

The Freethinker

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IN THE CONCORDAT of 1953 between Franco and the Vatican two clauses are specially notable. One reserves a place in all public propaganda services, including radio and TV, for the Catholic Church; another provides for the Spanish Government to give a free hand to the "legitimate" activities of Catholic Action in Spain. In our own country the "hidden hand" of the Churches on the air — if we may use such a mixed metaphor — has recently attracted much public attention in a case in which the National Secular Society has been directly involved, but the insidious activity of Catholic Action in this country has, as yet, been insufficiently recognised. At present, since this is officially a Protestant country, it represents an underground movement but is already a potent menace. Considered as operating on an international scale it may perhaps be described as Public Enemy No. 1 of any independent movement of human reason.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Catholic Action— Public Enemy No. 1

By F. A. RIDLEY

What is Catholic Action?

Catholic Action has been defined by a leading member of the Catholic Hierarchy as "the active participation of the laity in the secular life of the Church under the direction of the Hierarchy". Whatever view one may hold about the purely theological activities of the R.C. Church, it seems indisputable that, as and when considered as a political organisation, the Church of Rome has known how to move with the times and how to adapt itself to succeeding and diverse historical situations. In his penetrating monastic autobiography, *Twelve Years in a Monastery*, Joseph McCabe has given a lucid account of some of these historical changes. Since "Father Anthony" wrote 60 years ago, further examples have been piling up showing the same type of strategic manoeuvre. When, for example, the present writer published his book on *The Papacy and Fascism* some 20 years ago, it was broadly true to state that, then, the Vatican was collaborating closely with the Fascist regimes of Hitler and Mussolini; whereas nowadays, at least outside the Iberian Peninsula, Rome poses as the bulwark of the Free World and the ally of Democracy against "totalitarian Communism". A clear case of casting out Beelzebub with Beelzebub!

The present writer has often considered that one of the most valuable acquisitions to anti-clerical literature would be a detailed study of the *political* evolution of the R.C. Church, which has successively backed Feudalism and Capitalism, autocracy and democracy. What it will back next is anybody's guess. The current political attitude of the Vatican to changes in the social sphere was aptly expressed by ex-Bishop Talleyrand — who incidentally returned to the Church before his death. Watching the fighting on the Paris barricades during the 1830 revolution, he turned and said, "We are winning." Asked whom "we" meant, he replied, "I don't know yet."

A Corporation of Priests

One constant feature, however, can be discerned in previous changes of Catholic policy; the initiative always came from above — from the Hierarchy. Even in the Crusades (the "Catholic Action" of the Middle Ages) the initiative came from priests like Peter the Hermit, St. Bernard, etc. Successively the Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits have played leading roles in the Church, but all these were, and are, corporations of priests. The Catholic laity were not asked for anything but obedience. "Their's not to reason why." Only blind submission was required of them, as perpetual minors under permanent direction. The essential significance of Catholic Action lies in its being a movement in which the Action comes from the laity — the first of its kind in the long history of the Church!

The Century of the Common Man

Our century, the "age of the common man", marks the end of the adolescence of the masses. Until the French Revolution, Democracy was merely a verbal theory which did not extend beyond the narrow circle of the educated and ruling groups. Today the masses are entering history, and even the reaction in Church and State has to take account of this fact. Hitler staged the German counter-revolution under such radical disguises as "The National Socialist Workers' Party". And Rome, whose ecclesiastical fascism is the prototype of the secular brand, is forced to enrol the laity and to rely on their active co-operation. Will this eventually become a boomerang, recoiling upon the head of the Church? For an institution whose basis lies in the unquestioning submission of its laity to the commands of the clerical corporation, to encourage Action on the part of the formerly submissive laity is playing with fire.

The Assault Guards of Rome

However, we live in an age of mass movements and Rome has to move with the times. If one may describe the Jesuits as the Brains Trust of the Vatican, which the Order founded by Loyola probably still is, it is nowadays correct to describe Catholic Action as the Storm Troops or assault-guards of the Church. More and more, Catholic Action assumes the role of the aggressive and insidious spearhead of the Church. In Catholic lands it acts openly. In lands such as this, where the Catholic Church is still only a tolerated minority, yet becoming increasingly restive in this subordinate position, it works underground, burrowing like a mole, so that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to trace its movements in precise detail. Only occasionally does Catholic Action come dramatically to the surface, as in the recent bold move to get rid of Dr. Evatt, the present Protestant leader of the largely Catholic Australian Labour Party. For the moment this particular plot has miscarried,

but in Australia, as generally in Anglo-Saxon Catholicism, proletarian elements predominate, and Catholic Action burrows persistently in working class organisations with an energy that emulates that of its Communist rivals within these same organisations. Before the war, a detailed study of Catholic Action in the English Trade Unions (by Mr. A. Flanders) actually appeared; it is hoped that in the near future the newly-formed T.U. Committee of the N.S.S. will be in a position to publish factual information of a more detailed character and of a contemporary nature. No more useful service could be rendered to the anti-clerical movement at the present juncture.

Public Enemy No. 1

Catholic Action represents a chameleon. In the Anglo-Saxon world — or, perhaps more accurately, in a world affected by the Irish immigration — Catholicism is mainly

proletarian, and political Catholicism assumes a democratic character. In Spain, Catholic Action is aristocratic, in Germany *bourgeois*; in both, Fascist in tendency. In present day Germany political Catholicism is universally regarded in radical circles as the ally of Fascism and the successor of Hitler. In France and Italy, Catholic Action disguises its reactionary character under the cloak of Christian Democracy. However, the "worker-priests" made no impact upon the traditionally anti-clerical French proletariat and the future drift will probably be towards open reaction. But elsewhere, and under manifold disguises, Catholic Action pursues a consistent world strategy, which the Black International has carried on under successive disguises and political instruments since the Roman Church first emerged. Today Catholic Action represents its major political instrument, Public Enemy No. 1, the greatest menace of, and to, our time.

Church Bells

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE RINGING OF BELLS in connection with religious ceremonies pre-dates the Christian era, as also do so many other rites now associated with Christianity.

The original purpose behind bell-ringing is to scare away evil spirits. The festival of Osiris in ancient Egypt was preceded by bells; in Athens the priests of Cybele used them in their rites; and the Jewish high priests wore golden bells dangling from their ornate vestments. In Exodus the priest enters the temple to the accompaniment of bells, lest he should fall victim to the devils lying in wait.

It was probably not the original intention that the sounds should be in any way musical or pleasing to the ear (and, one may add, it is even today difficult to discern such intention). It was the noise of a *metal* instrument which kept the Evil One at bay, and in Greece and Rome the clank of bronze or iron was supposed to put goblins to flight. These and other superstitions survived pagan forms of religion and became incorporated into the Christian tradition.

In the Middle Ages of Christendom the church bells were still avowedly the means of warding off demons. The First Council of Cologne (Catholic) stated it as

an opinion of the Fathers that at the sound of bells summoning Christians to prayer demons are terrified and depart, and the spirits of the storm, the powers of the air, are laid low. The Roman Pontifical service book acknowledged the power of bells in "affrighting evil spectres", silencing the gibbering ghosts and stilling the tempest fiends.

Canon Durandus (13th century) states:

For when they hear the trumpets of the Church Militant; that is, the bells; they are afraid, as any tyrant is afraid when he hears in his land the trumpets of the powerful king, his foe. And that, too, is the reason why, at the sight of a storm rising, the Church rings its bells, in order that the demons, hearing the trumpets of the Eternal King, may be terrified and flee away and abstain from stirring up the tempest.

Hamlet dwellers of the Middle Ages would be kept awake sometimes right through the night, on such occasions as the "Festive Nights" of witches and warlocks, whose malignant arts were more effective during the hours of darkness. Nocturnal pealing was even more common in France, Spain and other parts of Europe, during the "sacred nights" of the warlock fraternity, when their alleged dander was at its height. Among the peasantry of Eastern Europe the terrors of "Walpurgis Night" survived until comparatively recently, and grotesque religious clowning was performed "to expel the baleful, though invisible, crew by making a prodigious racket".

The purpose of the Passing Bell, at or near death, was to scare away the soul-snatching goblins or spectres in the employ of the Evil One. In northern lands, according to one antiquary (Capt. Gore) the Passing Bell was to bespeak the prayers for the departing soul and also

to drive away the evil spirits who stood at the bed's foot and about the house, ready to seize their prey, or at least to molest and terrify the soul in its passage.

The average vicar today would, of course, defend his bells as a means of reminding his customers of the impending service and would perhaps like to forget the barbaric ancestry of this time-honoured rite.

An Angry British Israelite

SOME KIND FRIEND — or perhaps it was the Editor himself — has sent me a copy of *The National Message*, a monthly journal which, no doubt, keeps those Britishers together who firmly believe that they are Israelites; though, thank Heaven, not Jews. Three-quarters of a column are devoted to me and not a line to the arguments I recently made in some articles. I am a "freethinker" and the sole object of our own journal is "to make nasty asides on the credulity of Christians". Let me hasten to assure our completely humourless Israelite that my own object is really not to make "nasty asides" but to push forward as complete a frontal attack as I know how.

The Editor is quite upset that I deny the historic reality of the twelve tribes of Israel as well as the 12 apostles; but he appears so thoroughly bewildered at this that he feebly asks me "to go back to school", or at least read "Kenyon". It is quite possible that I read "Kenyon" before he was born, but as a matter of curiosity, I looked up his *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* and was not at all surprised to see that the Twelve Tribes are not even mentioned in the Index. Of course, "Kenyon", the Israelite, may be some other person than Sir Frederic G. Kenyon — and if so, I would be delighted to look him up.

The truth is that the Israelitish Editor of *The National Message* found it utterly impossible to answer me, and so passed the buck to "Kenyon". But it was a glorious opportunity to let himself go on my ignorance. He knows quite well that none of his readers dares read THE FREETHINKER without a shred of humour, they never face up to reality. They still live in the ignorant world of Richard Brothers of some lunatic like him.

The Sacred Cow of Controversy

By LEON SPAIN

AN IMPEDIMENT in the highway of intellectual progress is the presence of a sacred cow of controversy, erected by the proponents and devotees of the predominant views of any age. The guardians of the exclusive rights of such sacred cows have arrogated to themselves the unlimited privilege of censoring and suppressing those views and trends of thought which are adverse to their vested interests or unquestioning loyalties. Sacred cows, unable to defend themselves, have ever relied upon ruthless champions, who were afraid to meet their opponents in a fair and open controversy, and who dealt with them in methods hardly consistent with fair play or human decency.

From the dawn of human history down to the present the pages of history are studded with the wrongdoings of those who were the watchdogs of the prevailing views of any time or place. If the champions or defenders of vested views and interests did not employ violence to persuade or convince, they resorted to the method of the conspiracy of silence, the veritable trade mark of intellectual poverty. Such an attitude was not only characteristic of the ages preceding our own; the sacred cow attitude is, in many instances, in existence in many acknowledged civilised areas today.

Recently, while reading the section of an American newspaper devoted to religious notices and activities, the following notice struck me rather vigorously: "It is our policy not to permit advertising columns to be used for an attack by one religious faith upon another faith, or to reflect upon the religious beliefs of persons of any faith." This, besides expressing the policy of its publisher, can be exposed as a piece of sophistry on a par with the worst in intellectual dishonesty. In this instance can be seen the damage which can be done to the media of information by the combined pressure of the representatives of the numerous religious groups in the United States. It is, needless to state, that, in the American press, accusations and recriminations of one political group upon another are published and given ample space. In political issues neither mercy nor quarter is asked, and the battle goes on merrily. However, in issues bordering upon, or directly concerned with, the religious, an attitude of solemnity begins to prevail and a new set of rules pertaining to intellectual controversy come into effect, for the pulpit must enjoy an immunity from criticism not bestowed upon the political platform.

In the quotation above, a double significance is present. The word "attack" is applied when perhaps a mere criticism has only been levelled in an issue pertaining to the activity of a religious group. And the word "reflect" is fraught with more ambiguities, because the intellectual bankruptcy of the dogmas and tenets of all the Fundamentalist religions will be interpreted as a "reflection", since their untenability has become evident. To expose the scholarly veneer of the theologians, in their pulpit rhetoric and written tracts, will also be construed as a "reflection", for the titans of organised religion and their pretensions must be sustained at all costs. However, the cries of "reflect" or "attack" are not of recent origin; they are at least as old as religious controversy. The champions of the revealed religions have been the outstanding culprits in resorting to the most open violence and basest subterfuge in countering the questionings and doubts of their opponents. Those who questioned their unfounded assumptions were always greeted with the choicest epithets.

Copernicus, in his presentation of the heliocentric theory versus the geocentric theory, cast more than sufficient doubt upon the Christian scriptures and the founding fathers of the Church, for he reduced their cosmology to an absurdity. Giordano Bruno, in maintaining the existence of the plurality of worlds, incurred the implacable hatred and malice of the ecclesiastical inquisitors, for speculating upon the probability of a universe beyond the intellectual scope of the medieval scholastics. Galileo, in his well-known recantation, which was wrung from him by his interrogators who were concerned over the welfare of his soul, truly "reflected" upon the doctrines of the Church fathers and their hollow commentaries upon scripture. Charles Darwin, the patient collector of facts pertaining to natural history in all its ramifications, was denounced with the vilest epithets by the apostles of "meekness" and "love", as reducing the image and likeness of the creator to the level of the brute. Darwin's logical inferences were more than the champions of human vanity could stomach, and similar instances can be presented, within a range of variety, to expose the hollowness of the thin-skinned religionists who cringed lest their sacred personages should fall from their pedestals, and their dogmas be exposed.

It has been maintained that religion has a legitimate and useful sphere as a pillar of western civilisation and an ally in the struggle against totalitarianism; that it is the best agency we have in the fight against juvenile delinquency, and that a thorough religious training is the best safeguard against criminality in later life; that "families who pray together will stay together"; and a host of other contentions that will fall apart upon a rigid analysis. However, without desiring to "reflect" upon the sacred cow, I should like to remark that "families who pay together will most certainly stay together". With crime on the upgrade, and supposedly at the critical level, the services of the various religious denominations are proffered in the war upon the evils of crime. Seemingly, the sacred cow has a nose of wax which can be moulded to meet the needs of the time, or to mean anything and everything, depending upon the situation.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the American republic and a great scholar in many departments, wrote to his nephew, Peter Carr, from Paris, August 10th, 1787:

"Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. Read the Bible, then, as you would Livy or Tacitus. . . ." "But those facts in the Bible which contradict the laws of nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here we must recur to the writer to inspiration from God. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong, as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature, in the case he relates." "Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no God, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you." "In fine, I repeat you must lay aside prejudices on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything, because any other persons, or descriptions of persons, have rejected or believed it." "I forgot to observe, when speaking of the New Testament, that you should read all the histories of Christ, as well of those whom a council of ecclesiastics have decided for us, to be pseudo-Evangelists, as those they named Evangelists. Because these pseudo-Evangelists pretended to inspiration, as much as the others, and you are to judge their pretensions by your own reason, and not by the reason of those ecclesiastics."

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Scotland always stands where it did, especially on religion, and it is with gratitude that we read the closing words of the Rev. M. Campbell who, as Moderator, recently told the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland that "the divine authority and trustworthiness of God's Word continued to be vindicated". Science had been compelled to recognise "a more spiritual conception of the universe", and scientific men "could no longer explain" it without reference "to a supernatural cause and mind". And of course, evolution "is without a shred of scientific proof". In fact, "in every field indeed science confirmed scripture".

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As for the Precious Word, needless to say that when "truth was met in human investigations is never ran contrary to what was written in the Bible"—and so, thank God, we are where Scotland always stood, four square against horrid infidelity and unbelief. What a blessing to a world steeped in sin are holy men of the calibre of Mr. Campbell, who now ought to be a Godsend for the BBC. Nowhere could his championship of (as he says) the "inerrancy and authority of the Bible" be put to better use. In that home of pure and unadulterated Fundamentalism, Mr. Campbell might well bring more souls to Christ than even the renowned Billy Graham, and what greater praise could there be than that?

★

We do not always agree with a Bishop, but how thoroughly are we in accord with the Bishop of Chichester, who, talking on "Religion in the Air" the other week, pointed out the "Church's immense debt to the BBC". We don't think the Church of England indulges in the merry game of Saint-making, but nobody deserves a Saintship more than Lord Reith, who insisted from the first that "the BBC programme must contain at least one religious service on Sundays", and thus helped to bring about a remarkable interest in religion all over the country. The BBC has even out-Reithed Reith by proudly presenting at least six religious services every Sunday.

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No wonder Dr. Bell in heartfelt gratitude insisted "we cannot be too grateful for the immensity and abundance of religious broadcasting in this country". And he wants plenty more. "What a Godsend it would be," he cried, if only "half a dozen dramatists steeped in the Christian tradition" could broadcast and televise plays. But is he quite sure this would help the Church? Leaving aside the spectacle of Jesus always going about "doing good"—how would TV deal with Jesus flying around in the arms of the Devil, Zacharias struck dumb by an angel, the Spirit of God looking uncommonly like a dove descending upon Jesus, "our Lord" evicting unclean spirits, seven devils coming out of dear old Mary Magdalene, Jesus riding on two donkeys, and similar lovely gems from the Gospels? We ourselves even have to give that one up.

★

That heavenly Christian body, the Lord's Day Observance Society, got a bitter attack recently in the *Illustrated Chronicle*, the writer of which objected to the "Thou Shalt Not" attitude of this bunch of the Lord's elect. And other provincial newspapers are admitting even attacks on the Roman Church as scathing as anything printed during that heyday of Protestantism, the 19th century. It is true that the antidote to all this—more or less—unkind criticism of Christianity is provided by the BBC, but that august Corporation is not having its own way all the time. Look what a hornet's nest has been aroused around its devoted neck in its encounter with the N.S.S.!

Even that hotbed of devout Christianity, Cornwall, the inhabitants of which appear never to have heard of Free-thought, must have had an atom-bomb shock on reading a letter by "Tarquin" in *The Cornishman*. This gentleman's championship was for Freethought against not only Christianity but against all totalitarian creeds—secular as well as religious. We extend our greetings to these anonymous warriors and hope their splendid example will encourage others to do likewise.

★

We note that Prof. J. B. Rhine, whose experiments in telepathy have mostly been failures, is now asking questions about reincarnation, the result of reading a book called *Bridley Murphy*, which tells how a Colorado housewife, Ruth Simmons, was hypnotised, and began to talk about her previous life in Ireland as a girl of 15. As soon as this kind of "data" is collected, we can be quite sure that some eminent professor will immediately jump into the fray, and tell us that there must be "something in it", or how can it be explained? There is no more evidence for reincarnation than there is for spirits. Both are freaks of credulity.

★

A London lady tried desperately to defend Pope Gregory XIII against the charge of congratulating Charles IX of France on the massacre of St. Bartholomew. In her letter to the *Evening Standard* (7/6/56) she insisted that "he did not write". The *Standard's* reply was brief and to the point. It was: "The Pope's letter sold at Sotheby's for £640 to an American dealer, said: 'We rejoice with you that with the aid of God you have relieved the world of those wicked heretics.'" We wonder if the lady is convinced now.

Quiz

1. This year we shall be celebrating the centenary of the birth of a brilliant freethought scholar. Who is he?
2. What is Panpsychism?
3. What is the religion of Tibet?
4. What is the formula for affirming instead of taking the oath?
5. Joseph Smith, Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Eddy were the founders of what religions?
6. The Zenda-Avesta were the sacred writings of what religion?
7. Who were the first and last English monarchs to touch for "King's Evil"?
8. In which book did the late Prof. Eddington enter into controversy with the late Chapman Cohen?

(Answers on page 212)

THE SACRED COW OF CONTROVERSY

(Concluded from page 207)

The quotations culled from the letter are inimical to those who, consciously or unconsciously, adopt the sacred cow attitude or the attitude of uncritical conformity. Thomas Jefferson's forthright statements follow in the truest sense in the footsteps of those who subscribed to the Rights of Man and the formulation of the articles separating Church from State. There was no holiest of holies in Jefferson's intellectual closet.

Any Sacred Cow of controversy, regardless of the department of thought, is an obstruction in the free market of ideas and opinions in which unfettered thought should prevail.

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.

C. PORTER.—Thomas Paine's occupation as a staymaker has been variously interpreted, one explanation being that he constructed stays, or enclosures, for farm animals.
P. STODDARD.—Mr. Ridley does not think the Tibetan Mahatma "seen" by Mme. Blavatsky was any more real than the Holy Trinity as "seen" by Golovief in the British Museum reading room.
H. IRVING, B. MOORE and others.—Thanks for your fine work in publishing the affair of our Secretary's treatment by the BBC in your local papers.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, NEWTON and SHEPPARD.
Bristol (The Downs).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: D. SHIPPER (Cardiff).
Dagenham Branch N.S.S.—Ramble, Epping Forest, Sunday, July 1st. Meet at Romford Station, 10 a.m.; then 250 bus to Abridge. Bring packed lunch.
Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston-on-Thames).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every week-day, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.45 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL.
Platt Fields, 3 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and others.
Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and others.
West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Victoria Park).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: Various speakers.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, July 1st, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "What is vital in Shaw?"

Notes and News

BRISTOL and Cardiff are two of the places in which the definite formation of an N.S.S. Branch has for some time seemed practical politics, though neither has been quite strong enough to put the idea into operation. Most new branches depend, at their inception, on one "live wire" who has the time, energy and ability to get things moving. The visits of Mr. D. Shipper from Cardiff across the water to Bristol, where he has begun speaking on the famous Downs site, open up the possibility of a new branch based on the two cities, to be called "Wales and Western". The growth of such a branch might eventually result in division into two separately functioning branches at Cardiff and Bristol.

MR. SHIPPER is new to the platform, and decided that the best way to overcome lack of experience was to get some. At the time of writing we have only news of his first effort, in which he held the platform for over two hours, and was subjected to much questioning. Bristol has long been without N.S.S. speakers and there is much hard work ahead. The speaker quite enjoyed the "baptism" and is eager to continue. We ask Freethinkers in Bristol and the vicinity to support meetings as advertised in our Lecture Notices. Mr. Shipper is prepared to travel from Cardiff every Sunday; others will find it well worth their while to go a few miles to hear him and, perhaps, sell THE FREETHINKER and help Mr. Jordan, our Bristol organiser.



FURTHER west—in Cornwall—Mr. E. J. Hughes of Falmouth and Mr. D. J. Crowle of Helston continue their correspondence in *The Cornishman*, taking turns to demolish the Christian opposition. And in Scotland, Mr. James Gibson (like Mr. Jordan, trying to form a branch of the N.S.S.) of Lockerbie regularly finds his way into the columns of the local papers. N.S.S. Executive Committee member, Mr. J. L. Shepherd, supports Mr. Gibson from London. In many different places, Freethinkers are using the local press to disseminate their ideas, and they often pay tribute to the fairmindedness of editors. Why not "Have a go!"

Under Christian Rule

WHAT a picture is drawn by Professor Draper of the squalid life of our ancestors only a few hundred years ago. In Paris and London the houses were of wood daubed with clay, and thatched with straw or reeds. They had no windows and few wooden floors. There were no chimneys, the smoke escaping through a hole in the roof. Drainage was unknown. A bag of straw served as a bed, and a wooden log as a pillow. No one washed himself; the very archbishops swarmed with vermin, and the stench was drowned with perfumes. The citizens wore leather garments which lasted for many years. It was a luxury to eat fresh meat once a week. The streets had neither sewers, pavements, nor lamps. Slops were emptied out of the chamber shutters after nightfall. Aeneas Sylvus, afterwards Pope Pius II, visited England about 1430. He describes the houses of the peasantry as built of stones without mortar; the roofs were of turf, and a stiffened bull's-hide served for a door. Coarse vegetable products, including the bark of trees, were the staple food; bread was quite unknown in some places. Is it any wonder that famine and pestilence raged periodically? In the famine of 1030 human flesh was cooked and sold; in that of 1258, fifteen thousand people died of hunger in London; in the plague of 1348 all Europe suffered, and one-third of the population of France was destroyed. Nor was the moral prospect a whit superior. "Men, women, and children," says Draper, "slept in the same apartment; not unfrequently, domestic animals were their companions; in such a confusion of the family, it was impossible that modesty or morality could be maintained." Sexual licentiousness was so universal that, on the introduction of the dreadful disease of syphilis from America, it spread with wonderful rapidity, and infected all ranks and classes, from the Holy Father Pope Leo X to the beggar by the wayside.

G. W. FOOTE.

NEXT WEEK

REPORT FROM SPAIN

The N.S.S. and Blood Sports

How the Bible Rates Women

By KENNETH ROTH

IN RECENT TIMES in the more advanced countries women have been seeking social and political equality. They have met with considerable success, and Christianity has been quick to try to grab the credit for it.

Since Christianity is supported overwhelmingly by the ladies, or so it appears to the writer, it seems proper to see just what would be the position of women in a truly Christian society; that is, one based on the Bible.

The writers of the Bible, inspired and prophetic as they were, did not foresee that one day men would have a hand in governing themselves. Even if they had they would have been horrified by women wishing equal rights of any kind with men.

Paul, a considerable writer and lecturer, and the real founder of early Christianity, had a lot to say about women. In 1st Timothy 2 : 11 to 13 he sets the tone when he writes, "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve."

He furthers the same idea in 1st Corinthians 14 : 34 and 35: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak. . . . And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

1st Cor. 11 : 9 puts Paul's belief quite neatly and clearly. It says, "Neither was the man created for the woman: but the woman for the man." In a number of places Paul went on record about marriage, family life, and sometimes sex. He did not much favour any of it. He plainly considered marriage as a moral weakness to be condoned only in dire need. In 1st Cor. 7 : 8 he advises the unmarried and widows to "abide even as I". But in the next verse he says, "But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." In verse 36 he reluctantly permits marriage "if need so require", but in verse 38 he makes it plain that, while marriage is all right, *no* marriage is better.

This, though, is a long step forward from the position taken by Christ on several occasions. Christ did far more than tend to low-rate marriage. The plain implication of his remarks would seem to make marriage and family life most unlikely. In Matt. 19 : 12, 18 : 8, 9 and 5 : 28 to 30 he seems to suggest a strong remedy for the sex urge. It is a historical fact that a Christian sect in Russia at one time practised castration in obedience to the implied command. I have no record of what the women thought of this; probably there were some cheaters. The sect seems to have died out; couldn't perpetuate itself, no doubt.

As for those men who wished to follow Christ but already had families, he asked them to desert them forthwith. (Luke 14 : 26 and 33. Also Matt. 19 : 29 and 8 : 21, 22.) Generally animals were more highly regarded than women, socially speaking. In the 10th commandment women are thrown in with the servants, oxen and asses. (Exodus 20 : 17.)

In Numbers 31, verses 14 to 18, 35 and 40, the story in brief is that the children of Israel were on one of their usual slaughterings of a neighbouring tribe. In verses 7 and 9 the Lord's people had massacred all the males but saved the women, children and animals. When the brave warriors returned to camp they found Moses very "wroth". He rebuked them for their policy and ordered another. This new order from the Lord's right-hand man is found in verses 17 and 18. "Now therefore kill every male among

the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves." Even the Lord, in verse 40, is on record as getting a share of the virgins. A similar incident occurs in Judges 21 : 10 to 14, except that only 400 virgins could be found after the slaughter had subsided and the Lord appears to have had none.

In Deut. 21 : 10 to 14 captured foreign women, if beautiful, be tried out in a sort of trial marriage by the Lord's chosen. If the man found "no delight" in his choice she could be sent packing whatever her condition by then.

One chapter of the Bible, Leviticus 12, is given to the purification of women after childbirth. She is said to be unclean twice as long in giving birth to a girl. (Verses 2 and 5.) As for the justice women obtained, perhaps the less said the better. One example must suffice. Lot's wife is said to have been turned into a pillar of salt for turning around to glance at her burning home. (Genesis 19 : 26.) The tale ends with each daughter of Lot "with child" by her father. The Lord did not disapprove of this business as no mention is made of rebuke or punishment, although their mother had been killed for turning around.

So much for justice and morality in that perfect divinely-inspired Book, the Bible.

[*The Liberal*, May (abridged).]

Two Poets of Freethought

By H. CUTNER

IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE in a short article dealing with THE FREETHINKER over 75 years, to do justice to all its contributors; but there were two who held a unique place in the list, and in their various ways enjoyed through the years the unqualified allegiance of many readers.

Both were poets with widely different outlooks, though both were Freethinkers in every sense of the word. The older man, who wrote during the reign of G. W. Foote, was G. L. Mackenzie, and I am sure there must be not a few of the veterans of our movement who still treasure the well-printed volume of his collected verse published by Foote in 1899 with the title of *Brimstone Ballads*.

No happier title could be conceived. Mackenzie had a knack of verifying which should have put him in the ranks of other writers of light verse like those collected in Locker-Lampson's *Lyra Elegantiarum*; that delightful anthology of "Social and Occasional Verse". And so he would have been if only he had not confessed to a sturdy Freethought. The one crime not allowed even to a poet is to blaspheme against the Christian Gods, and Mackenzie never ceased pouring out his contemptuous laughter on the Christian story.

In this volume of nearly 200 pages will be found all sorts and conditions of poetry and verse, for Mackenzie loved nothing better than trying out new ways of expressing himself. His forte was humour, but he could be serious when occasion needed. In any case, as Foote pointed out in his very appreciative Introduction to *Brimstone Ballads*, "a writer must be judged within the scope of his performance. If he acquits himself well, let him have the credit." And Mackenzie certainly acquitted himself well, for Foote, no mean critic of poetry — as distinguished from verse — considered one of the pieces in the book "a little masterpiece".

and another, "one that very few have the right to sneeze at". And certainly Mackenzie's facility in rhyme, in satire, in biting wit, may well have flown further and struck deeper than, as Foote said, "missiles from a more prosaic armoury". Perhaps THE FREETHINKER will now and then reprint some of Mackenzie's delightful verse, and show modern readers, particularly those who have never heard of him, what they have missed.

The younger poet is still happily with us, though Bayard Simmons is not quite as active and productive as he was when at the height of his powers. In those two slim volumes of his, *Minerva's Owl* and *The Pagoda of Untroubled Ease*, will be found a splendid representative selection of his poetry—poetry as distinguished from verse he would prefer to call it. If Mackenzie could be boisterous and hard-hitting, Simmons was all for the more gentle and subtle approach, the iron hand in a kid glove. He could also be witty and contemptuous of Christian pretensions; he also sought out new forms to express himself; but one senses how he tried to make his words give us music, and how well he succeeded. In *Minerva's Owl* will be found Ballades, Kyrielles, Rondeaux, Villanelles, Sonnets, and even one Triolet—all forms of poetry which for me at least make it so exciting.

But, of course, it was in THE FREETHINKER itself that readers were lucky to get for nearly 30 years the poetic rhymes and fancies, witty and hard-hitting, of this fine poet.

Throughout its 75 years of existence, the columns of THE FREETHINKER have had many notable poetic contributions—alas, mostly lost for the general reader. But Mackenzie in *Brimstone Ballads* and Bayard Simmons in those two volumes of his I have named have left us a poetic heritage—the work of our own Poets of Freethought.

Ten Years Later

By DAVID SHIPPER

TEN YEARS AGO the Nazi war leaders were hanged in Nuremberg. It is interesting at this time to note their last words.

Some of them showed the effects of a sound religious upbringing and went to the scaffold as good Christians, no doubt hopeful of making the acquaintance of Saint Peter. Foreign Minister Ribbentrop cried "God protect Germany. Thank God that He is merciful." Ex-F.M. Keitel shouted "I call on the Almighty. May He have mercy on the German people and show them tenderness". Hans Frank, butcher of Poland, mumbled "I beg the Lord to receive me mercifully". Jew-baiter Streicher screamed, "Heil Hitler! Now it goes to God" and ranted, "Jewish holiday! The Bolsheviks will hang you all next"; and as the hood was thrust over his head, "I am with God, father." Slave labour chief Sauckel complained, "The verdict was unjust. God protect Germany and make her great again. I die innocent."

What of the Germany ten years later? The newly appointed Catholic Chaplain-General of the W. German Army is Bishop Georg Werthmann, who by a surprising coincidence occupied the same spiritually-satisfying position in Hitler's Wehrmacht. It was Werthmann who, when a priest called Fleischer refused to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler, visited him in prison, struck him and ordered him to swear the oath in the name of the Church and threatened execution if he did not obey.

The post of Chief Press Officer of the W. German Government with the rank of ministerial director is now held by Edmund Forsbach, formerly of the Nazi S.A., and member of the first Hitler Reichstag in 1933, and also

leader of the Catholic Student Association. His election address contained the following:

On November 12th it must be shown that the entire German people support the peace policy of Adolf Hitler. . . . No doubt must be left that National Socialism and Germany are irrevocably wedded.

It is distressing to note the progress made by Catholic and other reactionaries of the old Hitler regime. In East Germany, on the other hand, Premier Grotewohl's speech to the Third Party Conference of the Socialist Unity Party, held recently, defined clearly the attitude of the government towards religious leaders, thus:

"Our state of workers and peasants extends particular protection to the unhindered exercise of religion. The supporters of the Church enjoy all civil rights. No limits are put on religious practice in the Church. The State does not intervene in the internal affairs of the Church, just as it does not interfere in those of other associations.

However . . . the activities of the Church must be within the bounds of the law. Our constitution states that religious bodies have the right to express their opinion on vital questions affecting our people. This clause must not be understood as allowing Church circles to intervene in a high-handed and negative spirit in the internal affairs of our State. . . . The clauses of our constitution have been misused by some Church leaders to give support to the anti-peace policy of the NATO powers. . . . We are convinced we can reach better relations with the Church leadership in the German Democratic Republic if this leadership does its part to respect the laws and interests of our state."

The Indian Rationalist Association

THE INDIAN RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION came into existence in December 1949 as a voluntary part of the World Rationalist Movement, already in existence and represented by the World Union of Freethinkers since 1904.

The Rationalist Movement has its own history of development right from the ancient days of the growth of civilisation in India. There have been advocates of freethought and champions of heretical philosophy in all periods of Indian history. Their precious messages wait to be discovered and gainfully utilised by us. The present movement, however, derives its inspiration not only from this ancient fund of rationalist philosophy and ethics, but also from the modern European freethought movement. Today there are rationalist societies operating in several big cities of India. Some rationalist journals are also being published in different languages in some units of the Indian Federation. The I.R.A. has its own monthly journal, *The Indian Rationalist*. It is also a strictly non-political body. As yet, this movement is confined mainly to the English-knowing sections of the Indian people. It is our task to see that it percolates to the common man.

Even on the basis of the little work that the I.R.A. has done during the last six years of its short history, it can safely and confidently be maintained that, starting with scattered individual rationalists and rationalist associations in certain big cities of India, the now co-ordinated and organised movement has come to stay in India, and is gradually but surely expanding. Much, however, remains to be done. Though rationalism is a crying need of modern India, the movement is faced with several difficulties. The movement ought to be made the harbinger of renaissance in mid-20th century India in close co-operation with other similar movements in our country and abroad.

The I.R.A. holds its General Conventions at different places annually. The first four conventions were held at Madras in December 1949, at Tenali (Andhra) in February 1952, at Delhi in May 1953, and at Meerut in January 1955.

The object of these Annual Conventions is to create consciousness among the Indian intelligentsia of an existing and expanding rationalist movement in the world, to promote solidarity among fellow rationalists in India and abroad, to emphasise the necessity of the rationalist movement in our country, to spread the rationalist outlook and knowledge of science among the Indian masses, to throw a rationalist searchlight on the main problems darkening the horizon of modern India, and to produce freedom-loving, truth-seeking, self-reliant and co-operative individuals.

Without such a rationalist movement, Indian Renaissance is not possible, and without renaissance we cannot have a new India as an autonomous region in a new, united and cosmopolitan world inhabited by rationalist humanists — mutually helpful and free individuals having the capacity and active quality of peacefully altering their philosophico-ethical, socio-cultural and politico-economical equipment and environment whenever necessity arises, as it is bound to arise in this dynamic cosmos of which change is one of the permanent features.

P. J. SABNIS.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. John M. Robertson (1856-1933).
2. The belief that matter is never present without mind.
3. Buddhism.
4. "I [give name] do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence that I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

NOTE: The request to affirm may not be denied, however troublesome the court officials may find it. The more trouble the better; they are the more likely to have it ready next time.

5. (a) Mormonism, (b) Theosophy, (c) Christian Science.
6. Zoroastrianism.
7. Edward the Confessor (1042-65); Queen Anne (1701-14).
8. *God and the Universe*.

CORRESPONDENCE

75th BIRTHDAY GOODWILL GREETINGS

From my beloved Spain — today under the most troublesome nightmare of Catholic dogma — we congratulate THE FREETHINKER on the good work of human enlightenment which it has carried on for 75 years.

The religious gangs have lost in the spiritual, but they are yet very potent in the political, field. A great risk is over mankind if Freethinkers all over the world unite not their minds and wills in order to form a united front in the ultimate battle which the Vatican is preparing. Our house is burning and we must not lose our time with sterile disputes. Freethought has one main enemy, one historical foe: Catholic dogma. Whoever reads history with eyes without bandages must know that human history from the 11th century is the battle of man against religious tyrannies, mainly the Catholic tyranny. Spain is grateful to THE FREETHINKER for its articles denouncing the risks which threaten daily all Spanish Freethinkers, particularly for those written by Mr. Ridley. Reading THE FREETHINKER, Spaniards will discover radical reasons for our history in this century. For this work we congratulate Foote's memory and make our vows for the greatest success of his disciples, the Freethinkers all over the world. HISPANICUS. ["Hispanicus" is the *nom-de-plume* of a leading Spanish Freethinker, and we congratulate him for his courage and forthright attack on Catholicism. We thank him also for his appreciation of THE FREETHINKER.—EDITOR.]

THE FREETHINKER

I did not begin reading THE FREETHINKER in 1881 as I only began to exist in that year. In fact, I only became aware of the journal

little more than a year ago, when — I think — as a consequence of losing control of myself, I wrote to Mrs. Margaret Knight to say that I did not know which to admire most — what she had said in her broadcast or her courage in saying it.

Now that I read THE FREETHINKER and have a vista of the freethought writing it opens up, I am very pleased and interested. As a criticism, I find the aggressive intolerance of some correspondents (e.g., one goes for another because he calls himself an "atheist" or an "agnostic") is difficult to tolerate calmly, but nothing like so difficult as the aggressive intolerance of some of the variety of Christians, and I suppose it "takes all sorts to make a world".

E. NEWBOLD.

FROM A EUROPEAN READER

I salute THE FREETHINKER on its 75th birthday. In my lifetime I have seen the fall of empires ruled by "god-given" monarchs supported by the avaricious superstition-spreading priesthood. Decline of religion and decline of monarchy went hand in hand, and the freethought element was the best part of the revolutionary changes. As a seaman, I have contacted many Freethinkers in many parts of the world, whose minds were freed by Bradlaugh, Foote, McCabe and Cohen.

K. LIDAKIS.

SUNDAY DANCING

I was interested by the consternation caused in St. Albans by the decision of the City Council to allow Sunday dancing in the Market Hall. The law regarding dancing is ridiculous, as are most laws interfering with the free use of Sunday for entertainment and culture. Any commercial dance hall may open a "club", enrol members at a nominal fee and, from then on, charge normal admission for "members" and "invited friends". This is often done in spite of councils with stern sabbatarian principles. Here in Cardiff, capital of Wales, the home of sabbatarian bigotry, we have three Sunday dance "clubs".

D. SHIPPER.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Referring to the letter by Mr. Shipper of May 4th, whatever else the present Union Government may be, it is certainly not anti-semitic. On the contrary, Dr. Malan has shown a most friendly interest in Israel and is held in esteem by the majority of South African Jews. There is no reason to believe that Strydom is different. He is far too shrewd a politician for that. I have heard of no "anti-Semitic strictures" by either Strydom or Malan.

E. A. McDONALD (South Africa).

LIVING ON THE CROSS

In reply to Mr. Ottaway, how could the statement "Jesus died on the Cross and parsons have been living on it ever since", drive an atheist into the arms of God? What is the logical connection?

Nor is he on firm ground in describing Dr. Schweitzer as a Christian. The BBC apologists would like to infer that he is.

IRENE BARNES.

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