Nonetheless surprising as such an attitude sounds today, it was really the case.

The Vatican Versus the Kremlin

It must always be remembered in the first instance, that the present world-wide rivalry between, what one may summarise here as "the Vatican versus the Kremlin," is actually the modern continuation under a new name, of an ancient political and ecclesiastical controversy which dates back to Medieval times—the age-long conflict between the Western Catholic Church of Rome and the Eastern "Orthodox" Church of Constantinople. When the Eastern Metropolis finally fell to the Turks in 1453, and was thus lost to Christendom, the spiritual and political centre of the "Orthodox" Church, shifted to Moscow, then the capital

of the rising Russian empire. Whereupon, the Tsars succeeded the Byzantine Cæsars as the political protectors of Rome's great Eastern rival by the Bosphorus, Russia, the new Byzantine and Moscow "The Third Rome," the historic successor of the Byzantine empire of Constantinople.

The Tsarist Theocracy

It is often forgotten that, the Tsarist empire, which ended in 1917, was also a theocracy, in which church and state in Russia, as previously in Constantinople, were subject to a single Head, the Tsar or Cæsar. In the eyes of his subjects, the Tsar was Pope as well as Emperor, spiritual as well as secular Head of the church, however little some of the individual Tsars, may have deserved this spiritual rank. In his "Con-

fession," addressed to Tsar Nicholas the first, one of the most curious documents ever penned, the imprisoned Anarchist Michael Bakunin confessed his sins to his "Little Father," the Tsar. To Rome, the Tsardom represented a rival theocracy, its rivals, "the heretical and persecuting Tsars" were so, equally with Protestant heresies.

The False Demetrius

The always hostile relations between the Eastern and Western theocracies came to a head with the bizarre episode of the "false Demetrius," (the Russian equivalent of the English Pretenders, Perkin Warbeck and Lambert Simnel) whom the Jesuits, with the aid of the Catholic Poles, crowned as Tsar in the Kremlin, in 1605; the same year, incidentally, in which the Holy Fathers hatched the "Gunpowder Plot" in England. After the assassination of the only Roman Catholic Tsar, a fierce reaction set in under the succeeding Romanoffs in church and state. For the next three centuries, Roman Catholicism in Russia represented a proscribed and often persecuted minority.

Providence Intervenes

On November the ninth, 1917 (new style), the Bolshevik revolution transpired; the Tsar had already been dethroned earlier in the year by a popular uprising. The news was received with joy at the Vatican, as the following episode sufficiently indicates. On October the second, 1918, the then Papal secretary of state, Cardinal Gasparri, gave an interview to an English military expert and publicist, Colonel Charles A'Court Repington, at the Vatican. What followed can best be related in Repington's own words: incidentally, he was not a Catholic himself, but he evidently regarded the Vatican as a bulwark of European conservatism against Bolshevism and, in fact, told the Cardinal so. It is a common point of view today, in non-Catholic, but politically conservative circles. Colonel Repington continues, "I had mentioned Russia and Poland while talking and Gasparri burst into violent recriminations against the late regime in Russia, declaring that the history of the (Roman) Catholics in (Tsarist) Russia in recent years had been one long Martyrologie, and Providence had

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The Vatican and the Russian Revolution

By F. A. RIDLEY

happily intervened at last to destroy that detestable system." Such was the Vatican's view of the Russian revolution in 1918. Lenin and Trotsky were the agents of "Providence." But then, proverbially, Providence makes use of peculiar instruments! The Vatican appears to have continued to hold this attitude for several years longer; at the Geneva Conference during the summer of 1922, under a new Pope, Pius the eleventh, but with Cardinal Gasparri still secretary of state, the same point of view was expressed by the Archbishop of Genoa to Mr. Tchitcherin, the then Bolshevik Commissar for foreign affairs. This Cardinal told the Russian delegate that Rome was watching "with interest and sympathy the Russian experiment in religious freedom." The "Infallible Papacy" had not yet realised, that it was now "out of the frying pan into the fire."

Times Change

Times change even for "Infallible" Popes and churches. Much water has flowed under the bridges of the Tiber since the now distant day when, in the Papal antechamber, a cardinal of the Church of Rome described the advent of Communism as an act of "Providence." Would Cardinal Gasparri's successors say that *now* of "godless Bolshevism"? We take leave to doubt it.

Review

Retreat from Reason, by Peter Nathan. Heinemann, 1955, 262 pp. 15/-.
 The sub-title—"an essay on the intellectual life of our time"—really is a true description of its contents, for it covers all the main subjects of intelligent discussion to-day; philosophy, religion, psychology, politics, economics, literature and art. And the reason why it is of special interest to Freethinkers is that Peter Nathan is a materialist, with no illusions about anything.

The book gets off to an excellent start, delineating our culture by contrasting the patriarchal and scientific attitudes of mind. This idea of a patriarchal culture is illuminating. Its main characteristics are two: "the intellectual life is permeated by obedience; and it looks back to the past." Historically, the old men dominate the culture or, with us, old ideas, customs, etc. The idea has many interesting applications, e.g., to dress: in patriarchal cultures dress tends to conceal the figure, as this is more flattering to the old; or in morals, where patriarchal ideas like Christianity decry the activities of youth.

Science is a challenge to patriarchy, a refusal to accept its dictates. For some time its influence has been growing in western culture, but a determined effort is being made to reinstate patriarchy in various fields of thought. A modern phenomenon is the anti-intellectual intellectual, who boasts his ignorance of science, and worships the irrational in many forms: instincts, traditions, mystical intuitions, etc. In a crisis, his need for a dictator comes to the fore, and he flees to Nazism, Catholicism, or Communism; also, "in times of drought there are many who understand the principles of the water supply and the central heating of their houses and who also go to a holy place and pray to a god for rain."

Later chapters deal with literature and art, economic and psychological interpretations of history, and so on. Dr. Nathan is always interesting and often amusing, many of his incidental remarks giving much food for thought, e.g. "A Roman Catholic revival is possible only in Russia, for Western Europe has left that stage behind for ever." In the manner of Paul Blanshard, he compares not only Catholicism but all Christianity with Communism, with most entertaining results.

Dr. Nathan's scepticism will at times surprise many Freethinkers. He thinks, for example, that a war between the U.S.A. and Russia is almost inevitable. And he is very doubtful whether the ordinary man can get along without a religion. On this last point he really does pose a problem for us. The following statement would be accepted by many: "I don't see how we can avoid the conclusion that it is no use expecting people below a certain level of education to arrive at a scientific and rational outlook." The writer of that? The editor of the *Literary Guide*, Hector Hawton!

In all these problems that he raises, Dr. Nathan is well worth reading. For once the dust-jacket blurb is right: "Dr. Nathan has produced a luminously intelligent book, controversial and amusing."

HIBERNICUS.

A Note on the "Screw-tape Letters"

Mr. C. S. Lewis is aware of the dangers of talking about a "Creator" or "the old Man in the Sky" once the Design Argument has been given up. He does not even like "an infinite Mind," and knows quite well these three words have literally no meaning for anybody who can logically think. And he tries to show that our "absurd" notions about God spring from our misinterpretation of what the Bible and the Church Fathers meant when they talked about the "old Man in the Sky." So we have to have "a New Approach."

The Grand Truth discovered by Mr. Lewis is that we are wrong in our "thinking" about the Universe. It is not "really a place, a system of stars or particles of matter spread out in space . . . (it) is, as far as we can ever know, a *personal* reality, a system of encounters between people. . . ." In fact, we ought to see "the whole world in our relationship with the other person" properly to understand "the mystery of personal life." I may be pardoned but this particular mystery appears to me to be just as much a mystery either way—that is, if we look at life the wrong way or the right way.

J.L.B.

What No Bible?

IT is widely claimed that the Bible, if not the inspired word of God, must at least be counted among the world's greatest literary treasures. This view received a set-back when one hundred and fifty leading literary figures in the United States were asked which book they would choose if they were stranded on a desert island, and had the choice of only one. The books selected, in order of preference were (according to a B.U.P. report in *The Observer*, 25 Dec., 1955):—

War and Peace (Tolstoy), *Abraham Lincoln* (Carl Sandburg), *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* (Mark Twain), *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Gibbon), *Walden* (Thoreau), *Don Quixote* (Cervantes), *The Divine Comedy* (Dante), *Sherlock Holmes* (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle), and *The Golden Bough* (Sir James Frazer).

The old lady on the Irish border, on being asked if anything to declare, replied: "nothing at all." The official asked what was in the bottle—"only holy water from Lourdes," was the reply. He pulled the cork—"Whisky it is," he declared. "Glory be to God," exclaimed the old lady—"A Miracle!"

—NEXT WEEK—

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

By Colin McCall

Prosper Alfarcic

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

WHEN Canon Rous died at Castres in 1929, the priest officiating at his funeral praised him for his "simple faith . . . as firm under trial as in prosperity." He little knew, apparently that the late canon was, as were so many French ecclesiastics of his day, liberal in his ideas and doubted much Christian and Catholic doctrine. For twenty years this broad-minded canon had been a friend of Prosper Alfarcic, now, alas, also dead, and had followed the latter's progress from belief to disbelief with understanding sympathy. In fact it is to a large degree to the Canon's repeated request to Alfarcic for an exposition of reasons for and against belief in Catholic doctrine that we owe the autobiographical study "De la Foi à la Raison," which was in the press at the moment of the author's deeply regretted death; it has since appeared as a memorial volume offered to the memory of their President Elect by the Union Rationaliste. After long meditation on his dead friend's suggestion, Alfarcic came to the conclusion that the best answer was to set out his own progress from fervent devotion to complete rejection, not merely of Christianity but of Theism, and to a conviction that Jesus Christ was not a historical character at all, but a religious creation.

Alfarcic was born in 1876 at the little village of Livinhac-le-Haut at the upper end of a valley sloping down to the river Let in southern France. He came of simple, pious peasant parents who married and died early. United by a bond of deep affection they lived frugally, almost barely, and uncomplainingly. The Alfarcics had long been settled in the region; in the days of the Albigenian persecution, they were accounted heretics. "Prosperou" was brought up in the shadow of the church, while, at Livinhac, is the hub from which radiate all the roads and all social activities. All that impressed his childish memory, all the pageantry of that simple life, derived from the church. His first teachers were Brothers of a teaching order. When he was near eleven years old, he was received for his first communion, went in solemn procession and new clothes to the church and, on his return after the ceremony, Monsieur le Curé proposed to Prosper's parents that their promising son should, instead of working in the fields, study for the priesthood. Moreover, said the Curé, this would cost them nothing as the parish had a fund, which had not been drawn on for some years, for such an expense, and if it were not enough, he was sure that the Bishop of Rodez would be able to find the rest. You can fancy the joy and wonderment of the pious father and mother. To the boy himself the proposal opened up a vision of enchantment, a prospect of all that was noble and best. So it befell that in October, 1888, the boy was admitted to the fourth class (remember that in France the first class is at the top) at the Little Seminary of S. Peter-under-Rodez.

At this school young Prosper passed four happy years—he was happy by nature. After French, Latin was very much the main subject. History, that most useful subject, and most used for indoctrination with prejudice and for the falsification of outlook, was efficiently taught. A myopic Abbé, much given to writing on the blackboard, taught Mathematics and very elementary Physics in a room over a wine-cellar tenanted by one not averse to business with schoolboys; hence on warm afternoons a message let down on the end of a strong string by a future Canon of Algiers would produce on its return journey a bottle of red wine, and the class would study hydrostatic pressures with joy.

From the Little to the Great Seminary was the next step. While he was here, in December 1893, Madame Alfarcic caught typhoid from a friend she was nursing and a few hours before the arrival of her son, sent for in haste, she died. He came, however, in time to receive his father's last words of affection, for, worn out with sorrow and excessive toil, Alfarcic père died a fortnight later. Looking back after sixty years, their son rejoiced that he had been able to provide them with a dream to content their hearts and to reward them for their unremitting and unselfish labours.

Thus at the age of seventeen, Prosper faced the world without resource, without practical knowledge, with no experience of the world, and responsible for four sisters and two brothers ranging in age from eleven to under one year. The Curé of Livinhac took the first step and consulted the Superior of the Great Seminary. They agreed that it was important that Prosper should continue his studies, for, in this way, he would in time be able to contribute to the support of his brothers and sisters, who, in the meantime, were found places in orphanages where they were looked after by nuns with kindness and affection, if not at times with much intelligence. The two younger girls, both under six, both fell ill, gravely ill. Whereon the Mother Superior declared: "It must be that the souls of your parents require prayers, and I have immediately had two masses said for the repose of their souls."

"Dear, kind parents," reflects Alfarcic, "would it have been you, who would have sent your two little girls into the shadow of death just because you required our prayers? What a strange fancy in a grown woman, responsible for the welfare of a whole community of little girls!"

At these orphanages for girls the discipline was strict and the teaching severely practical; the girls became excellent needle-women whose work was in demand, not only among pious ladies, but also in the great Parisian shops. As soon as Alfarcic could, he transferred his sisters from their orphanages to boarding schools, where they found themselves woefully backward for their age; nevertheless at least one gained the certificates necessary to become a schoolmistress.

Profoundly grateful to Curé and to Superior, Prosper applied himself to his studies with unrelaxing diligence, so that at twenty-one he was chosen to follow special courses at Paris with the view of becoming a teaching brother of Company of St. Sulpicius. So the untravelled country boy came to Paris. A year later while on a visit to his maternal grandfather, where all his brothers and sisters came annually for a family reunion, he learned that he had been appointed Professor of Philosophy at the Seminary of Bayeux in Normandy. Here he spent three happy years. He relates how the classes began with *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, a bizarre dialogue of unrelated texts quite incomprehensible to both teacher and class; after this a set prayer. Thus being assured of divine help, the teacher calls the roll of his class. In Alfarcic's case the lesson was then conducted in Latin.

From Bayeux to Issy-les-Moulineaux, depicted by Renan in his *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*, for his noviciate as a Sulpician. It was here, where it was held firmly that the laws of science were those of logic, as expressed by St. Thomas Aquinas and Leo XIII, that young Alfarcic became aware of difficulties, which became more and more insistent, in reconciling faith with reason; difficulties which had begun to make themselves felt while he was still at Rodez. There

(continued on next page)

This Believing World

The most brilliant "Saying of the Year" has already appeared. It comes from the *Sunday Graphic* where a Mr. Roderick Mann pictures five outstanding women of 1955. One of them is Mrs. Margaret Knight—a thoroughly justified choice—but Mr. Mann tells us why: because her anti-religious talks "drive more and more people back to the churches." Mr. Mann perhaps saw them going in droves, most of them no doubt blatant infidels who now believe in Angels, Devils, Hell, and Heaven, to say nothing of Miracles, as he himself does. But apart from Mr. Mann, what is the evidence that more and more people have gone back to the churches? None whatever—it is just pitiful ignorant bla-bla, as the *Sunday Graphic* well knows. But if Mrs. Knight really drives people back to church, why does not the B.B.C. engage her to lecture every week?

What a noise our newspapers make of a "convert" when on very rare occasions one turns up! The Billy Graham Crusade brought in, of course, thousands until it was shown that the "converts" were all Christians before they were converted to Christianity and then these "converts" were not particularly big news. This must have been forgotten by a Scots newspaper recently, the *Elgin Courier*, for it splashes a big headline "Testimony of a Convert"—the convert being a gentleman who blandly tells us, "I was brought up by Christian parents who taught me the way to the Cross." It appears, however, that he did not "really grasp its meaning" then but he does now. So he is a "convert."

The truth is that only very rarely does a genuine unbeliever ever go back to the fantastic credulity and beliefs of true Christianity once he has studied the researches of scientists in general and of anthropologists in particular. There have been cases, but almost all of them are mere no-bodies, and the Freethought Movement can very well dispense with them. Their place is with Fundamentalists like Billy Graham, or the Salvation Army—and now that the gentleman referred to above has seen "the light" (as he calls it) we hope he will go and evermore rest in their saintly bosoms. But not in ours.

Now that the Xmas of 1955 is receding into the dim past, we are sorry to report that the Bishop of Chester is a very sad Christian. The hallowed festival, which should ever call to mind how God bestowed his greatest possession, that is, Himself or his Son (we are not quite sure which) on to a grateful world seems to have slipped into what one may call an orgy of eating, drinking, and lots of fun and fun generally. Even the Cards of Remembrance appear rarely to mention Christ or the Babe of Bethlehem. What a pity that the good Bishop does not send his followers to *The Freethinker* which at least does refer not only to Christmas, but very often also to the Babe of Bethlehem.

Few religions of antiquity even could have made more of a female Deity than Rome; for not content with making the Assumption of the Virgin a "dogma" like the Immaculate Conception, the present Pope now wants all believers to insist that "the sole mediator between mankind and God" is the Virgin Mary. As all good Protestants know, you can get lots of mediation by applying, in the first place, to God Almighty himself; or, to make quite sure, you ought to do it through Christ Jesus if possible. But "ladies first" is now the Catholic motto. Not, naturally, on earth for only priests rule here—but in Heaven. And the ladies have got to get there first.

A member of the House of Lords, Lord Teyneham, wants to rouse the nation with the once popular, Christian cry of "Blasphemy!" With a Christian House of Lords, and in a Christian country, the Electricity Board had a Nativity display last Xmas in one of its showrooms, but instead of the Three Wise Men offering gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Babe of Bethlehem, they were offering a washing machine, an electric cooker, and a refrigerator! Such blasphemy has not been heard of since G. W. Foote gave us a few mild cartoons, and was promptly jailed by a pious Roman Catholic judge (North)—he was later removed—to serve twelve months hard. We, not very hopefully, advise that something like this should be meted out to the whole of the members of the Electricity Board. That would learn 'em!

PROSPER ALFARIC

(continued from page 11)

faith had been strong enough to still reason. New reason was refusing to be stilled.

These were the days of the Dreyfus affair—the Sulpicians were to a man antidreyfus. These were the days when Emile Combes, once a priest, then a doctor, then a politician, was Minister of Education and Religion. These were the days Loisy was publishing his *Revue d'Histoire et de Littérature religieuses*, when von Hugel declared that the Books of Moses had certainly four different authors, when Albert Houtin found that he could no longer accept the official doctrines of the Church and when Marcel Hébert, Parisian abbé, publicly rejected all belief in god, when Joseph Turmel came to the conclusion that Holy Writ not only abounded in contradictions and improbabilities, but in falsifications and forgeries. All these names became known to the public; but there were many priests, some holding high positions, who held similar opinions, but never made any public declaration of them.

Having completed his noviciate, Alfaric returned to Bayeux, and found time to study not only the writings of Loisy and Houtin, but also Comte, Spencer, Kant, Spinoza, and in English, Driver's Introduction to the Old Testament.

From Bayeux to Bordeaux, from Bordeaux to Albi, where the "âme de la maison" (the soul of the house) was Archbishop Mignet. Before taking up the professorship at Albi, Alfaric had a long interview with this notable man, and discovered in him a very wide sympathy of outlook and interests. At Albi Alfaric became convinced that he could no longer remain in the Church; that his opinions derived from constant study clashed too violently with the official views which had recently (July, 1907) been set out in a decree of the Holy Office "*Lamentabili sane exitu*" which condemned the Modernism of Loisy and his like. In this Syllabus of heresies Alfaric discovered all that had been to him a revelation of truth. A few months later (Dec., 1907) Pope Pius X issued an encyclical "*Pascendi dominici gregis*" in which he declared that this Modernism derived from three errors: indiscreet curiosity, boundless vanity and lamentable ignorance of the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas. Moreover the Pope threatened with excommunication those who should take up the defence of the propositions condemned in the syllabus of *Lamentabili sane exitu*; whereon the Archbishop of Paris, acting under instructions from Cardinal Merry del Val, summoned Loisy to adhere to the terms of the two Papal documents cited above. Loisy refused contemptuously and was duly excommunicated.

(To be concluded)

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 propaganda.

PAUL VARNEY.—The word "bowdlerize" derives from Dr. Thos. Bowdler, who in 1818 published a *Family Shakespeare* in which, as he said, "those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family." After its initial popularity, it became an object of ridicule, and a similar attempt to bowdlerise Gibbon failed.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Lincolns Inn Fields, Kingsway, W.C.1.).—Every Tuesday, 1 p.m. (Tower Hill) Every Thursday, 1 p.m. Speakers: J. M. ALEXANDER, W. CARLTON, and others.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1.0 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and CORSAIR.

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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, January 15, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "Was Jesus a Humanist?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic's Institute).—January, 15, 6.45 p.m.: N. BERRY, "My Visit to the Chinese Republic" (illustrated).

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Tuesday, January 17, 7.15 p.m.: Rev. E. G. LEE, "Humanism or Theism?"

Glasgow R.P.A. (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street).—Sunday, January 15, 3 p.m.: ALASTAIR LINDSAY, L.L.B., "Religion in Scotland To-day."

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 15, 6.30 p.m.: C. G. SHUTTLEWOOD, "The Galaxy" (illustrated by lantern slides).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, January 15, 2.30 p.m.: EDMUND TAYLOR, "Education from Luther to John Dewey."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, January 15, 11 a.m.: DR. W. E. SWINTON, "The Greeks and Evolution."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1.).—Sunday, January 15, 7.15 p.m.: COLIN McCALL, "The Secular Basis of Culture."

Notes and News

The response for tickets for the Jubilee Dinner of the N.S.S. has already been gratifying and all who wish to attend should immediately let the General Secretary know. Not only will there be a Social and Dance but we are hoping to have the pleasure of seeing a famous T.V. conjuror perform some of his baffling tricks. It is hoped to make this Jubilee Dinner one of the best, if not the

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £1,050 16s. 1d.; Miss I Barnes, £1 6s. 0d.; A. W. Coleman, £2 10s. 0d.; B. M. Heckford (New South Wales), £1 1s. 0d.; Mr. McGough (North London Branch), 10s. 0d.; J. W. M. Ward, 5s. 0d.; A. Hancock, 2s. 0d.; C. E. Smith, 2s. 6d.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1 0s. 0d. Total to date, £1,057 12s. 7d.

best, members and their friends have ever enjoyed. Needless to add the presence of Mrs. Margaret Knight as the Guest of Honour will be the chief attraction.

Lengthy reports appeared in several Midland newspapers following the address given by Mrs. Margaret Knight at Birmingham, and in each case the National Secular Society (Birmingham Branch) was mentioned. The reports were factual and, so far as they went, fairly presented.

In a lengthy advance note of the meeting the *Birmingham Mail* said:

"She is a lucid speaker. She argues her case well. She sees no reason why people should not live a useful, adult, moral life without religion, though she would be the last to condemn those who feel otherwise.

She is not afraid of the questioner. Some few weeks ago, at the Conway Hall, London, one heard her deal with hecklers with practised ease. If a quotation were hurled at her she had one to cap it, and she never lost a point.

Her researches into prison life and her study of asylums, have convinced her that there are more social delinquents and mental patients with a religious bent than otherwise, though she finds no pleasure in the fact."

Figures given by Mrs. Knight on the high proportion of Catholic criminals were quoted in both the *Sunday Mercury* (Dec. 11) and the *Birmingham Post* (Dec. 12). The *Mercury* also has this to say: "Despite repeated approaches, Roman Catholic authorities in the city declined comment on the allegations."

Mrs. Knight had also dealt with Billy Graham and the Churches' attitude to him. According to the *Mercury*:—

She also made an attack on churchmen who "stifle their intellectual scruples" in the face of "childish superstitions."

"Many churchmen," said Mrs. Knight, "regard Billy Graham as a good moral influence and try to convince themselves that his fundamentalism is child-like faith and not childish superstition.

"But it is sad to see cultured and scholarly Christians sitting beside Dr. Graham on public platforms while he urges his audience to commit 'intellectual suicide'."

The reports were boldly headlined: "Mrs. Knight attacks Catholics and Clerics," "Humanism instead of Religion"; and the following is a sample of the *Birmingham Post* report:

"Non-Christian humanism was still a comparatively young, small and unorganised movement, not in a position to found institutions, but individual humanists had made immense contributions to welfare in other ways, Mrs. Margaret Knight, of the Department of Psychology, University of Aberdeen, said in Birmingham on Saturday.

In an address to the Birmingham branch of the National Secular Society, she said that such men and women as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Pierre and Marie Curie, Freud and Einstein—to say nothing of living

humanists—compared very favourably with Christians in the good they had done and the evil they had refrained from doing.”

Replies drawn from Birmingham's defenders of Christianity can only be described as miserably inept. The Rev. N. Power, for instance, in the *Mail*, contended that Einstein “did believe in God,” leaving the average reader with the impression that the Rev. N. Power's God and Einstein's Spinozistic god were one and the same animal! And this cleric has the impudence to use the title, “Was Mrs. Knight Fair?” But it was left to the Rector of Birmingham to provide the Crushing Answer. Mrs. Knight, he said, “seemed to be ignorant of the inward Christian experience which united Christians.” As Chapman Cohen used to say: “Christians unite! Then fetch the police.”

Articles and smaller items from *The Freethinker* continue to find their way into the Freethought journals of the world. Among recent examples, an article by G. I. Bennett was translated by one of our readers, Mr. W. Auld, for the Esperantist paper *Norda Prismo*, one by G. H. Taylor was used as a front page article in the *New Zealand Rationalist*, and one by F. A. Ridley appeared in *Progressive World* (U.S.A.).

Some time ago one of our readers, Mr. James McGowan, was successful in getting the Ashton-under-Lyne central library to take *The Freethinker* for a trial period of two months. We are now pleased to report that the trial has been a success, and we hear that *The Freethinker* has proved so popular with readers that it is now to be a permanent addition to the library. We should be glad to hear of other efforts in this direction.

We regret that the following was not listed in the N.S.S. branches in the issue of December 30th: BRADFORD, Secretary Mr. W. Baldie, 2 Kingsley Crescent, Baildon, Shipley.

The Biggest Failure in Christendom

By H. CUTNER

IF I were asked to give the name of the silliest Society in Christendom, I should be obliged to say The Society for the Conversion of Jews. Most other societies learn a great deal in the course of centuries, but this particular one never anything. It has not budged, since it was founded, from its original incredible stupidity and I find it difficult to write about downright stupidity.

But a book in our Free Library about it caught my eye and I have found it so “entertaining” that it is really worth an article. This book is *The Church and the Jewish People*, and it consists of a number of contributions by Christian and Jewish writers, and edited by a Swedish parson who appears to be completely obsessed with a “mission” which must be fulfilled at all costs—converting Jews. Whether he has, in the course of many years, converted even one, I cannot find out but he gives me the impression that if he can bring only one member of the stubborn “race” to Christ he would willingly die.

It is quite impossible to deal with all the articles, many of which are incredibly silly, but there is one shining piece of lunacy through them all. It is that every word, every dot in the Bible, comes straight from God to the Jews. Are they not His “Chosen Race”? There is not the least doubt whatever that the Bible is literally true, and particularly the

“historic” fact that the Virgin-born Saviour came to save the Jews, and in their stupid obstinacy, they rejected Him. It is too awful to contemplate. Ask any Christian missionary to the Jews and he will tell you without the bat of an eyelid that all the Christian tortures and massacres of the Jews through history were brought upon themselves through their rejection of Christ Jesus. Christians were merely the instruments of an outraged God. God Almighty sent His Son to save the Jews and the stubborn “race” refused Him! And if one argues with these Christian lunatics, either they get black in the face with Christian anger, or with Christian humility they warn you that there are limits to an outraged God.

Talk about Fundamentalism! Billy Graham is almost an unbeliever when it comes to proving everything that has happened to the Jews through their exasperating unbelief in Jesus. A Christian missionary can roll off the horrors without ceasing. I once met one of them and asked him to prove that the Jews were a “race.” He had one answer only. It says so in the Bible! “Our Lord” said so, and when I gently suggested that if “Our Lord” ever lived He must have had the skin of an Arab like all the Israelites of the Bible, he nearly collapsed with anger. When he recovered sufficiently enough to be coherent, he said that living in Europe for some centuries was sufficient to change the colour of all Jews from brown to white!

The one thing that all these Christian missionaries cannot forgive is unbelief. For a Jew to hide his origin, to renounce his Jewish heritage, to laugh at most of the silly Talmudic laws, to come out as a Freethinker, is something so vile that no humble believer in Christ is going to allow for a moment. How can a Jew be converted if he gives up belief in the faith of his forefathers? How can he come to Christ if he pokes fun at the “Fall of Man,” at the reality of the sin Jesus had come to save him from?

It must be confessed that most Jews have not yet reached such an unorthodox point of view. What with ritual and fear and often a lack of scholarship, they keep up something of their forefathers' teachings if only half-heartedly; and it is this lukewarm approach to religion by modern Jews that Christian missionaries find so hard to overcome. Given a very religious Jew, one who is quite certain that the Pentateuch was dictated to Moses by God and therefore must be completely true, and he can at least be approached. If all things are possible to God, then it is possible for God to have a Son—and even a Mother. And if a Jew believes in miracles, and a Christian shares the same belief, then at last they have some common ground from which to begin. But what can one do with the horror of unbelief, with someone who is quite convinced that Adam, Moses, Jesus and the rest are all myths?

One of the few truly interesting chapters in the book is, however, that about “Hebrew Christians” who are hated by their one time brothers, and despised by genuine Christians as “renegades.” These people complain that they are by no means received into the Christian community as they should be. It reminds me of the famous drawing by Phil May of the Hebrew Christian who tells his father of his change, and the old man asks him what is he going to do with that nose?

The writer of this chapter is obliged to admit that it is the Christian Church itself which is responsible for the bad treatment of Hebrew Christians. He says,

Even as the continued existence of the Jew in his refusal of Christ constitutes the supreme challenge to the missionary vocation of the Church, so the Hebrew Christian in its midst is the supreme challenge that it should recapture the mind of its Lord for its organization, living, theology, and outlook.

And he adds,

The worst complaint of Hebrew Christians is that they have been regarded with suspicion and their motives questioned . . . Nothing comes as a greater shock to the average convert than to discover how deep Christian divisions go and that denominational differences often count far more than a common faith in Christ. . . . The deepest revolt of many Hebrew Christians against the system in which they find themselves is, however, against its theology and practice. . . .

—and so on.

This book is full of what is called "the Christian Witness" to the Jewish people. Well, the Jews have had plenty experience of the wonderful witness; but with an effrontery that only a humble Christian follower of gentle Jesus can muster up, a missionary still talks as if every dot and comma in the Bible compels him to "convert" the Jew to his own conglomeration of some of the most idiotic beliefs in the world's thousand religions. And the appalling cost! Each Jew costs the society, that is, the public, somewhere near £1,000 to be converted.

The more one reads about Christianity, the more one must despise it.

Instead of the Bible

YOU ask me what I would put in place of the Bible as a moral guide.

There are many good precepts, many wise sayings, and many good regulations and laws in the Bible, and these are mingled with bad precepts, with foolish sayings, with absurd rules and cruel laws.

But we must remember that the Bible is a collection of many books written centuries apart, and that it in part represents the growth and tells in part the history of a people. We must also remember that the writers treat of many subjects. Many of these writers have nothing to say about right or wrong, about vice or virtue.

The book of Genesis has nothing about morality. There is not a line in it calculated to shed light on the path of conduct. No one can call that book a moral guide. It is made up of myth and miracle, of tradition and legend.

In Exodus we have an account of the manner in which Jehovah delivered the Jews from Egyptian bondage.

We now know that the Jews were never enslaved by the Egyptians; that the entire story is a fiction. We know this, because there is not found in Hebrew—a word of Egyptian origin, and there is not found in the language of the Egyptians a word of Hebrew origin. This being so, we know that the Hebrews and Egyptians could not have lived together for hundreds of years.

Certainly Exodus was not written to teach morality. In that book you cannot find one word against human slavery. As a matter of fact, Jehovah was a believer in that institution.

The killing of cattle with disease and hail, the murder of the first-born, so that in every house was death, because the King refused to let the Hebrews go, certainly was not moral; it was fiendish. The writer of that book regarded all the people of Egypt, their children, their flocks and herds, as the property of Pharaoh, and these people and these cattle were killed, not because they had done anything wrong, but simply for the purpose of punishing the king. Is it possible to get any morality out of this history?

All the laws found in Exodus including the Ten Commandments, so far as they are really good and sensible, were at that time in force amongst all the peoples of the world.

Murder is, and always was, a crime, and always will be as long as a majority of people object to being murdered.

Industry always has been, and always will be, the enemy of larceny.

The nature of man is such that he admires the teller of truth and despises the liar. Among all tribes, among all people, truth-telling has been considered a virtue and false swearing or false speaking a vice.

The love of parents for children is natural, and this love is found among all the animals that live. So the love of children for parents is natural, and was not, and cannot be, created by law. Love does not spring from a sense of duty, nor does it bow in obedience to commands.

So men and women are not virtuous because of anything in books or creeds.

All the Ten Commandments that are good were old, were the result of experience. The Commandments that were original with Jehovah were foolish.

The worship of "any other god" could not have been worse than the worship of Jehovah, and nothing could have been more absurd than the sacredness of the Sabbath.

If Commandments had been given against slavery and polygamy, against wars of invasion and extermination, against religious persecution in all its forms, so that the world could be free, so that the brain might be developed and the heart civilised, then we might, with propriety, call such Commandments a moral guide.

Before we can truthfully say that the Ten Commandments constitute a moral guide, we must add and subtract. We must throw away some, and write others in their places.

The Commandments that have a known application here in this world, and treat of human obligations, are good; the others have no basis in fact or experience.

Many of the regulations found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are good. Many are absurd and cruel.

The entire ceremonial of worship is insane.

Most of the punishments for violations of laws are unphilosophic and brutal. . . . The fact is, that the Pentateuch upholds nearly all crimes, and to call it a moral guide is as absurd as to say that it is merciful or true.

Nothing of a moral nature can be found in Joshua or Judges. These books are filled with crimes, with massacres, and murders. They are about the same as the real history of the Apache Indians.

The story of Ruth is not particularly moral.

In first and second Samuel there is not one word calculated to develop the brain or conscience.

Jehovah murdered seventy thousand Jews because David took a census of the people. David, according to the account, was the guilty one, but only the innocent were killed.

In first and second Kings can be found nothing of ethical value. All the kings who refused to obey the priests were denounced, and all the crowned wretches who assisted the priests were declared to be the favourites of Jehovah. In these books there cannot be found one word in favour of liberty.

There are some good Psalms, and there are some that are infamous. Most of these Psalms are selfish. Many of them are passionate appeals for revenge.

COL. ROBERT G. INGERSOLL,
(*Boston Investigator*, 1898)

(To be concluded)

W. LONDON BRANCH A.G.M.

The Annual General Meeting of the West London Branch of the National Secular Society was held on January 1st at the Laurie Arms. A successful year of propaganda was reported, particularly from the outdoor meetings in Hyde Park, and, at the suggestion of Mr. W. J. O'Neill, it was the general feeling that the indoor meetings should take on the character of a pursuance of the outdoor work. Newcomers to the indoor lectures had been drawn from the outdoor audiences, and they expected a continuance of the same type of secularist propaganda. This, it was felt, could be done not only by the society's speakers, but equally effectively by having Christian speakers as often as possible. Not only did their own supporters swell the attendance, but the discussions provided excellent chances of contrasting freethought with religion for the benefit of non-members and Christians. The visit of a Catholic speaker had in these respects been the biggest recent success. It was decided to try to plan the syllabus accordingly.

It was learned with pleasure that Mr. O'Neill would be available for outdoor speaking whenever in London, though he had forthcoming business assignments in S. Africa and in Europe.

For the open-air propaganda next Summer the aim is to have two platforms in use on Sunday evenings. Mr. C. E. Wood suggested that one indoor meeting should consist of individually selected readings from Freethought literature, with discussion, by half a dozen members; this, he said, would incidentally afford platform experience for some not yet ready to give a lecture.

The Branch income for the year had, as usual, been spent almost to the last shilling. The officials were thanked for their splendid efforts and re-elected as follows: President Mr. F. A. Hornibrook; Secretary Mr. H. Cleaver; Treasurer Mr. C. McKay.

G.H.T.

EXECUTIVE MEETING

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the N.S.S. took place on Wednesday, 14th December, 1955. Mr. F. A. Ridley, President, in the chair; present: Messrs. Arthur, Barker, Ebury, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor, Tiley, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer Mr. Griffiths, and the Secretary. A reply from American Embassy re Mr. Paul Robeson was noted. New members were admitted to Parent, Birmingham, Central London, North London, Nottingham and West London branches; various items of correspondence were dealt with. Arrangements for the 50th Annual Dinner were announced and Mrs. Knight's meetings under the auspices of the Birmingham and Manchester branches were reported. The question of circularising Trade Union branches regarding the B.B.C. refusal to allow the expression of unorthodox views was raised and branches were to be asked to follow the example of N. London. It was decided not to hold an interim conference but to prepare a draft of the revised rules for circulation to branches before the Annual Conference.

Correspondence

MONARCHY OR REPUBLIC

Your contributor E. G. Macfarlane suggests that as a "true single-class republic . . . we should then be in a position to unite constitutionally with similar republics . . ."—but should we really be any nearer union with the U.S.A. and France if we dispensed with the Monarchy, or would the United Europe idea have been pursued more enthusiastically? I doubt it.

An historic, constitutional monarchy (provided the members of the royal family are worthy people), seems to have some advantages over a republic headed by a president: (1) The Sovereign may be a woman, which is a pleasant change (in theory a president might be female but in practice it doesn't seem to happen). (2) He, or she, may be young (more likely so than a president). (3) He, or she, will in most cases have been trained for the position from early life. (4) The monarch is usually in office for longer than a president, giving a continuity desirable in a symbolic representative. (5) The monarch is not identified with a political party, as are some presidents.

I think that we should not readily forego these advantages.

G. W. CLARK.

CHURCH REVENUES

My dictionary 1948, defines Establishment as "recognition by the State and in some cases partial support, as the Church of England." I understand that during the agricultural depression between the wars, the Government paid the church £51,650,000 stock to redeem

the "Queen Anne's Bounty," which was described by the late Lord Melchett, speaking in the House of Commons May 5th, 1912.

"Queens Anne's Bounty, was not an endowment; it was the alienation of Crown property to the Church of England. Queen Anne had no right to alienate that property; it was the property of the Crown and the Nation."

Landowners are still paying off the sum mentioned above in the form of yearly annuities, and will be until 1996. If this isn't taking money from the taxpayers I don't know what is, the only difference is the Government have given the Church a lump sum, and the taxpayers are paying it back in instalments.

I have no objection to schools, hospitals and charitable institutions being exempt from rates, as they are all vital to the needs of the community. The churches do not in my opinion fall into this category, as we are told that it is possible to worship God anywhere, and there is no need for a special building for that purpose. The Church of England revenue from land and investments for 1954-1955 was £10,500,000 and as far as I know they do not pay any Income Tax.

C.H.H.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

It is more in sorrow than in anger that I am daring to criticise the article on capital punishment by Mr. Ridley. Nearing eighty, I am anxious for my age group from whence, including defenceless women, these sadistic brutes seek their prey. I am not in favour of making this country "a land fit for murderers to live in"; I want it safe for the others.

The article is typical throughout, not one word in sympathy with the unfortunate victims for whom it will certainly not be a glorious victory.

A Sunday newspaper, solidly in favour of the abolition of capital punishment and flogging, is now publishing two articles, one by a ex-prison chaplain deploring the banning of flogging for violence, claiming it to be the strongest deterrent, and another by a boxer and ex-gangster, boasting of his exploits, I will quote—"I used a piece of rock, my pal a knuckleduster; we finished him off with the boot"; "I have seen my pal kick a man's face to pulp"; "Their girl friend double crossed them so they flung acid in her face," and so on *ad nauseam!* but these types of people must not be flogged; it might hurt them.

To the M.P. who would compel the Home Secretary to attend executions I would agree providing the M.P. himself be compelled to attend the mortuary to view the mutilated, battered body of the next victim.

The abolition of flogging has not lessened crimes of violence. The figures are higher than they have ever been. Will you tell us how you propose to protect the old and defenceless when you have got rid of this last deterrent?

C. W. JAMES.

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