

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

RECENTLY the BBC announced that at a recent exhibition the Church of England had a stall intended apparently for the recruitment of clergy for the established Church. The Roman Catholic Church also ran a similar exhibition some time ago to illustrate the practical prospects of the priesthood and to recruit for that somewhat equivocal profession. To a sceptic such exhibitions might appear to verge on irrelevance, if not downright blasphemy. For have we not been told *ad nauseum* that the clerical profession is not a career in the ordinary sense but a special vocation from God? Has the Almighty lost interest nowadays since the advertising profession has to be called in to supplement the Divine Call? Or is the clerical profession, after all, merely a career like any other which reacts sharply to the unfavourable state of the market?

Its Fourth Centenary

In the case of the "Church of England by Law Established" it certainly appears rather odd that today it should have to advertise its wares to its secular clients, the English people, all of whom are its nominal members. For the C. of E. is not a new institution. It is true there may be some doubt as to when exactly it was founded or who founded it. Was it the learned but polygamous Henry VIII, the mighty lord who broke the bonds of Rome, or his still more learned son upon whom "the sins of the fathers" were visited on the children in hereditary syphilis? Or the also learned but scarcely pious "Virgin Queen," Elizabeth I, who was, in the words of a contemporary, "vehemently suspected" of conniving at, if not actually instigating, one of the most atrocious murders in even the 16th century, the century of the Borgias and the Medici, that of Amy Robsart? Assuming, along with perhaps most ecclesiastical specialists, that Queen Elizabeth was the actual founder, the English Church is then due for its fourth centenary next year. Surely its merits or demerits should now be reasonably familiar without any need for the secular assistance of advertising.

1558-1957: A Balance Sheet

Let us for the moment discard the advertising done by the Anglican Church itself and rely on our estimate of this institution. In the conscious intention of its founders, who were politicians much more than theologians, in Tudor and Stuart times the Church was created as a *via media*, or third force, between Catholicism and Protestantism; between Rome and Geneva. Its theological system — in particular its pivotal formulæ, the Thirty-nine Articles — are actually capable both of a Protestant and a Catholic interpretation and have in fact received such divergent interpretations! However, the real purpose in compiling these elusive formulæ was political rather than theological, with the aim of keeping England out of the Wars of Religion between Rome and the Reformation, then ravag-

ing the Continent. Unless we take the purely static, and ultimately meaningless, view that all religions represent an *equal* degree of falsity, one must recognise that the Reformation represented a great liberating process. Compared with its predecessor, medieval Catholicism, the Church of England undoubtedly represented both social and intellectual progress at its inception.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Church of England and Disestablishment

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

An Historical Climate

How far has the C. of E. justified its claim to represent the English people in the spiritual sphere? We would describe its four-century record as a mixed grill. From the intellectual standpoint it has certainly represented a more liberal outlook than Rome or, probably, the Geneva of Calvin, which during most of its existence have been its principal competitors for the spiritual allegiance of the English people. Intellectually it has produced eminent scholars and thinkers such as "the judicious Hooker," Bishops Berkeley and Butler, Deans Mansel and Milman and many others. What is perhaps more important, prior to the present century, when Anglican cultural tradition appears to have largely foundered along with the leisured class, is that the Anglican clergy respected learning and its standards of scholarship were probably the highest in the Christian world. In an age in which atheism was little more than a term of abuse, and the general illiteracy precluded any large-scale rationalist movement, the defence of reason was often entrusted, and by no means unworthily, to the pens of such Divines as Conyers Middleton and Chillingworth, whilst in the practical sphere most of the social services now done by the Welfare State were discharged, when at all, by the parochial clergy of the C. of E., whose social functions, especially in the countryside, were often extremely valuable. Of course, the debit side of the Established Church was often extremely heavy; its often disgusting sycophancy to the State which endowed it, its close association with social snobbery and political reaction: these darker features of Anglicanism may be presumed, here at least, to be well enough known. On many matters, including the personal habits of "the Squire and his relations," the Church discreetly kept — and still keeps! — silence. For example, we have referred before to the recent refusal of the Archbishop of Canterbury to make *any* official pronouncement on the ethics of blood sports. We have suggested that he hardly could decently condemn them in view of the many parsons who "rode to hounds" in the past. However, we do not dispute the also considerable services which the Anglican clergy have also displayed to the more reputable game of cricket! In the technical sphere of theology it is well known that Anglicanism has varied widely. High, Low and Broad Churchmen have all successively "had a go." But, whatever its theological vagaries, the climate of Anglicanism has on the whole not been favourable to fanaticism, in which respect the English Church compares very favourably with both Rome and the extreme Protestant sects.

The recent public appearance of Dr. Fisher on the same platform as that semi-literate Bible banger, Billy Graham, would appear to signify a deterioration, which would, we imagine, cause the great Anglican scholars of the past to turn in their dignified graves.

The Problem of Disestablishment

Whatever its merits or demerits in the past, it appears fairly clear by now that the Anglican Church is well advanced in its decline and that it no longer commands more than passive support from more than a small and continually shrinking section of the general public. It is only its privileged position, with the political influence and social prestige behind it, that makes it necessary to take it seriously. Under such circumstances the question of disestablishing the Church in England, as formerly in Ireland and Wales, *must* arise sooner or later. Historically the Established Church has always been largely a *class* Church and its current decline cannot be considered as

something altogether separate from the parallel decline of the leisured "Squirearchy" with which its existence has been so closely connected. Death duties have played a probably larger part in the decline of Anglicanism than either Roman or Rationalist criticism of the Thirty-nine Articles! However, I am altogether in favour of Disestablishment; indeed, I regard it as a primary plank in the Secularist programme. We must, however, distinguish between, say, disestablishment of *the* Church and that of a Church, since the Church of Rome and perhaps also the Salvation Army are in favour of disestablishing *a* Church, the present one, in order to substitute their own. From our angle this would be flying out of the frying pan into the fire. Canterbury is certainly the lesser evil compared with Rome—or with Billy Graham! If the only alternative were Rome or Canterbury the Humanist Council, as representing British Rationalism, should certainly take up the case for maintaining the *status quo*.

Memories of Chapman Cohen

(Died February 4th, 1954)

By H. IRVING

"I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOUR HEAD!" The menacing tones sounded as though the speaker would have liked to decapitate Chapman Cohen on the spot, but the twinkling eyes conveyed a different meaning.

It was a Manchester "saint" who paid this compliment to the great freethinker in my home more than 30 years ago. Freethinkers the world over in glowing terms have recorded similar sentiments, and while it is gratifying to hear of them, we have grown to expect them from this source. But a more pleasurable thrill is felt when a parson tells you how he was impressed likewise by the charm and prowess of our late leader.

This vicar of the Church of England was the chief speaker at a Peace Meeting. Prior to the proceedings a promoter of the meeting introduced me to the vicar as "a friend of Chapman Cohen's."

"How is he getting on?" he asked as we shook hands. I replied that I feared his service to Freethought was ended.

He expressed his deep sorrow to hear of it. He went on: "I opposed Cohen several times on his platform some years ago while I was a curate in the north. He hit me this way and that way and *that* way. In fact, he knocked me all over the shop," and the vicar chuckled as he used his fists to illustrate his remarks.

It is worth noting that in his subsequent speech on Peace, the parson never alluded to Christ or religion.

The first time I heard Cohen lecture was over 60 years ago. The subject was Evolution. As the years rolled on, it was something more than just a subject for a lecture.

He *lived* Evolution. Evolution and Cohenism became interchangeable terms.

When we hear celebrities with a leaning to science talk of a motive power behind Evolution, and ask such futile questions as "Why didn't Evolution stop when it had produced the monkey?" and when we note the muteness of some luminaries of the scholastic world regarding the works of Chapman Cohen, we are reminded of Ingersoll's epigram, "Universities are places where pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed." The easy natural manner in which Cohen carried his understanding of the philosophical side of Freethought, and the clarity and wealth of illustration he displayed in expounding it were a source of wonder to his followers. Even J. M. Robertson asked him how he

managed to get through so much work, and Cohen replied that he didn't work, he just functioned.

Certainly, I never saw him work or prepare anything for his Sunday lectures in the provinces.

He would arrive on the Saturday, and whether he stayed in hotels or in our home, he would settle himself in an easy chair, light his pipe, and except for meals he would stay there, receive visitors, and talk well into the small hours, but always he opened his meetings punctually. After his meetings, back to his lodge, and a further session of rest, visitors and talk. Yet he never missed his train. And such talks! No wonder some admirer likened him to Socrates, although I'm sure that Socrates would not have got away with Cohen as easily as he appears to have done with some of the stooges upon whom he exercised his dialectical skill. I've seen Cohen go to sleep while the chairman was making his introductory speech, and wake up when the clapping registered that the chairman had sat down.

I once asked him if he ever took any physical exercise. He said he had won a trophy on the bowling-green. I can't believe that he seriously prepared for the competition.

The loss of his brilliant daughter wrought havoc with his constitution, as can be seen by comparing photographs of him before and after that sad event, yet the old whimsical way of meeting difficulties that beset the secular movement would assert itself.

Arriving on the scene after THE FREETHINKER offices had been bombed out of existence, Cohen was asked by a friendly policeman if there was anything he wanted to take away with him. "There seems to be nothing left but that big hole. I can't see what use we could make of it if we carted it away." A reply which amused the bobby.

Some time later my wife and I accompanied Cohen to view the wreckage.

The hole was still there. Nobody else seemed to want it.

Nothing was ever a task to him. Everything he did appeared to be done without effort, and he had always time to attend to other people's troubles.

It was by sheer flexibility of mind and body that he surmounted all the difficulties he encountered in his strenuous battle to keep THE FREETHINKER flag flying. A more rigid constitution would have cracked under the strain long before the "allotted span."

On the Mark Again in Malta

By COLIN McCALL

MALTESE CATHOLICS have not let us down. The anticipated response to our second Report from Malta (THE FREETHINKER, November 23rd) appeared in *The Bulletin* for Tuesday, December 4th, 1956, under the heading, "The Anti-Clericals Strike Again." There is no doubt that it was written by a Catholic, though the author uses the rather incongruous pen-name of "Jupiter." This pagan-pseudonymed-Papist is certainly disturbed. THE FREETHINKER has assuredly struck again and hit the target.

Our Special Correspondent — we read — "assails the Church with vitriolic vituperations and resorts to the usual distortions and lies with which the enemies of the Church in Malta and elsewhere, use as their main weapon." A glance at the report in question will show that it concerned little or no "vitriolic vituperation(s)"; it was characterised by sobriety, and gave a brief but factual introduction to recent Church-State relations in Malta. It did not, of course, disguise its writer's opinion that the Church is a menace; it presented evidence to support this contention. "Jupiter" may not accept that evidence but he cannot dismiss it as "vitriolic vituperation," whatever his fondness for alliteration. It is similarly impossible to make accusations of "distortions and lies"; to refer to "baseless assertions against the Church"; and to get away with it—except, perhaps, among the faithful.

What are these distortions, lies and baseless assertions? If they are so glaring, why doesn't "Jupiter" quote them instead of merely referring to their presence? I think the reason is obvious: they don't exist. Surely it is significant that there is not a solitary quotation from our report in the whole "reply." I realise that a *Bulletin* writer must be careful — careful not to spread the contents of THE FREETHINKER report lest it should stir doubts and spread discontent in censor-bound Malta. It would be so easy to give the game away! But this only applies if one has something to fear; something to hide. Can it be that there is a skeleton in the clerical cupboard which our Special Correspondent has exposed to the view of FREETHINKER readers? This is the only possible explanation of "Jupiter's" continued reference to lies that he never nails. If THE FREETHINKER is guilty of "persistent lying" — as is alleged — let *The Bulletin* quote the lies one by one and expose them. In its "persistent" refusal to do this, it casts doubt on its own veracity.

Not only does the whole article fail to give one actual quotation, it omits an important qualification when it comes nearest to quoting our Correspondent's words. "He starts by saying that the Nationalist Party was the party of the clergy" — it says; whereas the actual statement read: "The former [the Nationalist Party] was, *to all intents and purposes*, the party of the clergy." (My italics.) The fact that Monsignor Dandria was Minister of Education in its government cannot, of course, be denied, even by "Jupiter"; but we are accused of "climaxing with barefaced impudence the lie that three-quarters of the day was wasted in the teaching of religion." We are told that "A perusal of the school curricula of that period at the Lyceum or Government schools would nail this untruth." But would it? A lesson described as "History" would normally be taken as non-religious; but is it so in a Catholic-controlled educational system? Mathematics, it is true, can hardly be given a religious slant (it must certainly be kept quite separate from the unique theorem, $3=1, 1=3$) but it is no secret that the Catholic Church's

idea of education is a very special one. True education — in the eyes of the Catholic Church — is Catholic education, and that means a whole curriculum with a Catholic bias. I repeat: it makes no secret of this. Indeed, it forms the basis of the Catholic protests on education in this and other Protestant countries. In English state schools, the Catholic child is not compelled to attend religious periods: the parents have to a right to withdraw him. They are not content to do this, however; they demand a specifically "Catholic" education, i.e. all possible subjects taught from the Catholic angle. School curricula in Spain no doubt suggest a wide variety of subjects, but are they to be taken at face-value? (I recently heard an English Protestant teacher state publicly that his Christian beliefs influenced all his lessons.)

Perhaps Freethinkers would like to be "free to go into the realms of allegations, as long as they scribble anything with which to hit the Catholic Church, even if this takes them to the lowest of untruths," writes "Jupiter"; "persistent lying is bound to show it up in its [Freethought's] true colours — worthy only of ridicule and contempt"; "either the correspondent has treaded (*sic*) on grounds with which he or she is not familiar, or shamefacedly lies in order to please readers. . . ."

"Jupiter" really ought to make up his mind whether our Correspondent is "barefaced" or "shamefaced." And, if we are worthy of nothing better, why doesn't he expose us to ridicule or treat us with contempt? Why, instead, does he display annoyance and irritation (to put it mildly)? The answer seems clear. Our Correspondent has "treaded" on *sacred* grounds that are closed to the public and guarded by censors. He has dared to enter through the holy gates and describe the scene therein. It is not a pleasant scene, but he has described it soberly. For doing so, he has incurred abuse and obliquely, as has THE FREETHINKER, for providing him with a medium of expression when none was available in Malta itself.

Our paper — we are told — "does not do the present Prime Minister any compliment when it pictures him as a die-hard opponent of the Church. . . ." We did not picture Mr. Mintoff as in any way a die-hard. We called him a "formidable opponent . . . who knew the ways and wiles of the clergy and was prepared to defy the seemingly all-powerful Archbishop" on the issue of the referendum. We admire Mr. Mintoff for his stand on that occasion, and we think we have done a little to help him — and his country. He can be under no delusions about the Church and the obstacle it presents to progress on the island. To *The Bulletin*, our Correspondent conveyed the "impression" that the referendum was the "culmination of a feud started long ago between the Church and Mr. Mintoff." Well, it is a wrong impression. The situation goes far beyond any "feud." Even "Jupiter" admits, a little further on, that there has been, and is, a "Church-State dispute." He says that we have rendered a "disservice . . . to the cause of those who have been working for a mutual approach to end" it. What he means is that we have presented the dispute in clear, unequivocal terms and have shown that it permits of no satisfactory compromise solution. The Church of Rome sets itself above the State, and is only satisfied when — as in Spain or Eire — it enjoys exceptional privileges.

"But at least the special correspondent has to admit that

(Concluded on next page)

The Rising Generation

It was quite amusing to hear the BBC "critics" the other Sunday doing their utmost *not* to agree with Mrs. Iremonger's book on the "Ghosts of Versailles." We called attention to it because it completely exposed *An Adventure*, in which two maiden ladies of "unimpeachable integrity" claimed to have seen in Versailles a scene with Marie Antoinette and members of her court just as they were over 170 years ago. With the exception of Miss Margaret Lane, who praised the book, our wonderful "critics," though obliged to admit that Mrs. Iremonger had completely proved her case, felt also compelled to bring in a few inevitable "buts."

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The fact that they found in the book a way of writing they criticised, or thought should be criticised, or perhaps they felt it was really too bad that such liars and humbugs as Miss Moberly and Miss Jourdain should be shown up, seemed to indicate that they would have preferred the Versailles spooks to be genuine. If Harry Price's lying "haunted" Borley Rectory had been discussed by them, we are sure that a few "buts" would have come in just the same.

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We have always regretted Miss Dorothy Sayers's abandonment of Lord Peter Wimsey and his thrilling crime investigations for a wordy, boring, and hopelessly indefensible "theology." That Miss Sayers has every right to believe what she likes and particularly in the Christian religion, we would support in every possible way. But if anyone wants to see how far removed she is from her famous detective, and what boring rubbish can be written up as "theology," let him read her article in the *Sunday Times* (January 6th) on "Immortality."

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It would take too long to deal with it fully — even if worth it, which it is not. But Miss Sayers, who appears to know Almighty God far better than Lord Peter, tells us that Heaven, Hell, the Universe, are all "real" and "made"; though their "Maker is alone real in his own right." After that captivating flight into philosophical theology, we need not be surprised to learn that "God sends nobody to Hell." Now, isn't that noble of him? Yet we seem to remember "our Lord" — who may or may not be God Almighty to some Christians — bluntly told us that we should all be "damned" if we didn't believe and he cursed the Pharisees — how could they escape the damnation of Hell? How could they, indeed?

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On the other hand, there is Bertrand Russell's article on the same subject in the same paper (January 13th). He has no belief whatever in "immortality," for, of course, if the brain merely registers our memories and ideas and "dies" with us, there can be no after life. But our distinguished author hastily refuses to be *accused* of "materialism" if this is so. One feels that Bertrand Russell would prefer to be called anything rather than a horrid materialist. But what exactly he should be called is difficult to discover. He wrote somewhere once (we believe) that "matter" did *not* exist. We wonder how he would refute the known weight of atoms?

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We must really hand it to our fellow Christians — they never let an opportunity go to boost up their touching and reverent faith. For example, we have Sir Linton Andrews, the Editor of the *Yorkshire Post*, writing on plays about "freedom" in the *Radio Times*, telling us about "the lessons of freedom learned from Christianity" which affirm

"that each of us is the child of God and has more than man-made rights and duties." It would certainly be illuminating if Sir Linton could tell us where, throughout its long history, anybody ever learnt "freedom" from Christianity? Unless all our historical authorities have hidden the truth from us, about the one thing Christianity hated above all else was "freedom" — freedom of thought, for example, or freedom of action.

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To take the reigns of our first two Queens as an example — Protestants were imprisoned, tortured, and burnt alive in good Queen Mary's days; and the same happy fate was meted out to Catholics in good Queen Bess's reign. Freedom indeed! Has Sir Linton heard of Bruno and Servetus and Dolet? — to say nothing of eminent Christians like Tyndale (who first published the New Testament in English) and John Rogers (who gave us Matthew's Bible in English) and in consequence were burnt alive by other eminent Christians? The truth is that it was the fight put up by Freethinkers who despised Christianity which helped to give us what freedom we have, in the teeth of the fiercest opposition put up by Christians.

ON KEIR HARDIE AGAIN

IN MR. GUY ALDRED'S *Autobiography* (now being published in parts), page 211, he gives an extract from the *Islington Gazette* for November 7th, 1906, which reports one of his lectures. In this will be found the following:

For Keir Hardie's attitude on the Zulu and Egyptian question, the lecturer admired him; but that had not helped the workers. When, however, he lectured to the P.S.A.s, and denounced his father and mother because they were Secularists; when, in addition, he said true Socialism meant true Christianity, Mr. Hardie was betraying the workers, revealing his ignorance, and talking utter nonsense.

It need hardly be pointed out that Mr. Aldred himself was (and is) a Socialist.

QUIZ

- Who said: (a) "I will return when liberty returns"; (b) "No Bishops, no King"; (c) "Paris is worth a Mass"; (d) "No man shall stand in my presence who denieth our Lord"; (e) "Keep your children away from the priest or he will make them the enemies of mankind"?
- Which gaols held these famous prisoners? (a) John Bunyan, (b) Robert Taylor, (c) Oscar Wilde.
- Fit these events to their dates: (a) Atheists first allowed to give evidence as atheists; (b) The Rochdale Pioneers; (c) The first modern crematorium in Britain. 1844, 1869, 1878.

(Answers on page 40)

ON THE MARK AGAIN IN MALTA

(Concluded from page 35)

the Church in Malta is still powerful . . ." says "Jupiter," on the mark for once — though not, alas, for long. He continues: "It is so because the people of Malta want it so." If this is the case, how does he explain Mr. Mintoff's referendum success against the open opposition of the Church? Nobody would deny that the Maltese are a strongly Catholic people; and the censorship aims at keeping them that way! But neither can it be denied that a growing number of them are prepared to defy the Church in the best interests of the State. We hope that they and others will realise that the interests of Church and State are conflicting; that there cannot be two masters in the one house; that their choice lies between a democratically-elected government or a dictatorial Church. If we have helped them just a little, we are more than satisfied. The fact that we have aggravated the Church shows that our aim was sure.

THE FREETHINKER

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Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are always welcome.

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.

F. OLDROYD.—No. The Barnsley clergyman went quiet and evidently decided not to carry out the challenge he threw down. He probably had a shock when Mr. Day accepted it, and would have had a worse shock had the debate actually materialised.

THOS. GUNN.—We agree. The average journalist writing on Christmas makes howler after howler.

C. WHALLEY.—After the collapse of Japan and of its emperor-God there was, as you say, a sort of religious vacuum. The Catholic Church is doing its best to fill it.

K. M. JOHNSTONE (Miss).—An instance of spontaneous transformation (an evolutionary leap, as it were) has been recorded from the Botanical Gardens of Paris in the case of Axolotls, which were observed to lose their gills, leave the water and become land salamanders. This change can be effected artificially by giving thyroid.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH, CORSAIR and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.15 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, and SMITH.

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) — Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE and R. MORRELL.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR and EBURY.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, February 3rd, 6.45 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Christians Awake."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, February 3rd, 7.15 p.m.: ALEC CRAIG, "Prostitution and the Law."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 5th, 7.15 p.m.: CEDRIC DOVER, "Can there be Equality among Nations?"

Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, February 1st, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The History of Christianity" (fifth of six Study Classes). Subject this week: "Modern Christianity." Admission 1/-.

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 3rd, 6.30 p.m.: R. LITTLEWOOD, B.A., "Cycling Through Spain."

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Liverpool).—Sunday, February 3rd, 7.15 p.m.: R. SEAR (London), "The Polish Situation."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, February 3rd, 2.30 p.m.: F. MAITLAND (I.L.P.), "The Spiritual Basis of Socialism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 3rd, 11 a.m.: Prof. H. LEVY, M.A., "The Rights of Dissenters Today."

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £174 18s. 8d.; J. P. Tuck, 10s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; P. G. Bamford (New Zealand), 10s.; A. O'Halloran (New Zealand), 5s. 4d.; J. A. White, £2 2s.—Total to date, January 25th, 1957, £178 7s.

Notes and News

THE Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society is only a fortnight away and we ask those who intend to be there to reserve their tickets as soon as they can, in order that seating arrangements may be made. Mr. H. J. Blackham will be the Guest of Honour; also present will be many of the contributors to these columns, and the authors of two books on Catholicism, Mr. Avro Manhattan (*The Dollar and the Vatican*) and Mr. Adrian Pigott (*Freedom's Foe—The Vatican*). Please write to the Secretary, N.S.S., 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, without delay.

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THE inaugural meeting of the Bristol Rationalist Group (comprising members of the Secular, Ethical and Rationalist organisations in this country) was held on Wednesday, January 16th, in the Hermes Room, 26 Broad Street, Bristol, 1, at 7.30 p.m., and it is hoped to follow it with regular meetings on the third Wednesday in each month. The next will be on February 20th, when Mr. D. Shipper (N.S.S.) will speak on "International Freethought." Readers in the Bristol area are asked to support the Group, whose Hon. Secretary is another N.S.S. member, Mr. P. E. J. Jordan, of 18 Pembroke Road, Bristol, 3.

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AT the time of writing controversy is in full swing in the Leicester *Evening Mail* on the "Bible was Right" series, and the freethought side has had a comparatively good showing in the correspondence columns, mainly by Mr. C. H. Hammersley. The Leicester *Mercury* is also now publishing freethought letters. In Cornwall our freethought supporters are engaging in a discussion on Catholicism and War in *The Cornishman*, while the Bolton *Evening News* maintains its remarkable record for the freethought letters printed. In fact, the freethought battery is now almost non-stop at Bolton and Leicester.

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THE superb Czechoslovakian film *Jan Hus*, which won the premier award at the Edinburgh Festival in 1955 and was reviewed in THE FREETHINKER at that time, is being distributed by Contemporary Films Ltd., 59 Frith Street, London, W.1. At present, we understand, the distributors are trying to obtain a West End showing but the lack of popular appeal is making this difficult. Our readers may not be able to influence West End managements, but they can try to persuade their local cinemas to screen the film, thereby ensuring an enjoyable and stimulating evening for themselves and others.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

51st ANNUAL DINNER

followed by a Dance

All SATURDAY, 16th FEBRUARY, 1957

Welcome at the MECCA RESTAURANT

11-12 BLOMFIELD STREET, E.C.2

(Near Liverpool St. and Broad St. Stations)

RECEPTION 6.30 P.M. DINNER 7.0 P.M.

Vegetarians Catered for Evening Dress Optional

Guest of Honour: H. J. BLACKHAM

TICKETS 17/6 each from the Sec., 41 Gray's Inn Rd., W.C.1

Fraud and Religious Frenzy

[Translated from the German original published in the June 1956 issue of *Der Freidenker*.]

By OTTO KILIAN

IN THE INDIAN STATE OF MADRAS stands a city famous for its temples. Since time immemorial, its sixty thousand inhabitants have existed in a state of squalor unknown in western civilisation. A small, pestilential lake occupies the heart of Kumbakonam and possesses, according to priests, a certain holy property, which manifests itself on a certain day in twelve-year cycles. They claim that mortals, fortunate enough to immerse their bodies in its waters, have their sins washed away.

The *Indian Rationalist*, in its March 1956 issue, carried the report of an eyewitness on the huge pilgrimage to Kumbakonam. It took place on February 25th. Two million men, women and children, among them high government officials and members of the educated classes, went there to cleanse themselves of their sins. It was not quite as imposing, perhaps, as the 1954 Allahabad pilgrimage, where on the designated day in January 1954 more than five hundred pilgrims were trampled to death and four million immersed their bodies in the waters of the holy river Ganges. The small lake at Kumbakonam could accommodate but a thousand at a time. The show ran from dawn to dusk on an assembly line system, with less than one minute allotted to each sinner. Many of them, their bodies covered with running sores and contagious skin disorders, divested themselves not only of their sins but excrements of their sick bodies as well, thus endangering the lives of the healthy. The representative of the *Indian Rationalist* pointed out to the officials present the atrocity of their tacit approval. He demanded why they themselves took part in this manifestation of religious mass hysteria, their authority and influence adding only to the befuddlement of the unfortunate, ignorant people. Shamefaced, the men assured them that this was due to the insistence of their wives, adding that they were forced to undertake the trip at their insistence. The wives, on their part, accused the men. The women told the correspondent their husbands forced them to come along on grounds of political expediency!

If we compare this with similar events in other parts of the world, the significance of this becomes apparent.

Pilgrimages existed all through history. Humanity in a broad stream travelled everywhere where there were well-advertised "holy" places, supposedly endowed with certain miraculous powers. There is that consecrated spot near Cadiz, in Spain, whence Hercules ascended to heaven to become a minor deity, the Egyptian god Osiris is interred in countless tombs along the banks of the Nile, Greece is teeming with ruins of shrines and temples of antiquity, Italy boasts a fair share and so do many other lands. Not the least important ones are the two sepulchres of the Virgin Mary in Jerusalem and Ephesus. In Arabia we know of a dung heap in which legend insists patient Job was buried. John M. Robertson wrote once about the pilgrimages which took place there before the days of Mohammed, when Christian pilgrims came to kiss the dung.

Mohammed, an excellent business man as well as prophet, prescribes in the Holy Koran for every good Mohammedan at least once in his life to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Only those are exempt who are too ill or too poor to pay for the trip. Many millions of human lives were lost on this dangerous journey, many more spent every cent they possessed to make it. The busiest season for Holy Mecca is the month of August. The heat is oppressive. A writer for *Reader's Digest*, in the anthology from that

magazine (1954/II) tells us that when he went along on the pilgrimage, when the temperature rose to well above a hundred, 4,411 pilgrims died in a single day, because of sunstroke.

Then 150,000 sheep were sacrificed and the smell of their blood polluted the air. Those who died far from home, before reaching the end of their pilgrimage, were shorn of all their earthly possessions by the Mohammedan priests. Their job consists of pointing out to the lucky ones who enter the gates of Mecca, the places where Adam and Eve were reunited after a separation which lasted two centuries, and Abraham, at the Lord's command made ready to cut the throat of his son Isaac (Mos. 122).

German church statistics list 1,200 "holy" places. Altogether is the top attraction, with 450,000 yearly pilgrims. What a sad commentary on the vast sums in D-marks taken from the people of Germany, marks which could be put to infinitely better use for the help of the poor and indigent!

Here is an illuminating quotation from the German historian Gregorovius, on the nature of the early Roman Catholic pilgrimages:

"Countless thousands came to Rome. . . More often than not it was their fate on their road to salvation to fall victims of big-time vice rings. Thus, instead of salvation, they found their reward in eternal misery, or at the least found themselves easy victims of sly crooks and thieves. . . The art of seduction in the Sybaritic communities of the south cost many a virgin her most precious possession. . ." (*Geschichte der Stadt Rom im Mittelalter, Stuttgart, 1860, Band III.*)

Conditions became so bad that the Synod of Friaul tried to stop the Rome pilgrimage in 791 on grounds of immorality, but its efforts proved without avail. Such display of the power of the Holy Church became notorious in all Christendom, when a boy of eighteen ascended the papal throne and assumed the name of John XII. Emperor Otto the Great received this report on the conditions under the youthful Pope in the Eternal City, from Bishop Luitprand:

"What we have to report is known to all Rome. We refer to Stephanie, mistress of John XII, who died giving birth to his child. Were this glossed over with silence, the fact remains that the Lateran Palace, once the home of holy men, is now the playground of whores. A sister of the dead Stephanie is another of the Pope's bed companions. We call to the attention of His Majesty the absence of any ladies, save those of Rome; ladies from places distant are afraid to travel there and show their faces near the grave of the Holy Apostle, when the rumour went abroad that some days ago he ravished quite a number of wives, widows and virgins." (*Luitprand, Historia Ottonis, Monumenta Germaniæ historica.*)

Both Gregorovius and others, dealing with the history of the Papacy, note many similar facts. As for John XII, he is said to have died a violent death in the year 964, after an encounter with an irate husband, who caught him in bed with his wife and promptly broke his neck.

In recent years there was the spectacle of more than two score bordellos doing splendid business within the sight of the Vatican on the occasion of the Holy Year, when thousands of pilgrims came to Rome to seek salvation from their sins.

One could go on for ever trying to keep a check on all those places all over the world, where spurious relics are used to bait pilgrims. The swindlers and confidence men travel there to fleece the gullible flocks. The list of "holy" relics compiled by Ludovic Lalanne lists ten heads of St. John the Baptist, even though Holy Writ has it that he lost his head but once.

Television and Religion

BOTH TV AND ITV now try to outvie each other on presenting religion to viewers on Sundays at seven, and, of course, it is, as far as possible, of the purest and most undiluted Fundamentalist type. I often wonder whether the producers would not find Billy Graham himself far too "modernistic."

ITV on a recent Sunday had the bright idea of a "soap-box" orator being heckled by listeners, and it would have provided excellent entertainment if the producer had been a little bolder. He actually called in a girl—a Miss C. Hastings—to provide the oratory, and it would certainly have been difficult to find anyone else in the whole of England who knew so little of the subject she chose to talk about.

This was the wonder, the beauty, the marvel, the miracle, of Jesus Christ. Every word and comma in the Gospels are Divinely Inspired. You have only to read the Gospels, in fact, to see that; and she laughed to scorn the idiotic criticism which was prevalent a little over fifty years ago, she said, but which now, thank Heaven and God, was as dead as a dodo. Nobody, she insisted over and over again, nowadays took the slightest notice of this kind of nonsense. Everybody—yes, *everybody* now knew that the Gospels were *literally* true in every particular.

One reason she gave us why they were true is that anybody who claimed to be God, and God's Son, and the Saviour, and who taught the marvellous truths Jesus did, would no doubt be thought insane these days. But how could God, and God's Son, and the Saviour of Mankind, be insane? Put it in that way, and you and I—and Miss Hastings—must see once for all how terrifically true every word and comma in the Gospels must be God's truth!

The little crowd of listeners did not seem to me to be suitably impressed. In fact, one lady had the courage to ask more than once how Miss Hastings knew that the Gospel Story was true, and what was her evidence?—and was scornfully referred to the Gospels themselves. How could they be packed with Gospel truth if they were not true?

Most of the gentlemen present hadn't the pluck to follow this lady's example; some indeed were ready to believe that Jesus was a Great, Good Man, but not that he was Divine. Perhaps the silent ones agreed with the soap-box orator. In any case, I doubt if even the biggest ranters on the platform of the Christian Evidence Society, when it had perhaps a little influence on Christians, would have permitted the hopeless nonsense poured forth in such profusion by Miss Hastings.

Could not the Religious Director of the ITV do a little better than this? What about getting a *real* Hyde Park crowd for once? And at least an *intelligent* Christian, if one could be found? Or, better still, what about an uninhibited debate between a Freethinker—not, if possible, one of our reverent Humanists, but one who believes in aggressive Freethought—and a Christian who at least knows a little of Biblical and Textual criticism? H.C.

G(U)ILT EDGED

WHEN a mailbag was emptied one day a badly wrapped parcel of Bibles was scattered over the sorting office floor. A sorter, eyeing the beautifully bound volumes, remarked "Fancy packing Bibles like that! Anybody a bit religious might be tempted to pinch one!"

—NEXT WEEK—

THE SCOTT PETITION

In the Church of St. Ursula in Cologne there used to be one wall completely covered with glass cases containing bones of its patron saint and her eleven thousand virgins. Those exhibits proved quite lucrative to the church and were on view for centuries. Suddenly, some fifty years ago, they disappeared from view. It may have been the result of probing by the science of modern anatomy, which did prove conclusively that a considerable number of St. Ursula's virgins had bones which were male in origin. In Palermo, Sicily, Archbishop Ruffini testily declared in 1951 that, "Those who are not Christians are not men but beasts." The strong Mediterranean sun which shines gaily on that fertile isle cannot illuminate the darkness in the heads of its inhabitants. The clergy has seen to that. In 1911 the American statesman and historian White wrote in his history of the feud between science and theology, published in 1911:

"When Professor Buckland, the great geologist and bone expert discovered that relics of St. Rosalie, worshipped in a shrine in Palermo and reputed to cure disease and distemper, were in reality bones of a goat, the discovery did not diminish their miraculous properties one whit."

Every Roman Catholic church is a place of pilgrimage and it is mandatory for every grown-up Catholic to visit the place under the penalty of eternal damnation. He must go there every Sunday and Holiday. True, the churches are kept clean, and the purification from sin, in spite of occasional unpleasant occurrences during the confessional, less repulsive than in India. Those great rationalisers, the Chinese, have announced that the ceremony of the Eucharist goes against their æsthetic grain and refuse to take part in it. They believe the digestion suffers from holy ministrations.

From New Zealand

THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE of the House of Representatives recently heard petitions from various bodies objecting to state aid for private schools. Among them was an objection from the Wellington Rationalist Association, made by Mr. G. Royle, to the claims made by Roman Catholicism.

The Roman Catholic Church was not really so anxious to educate children in the more scientific sense as it was to make more Roman Catholics, he said.

The Church encouraged its adherents to convert others to the Roman Catholic religion. Schools were used as forcing houses for the inculcation of the Roman Catholic religion's creed and children were frightened into the belief that it was wicked and bad not to believe what they were taught.

Most injurious of all, said Mr. Royle, was the enslavement of the child mind to the Roman Catholic religious teaching, and such conditions were not in accord with the dignity of a cultured society today. Roman Catholic teachers were not educationists but propagandists and canvassers for their own creed.

The allegiance of Roman Catholics was first and foremost to the Pope, and allegiance to the community was only a secondary matter, he said. In time there could be a Roman Catholic nation in New Zealand which owed its chief allegiance to Rome, and that was a rather sinister situation.

The claims of every minority should be given consideration, but it was the very antithesis of democracy to favour a small section of the people at the expense of the much larger section.

Roman Catholics were about one-eighth of the population of New Zealand, and the other seven-eighths was being asked to pay for the privilege which Roman Catholics were demanding as justice.

Religious Revival?

IN Abertillery the Sunday freedom forces inflicted another crushing defeat on religious bigotry, when 5,042 people voted for Sunday cinemas and only 458 against—a five-to-one majority. The repercussions of this Christian debacle may soon be felt in other towns in the Welsh valleys. During the pre-election controversy the Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. entered the battle by distributing N.S.S. "Sunday Cinema" leaflets, a good advertisement for the Society and THE FREETHINKER. The team of distributors included Mr. D. Shipper, Mr. J. Phillips (branch treasurer) and the well-known South Wales racing motorist, Ron Rogers.

★

FOLLOWING closely after the announcement of the Abertillery success another triumph over the Sabbatarians was declared in Bedwellty (Mon.). Voting:

For Sunday cinemas ...	3,582
Against Sunday cinemas ...	758

Majority	2,824
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More examples of the great Religious Revival?

★

THE REV. E. HOPKINS, Vicar of St. James's, Bristol, is "disturbed by the fact that although the Christian Church has all modern techniques at its disposal, the impression made on the masses is comparatively little." "Think of the assistance given by the daily press, broadcasting and television, each bringing the gospel right into the homes of the people. Think of the vast amount of Christian literature that pours out from the Christian press." It's nice to hear a parson admitting that all the effective means of propaganda are put freely at their disposal—but he doesn't suggest that atheists should be given similar benefits—even with a Bishop to have the last word in reply.

Branch News

THE monthly meetings by the West Ham and District Branch are showing a gradual improvement, and at the last meeting Mr. J. L. Shepherd spoke on "What Free-thought means to me." This brought along a Baptist minister who joined in the discussion after the address, and so made the evening well worth while. A number of syllabuses have been distributed and FREETHINKER readers and friends will be made welcome. The hall is only two minutes' walk from Wanstead Station (Central Line). Information will be given by the Hon. Secretary, Mr. F. S. Warner, 83A, Dawlish Road, Leyton, E.10. LEY 1580.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. (a) Victor Hugo, on leaving France; (b) James II of England; (c) Henry of Navarre; (d) James I; (e) Prof. W. Kingdon Clifford. 2. (a) Bedford, (b) Oakham, (c) Reading. 3. (a) 1869, (b) 1844, (c) 1878.

G.H.T.

RELIGIOUS SURVIVAL

To see him at prayer was an inspiring sight. The blood vessels on his forehead stood forth like blind-cords in the intensity of his worship.—R.I.P. —*Church Times*, December 28th, 1956.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE "SUNDAY TIMES" ARTICLES

Being practically the same age as—though unfortunately much less vigorous than—THE FREETHINKER, perhaps I take an excessive interest in "The Great Mystery," a series of articles in the

Sunday Times, to which shrine I recently transferred my Sunday "worship." Bertrand Russell on "Do men survive Death?" seems to put the whole issue succinctly, but the first instalment was really amusing. It was a rehash of the Christian provender mixed with a time/space continuum ingredient from Higher Mathematics by Dorothy Sayers which I do not understand and doubt very much if the authoress does either.

E. NEWBOLD.

ROYALISM IN BRITAIN

One puzzling feature of the times is the growth of royalism in Britain at a period of history when republicanism has been sweeping through the rest of the world. Republicanism, from the propaganda point of view, is almost dead in Britain. I attribute a great deal of the responsibility for this to the late Ramsay Macdonald and other Labour leaders who have declined to take any step towards amending the oath of allegiance or in checking the power of the Crown. The country has now reached the position in which a good deal of backdoor influence is being exercised by four ladies in the shape of the Queen, the Queen-Mother, Princess Margaret, and the Duchess of Kent. It is a matter to which some attention should be paid by those who value republicanism as an important principle as is obviously the opinion of much of the rest of the world.

C. H. NORMAN.

SUNDAY CINEMAS—FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

Despite the efforts of the Lord's Day Observance Society, and the prophesying of the local Sabbatarians that if we opened our cinemas on Sundays a worse fate would befall us than that which befell Sodom and Gomorrah, a majority of the townsfolk here in Sidmouth, Devon, *have* voted in favour of Sunday opening.

I fear the prophecies will come true, for a few weeks ago, even before the ballot, one of our cinemas was destroyed by fire. Oh dear I can already smell the fire and brimstone. Adios.

D. L. WEBSTER.

IS PRAYER A DELUSION

In your issue of January 4th, 1957, one of the articles describes prayer as an "activity of the deluded." It often makes me wonder how often those claiming to be "rationalists" indulge in talk most irrational. The cheap gibes at the fact of prayer which is borne out by the experience of many spiritually well-attuned people certainly falls under that category. Your contributor has every right to say that he cannot understand how God can interfere in men's affairs in response to prayers. But does his own ignorance of a subtle phenomenon beyond his own ken warrant denial of the possibility of that event? Prayer, and God's intervention in human affairs in response to it are hard facts which have stood the test of experience, even experiment. And if your contributor wants to know more about it, will you direct him to the Mosque, Woking?

MUHAMMAD YAKUB KHAN (Imam).

[Mr. Macfarlane writes: If and when Moslems manage to delude enough people into supporting them so that they control the schools as Christians now do in Britain, they will find me just as firmly opposed to the practices which they would introduce in accordance with their lights. My hope in writing the article was to rouse those with minds which have managed to rise superior to the stupefying influence of old religions to assert themselves to move forward to the introduction of the secular state. This means a state in which there would be no established form of dogmatism—whether Moslem, Christian or Atheist. As regards the suggestion that I am ignorant or not "spiritually well-attuned," may I suggest that Mr. Khan should perhaps know a little more about my personality and experiences before venturing to make suggestions of that kind. Actually I feel that it is not so much the experiences which men have which differentiates them as the interpretations and explanations they accept concerning these experiences. I think psychology and common sense can fill many gaps which witch-doctors and ministers of religion exploit to their own advantage.]

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