

The Freethinker

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ONE OF THE incidental bye-products of the Victorian age with its virtual monopoly of world trade and Income Tax at 3d. in the pound, was the tranquil existence of a substantial class of *rentiers*, people of independent means who enjoyed abundant leisure. Members of this class produced quite a number of scholars and literary amateurs who produced work which, whilst it failed to make the grade of immortality, was often of great value. One of the first articles which struck the present writer way back in the '20s when he first made the acquaintance of THE FREETHINKER, was a reprint of a remarkable series of articles originally written by the late G. W. Foote. In this series, that great man of letters dealt with a notable biography of the French Protestant scholar, printer and martyr, who was burned alive by the Church in the year 1546. Etienne Dolet was closely associated with Rabelais and his biography, reviewed by Foote and written by a scholarly English Protestant, Mr. G. Christie, throws a flood of light on that stormy but colourful era in European history.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Rabelais and the Protestant Reformation

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

tion continued, the critics of the corrupt Church and Clergy of Rome, tended to split into two clearly distinct sections, the Protestants, who opposed Catholicism and its corruptions in order to return to what they conceived to have been the virtues of primitive Christianity; and the wits, or scoffers, "The Libertines" as their critics sometimes styled them, who tended more and more to reject all dogma, Catholic or Protestant and to scoff impartially at all organised religion. Etienne Dolet appears to have belonged to this latter class, at least in the sense that he went considerably beyond Protestant orthodoxy in extravagance which eventually conducted him to his frightful end at the stake. To the selfsame school of scoffers Rabelais,

as Dr. Wright demonstrates, clearly belonged. More fortunate, or perhaps more prudent than Dolet, "the great original" of Rabelasian satire, escaped the executioner and eventually appears to have died in his bed as — ironically enough — a beneficed cleric of the Catholic Church upon whose flagrant abuses the shafts of his Rabelasian irony had so often descended — at least we may presume that this was so — for though no record has survived of the place or manner of his death, the death of so famous a writer at the stake would surely have left some trace of so sensational an event.

Rabelais and the Reformation

Francois Rabelais, himself destined to add a new word to most civilised languages, was born about 1483 and — like his contemporary, Martin Luther — began his career in the Church. In this case it was the Franciscan Order — later to be adorned by a modern monk of a very dissimilar type except for the vast erudition that signalised them both, Father Anthony alias McCabe! Like his modern antitype, Rabelais' scepticism got him into trouble with the Franciscans and, like another eminent Franciscan before him, Roger Bacon, he spent some time in the monastic prison, but at length received permission to join the more learned Benedictine Order. Rabelais did not leave the Catholic Church but actually ended up as *curé* of Meudon. Prior to this however, Rabelais had flirted with the French Protestants and was at one time on friendly terms with the redoubtable Calvin himself. Later, Calvin denounced Rabelais by name and to be denounced by Calvin was no passport either to a long or tranquil existence. But Rabelais was by temperament a sceptic; if he disliked the medieval dogmas of Rome and poured scorn on its corrupt priests, the grim puritanism and cast-iron dogmas of Calvin and his Geneva school were even less to his taste. Accordingly, whilst he lashed the personal vices and religious absurdities of the Roman clergy in his famous satirical romances, he never formally adopted the tenets of the Reformation. Indeed, it seems quite clear from Dr. Wright's narrative that, like his equally learned contemporaries Servetus and his own personal friend and printer, Etienne Dolet, Rabelais himself was between the devil and the deep sea — between

France and the Reformation

Another English scholar, Dr. Thomas Wright, published in 1861 a collection of remarkable essays, an elegant literary species which seems to have fallen into abeyance in recent years — dealing with the life and literature of medieval and Reformation times. One of these essays deals with the gay and polished civilisation of medieval Provence with its troubador poets and its unique "Courts of Love"; an indigenous culture of remarkable interest which was literally extirpated with fire and sword by the Inquisition and the Catholic Crusaders of Pope Innocent III and Simon de Montfort in their war of extermination against the heretical Albigenses in the 13th century. Another of Dr. Wright's essays deals with the, to Freethinkers at least, absorbing subject of the Protestant Reformation in France and the literature both controversial and satirical produced by the Reformation. For, as our author does not fail to note, France represented the classic battleground between the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation in the 16th Century. For this was the ghastly era of "The Wars of Religion" in which Catholics and Protestants fought fiercely for supremacy: the era of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew (1572) and of the Catholic "League". It was also the era, and France was the birthplace, of Calvin, the greatest of the Protestant theologians, and of Rabelais, the greatest — or, at least, the most famous — satirist and literary figure of his age.

Protestants and Scoffers

The terrible corruption which characterised the Borgia and Medici Papacy of the Renaissance which provoked the initial revolt of Luther, produced an extensive satiric literature of which the Rabelasian *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* were only the most famous characters. But as the Reforma-

the official Catholic Inquisition and the unofficial, but equally ruthless Calvinist tribunal at Geneva. The learned Dolet was eventually burned by the Catholics after having been denounced by the Protestants for his apparently pantheistic heresies whilst Servetus was finally roasted by the Calvinists over a slow fire at Geneva after Calvin himself had denounced him to the *Catholic* Inquisition for his anti-Trinitarian heresies. The era of St. Bartholomew's Eve was neither a safe nor a pleasant era for sceptics. The Reverend Dr. Rabelais had good cause to know this, and it would appear that it was more or less of an accident that the most famous French writer of his age did not end up like his unhappy printer as fuel for a bonfire. One may perhaps assume that whether caused by Catholic or Protestant bigotry, his end would be equally unpleasant. In the era of the religious wars, as later at the time of the French Revolution, it was no small achievement to keep alive! As far as Rabelais was concerned, like many other contemporary writers, he indulged apparently deliberately in cryptic language no doubt inspired by a fully justified fear of persecution. As a later French freethinker wrote to Voltaire — "The thought of the stake is chilling to the blood." Similarly no doubt Rabelais' famous Abbey of Theleme with its Anarchist motto, "Do as you please" represented in the age of the Reformation that kind of ideal to which, proverbially "Distance lends Enchantment." There was precious little chance to do, or to believe, as one wished in that age of unreasoning fanaticism and of organised religious murder in an age in which Europe has been aptly described as a Madhouse.

Catholics and American Public Schools

IN THE MARCH 16TH ISSUE of the Jesuit magazine *America*, the Rev. Thurston N. Davis, S.J., has sought to "improve the climate of Protestant-Catholic relations" by analysing several questions which have been a source of tension between the two major branches of Christianity in this country. Father Davis seems to be of the opinion that these "tensions" will be resolved if non-Catholics will only learn and understand the "Catholic" position on such matters as birth control, censorship and parochial schools.

Father Davis then goes on to try to persuade the reader that Catholicism is not really opposed to free secular public education. He says: "Catholics are by no means opposed to our fine American public school system. They support it, just as all sensible American citizens do." But is this really the Catholic position on public schools? I think not, and have no better source for my opinion than a standard text currently in use in many Catholic colleges and universities: namely, "Moral Guidance," by Rev. Edwin F. Healy, S.J. Father Healy's textbook, which bears the imprimatur of Cardinal Stritch, points that "Attending schools where there is no teaching of Catholic doctrine is generally injurious to faith and morals." A more vicious "dig" at our public schools would be hard to find. And he goes on to point out that the Catholic student in a non-Catholic school "is apt to be corrupted by the example and teaching of his professors (e.g., by the false views and imprudent discussions in courses on marriage) and by the evil influence of his textbooks and prescribed reading." And as if this were not enough, Father Healy goes on to say that "If Catholic parents realised the disastrous influences at work in non-Catholic schools, they would never think of sending their children into the midst of such dangers."

But to return to Father Davis' attempt to reduce Protestant-Catholic tensions, we find him saying that "very many Catholic parents *choose* [implying voluntary action] to exercise their constitutional right to send their children

"Paris is worth a Mass"

Dr. Wright describes with considerable detail the literary controversies between Catholics and adherents of the Reformation which continued uninterrupted up to the end of the 16th century when the accession of the Protestant leader Henry of Navarre to the throne of France, put an end to the frightful era of the French Wars of Religion. By that time Rabelais was dead but the great satirist would surely have appreciated the irony behind Henry's famous comment, "Paris is worth a Mass." A more solid justification for Henry's conversion to Rome lay in the fact that in a land like France with a permanent Catholic majority, it probably represented the only practical alternative to an indefinite prolongation of the generation-long fratricidal war between Rome and the Reformation. During that shocking exhibition of civil strife, French society almost reached the point of dissolution, and many of the best Frenchmen of the time perished either on the scaffold, at the stake or by the assassin's dagger. The fury of this conflict is mirrored in the controversial literature which Dr. Wright summarises in his learned pages. In scholarship, as one would expect, the Protestants were superior but the Catholics excelled in scurrility. To a certain extent Rabelais himself must be regarded as a contributor to this ephemeral controversy: it is due to other more permanent and more substantial qualities that he and his books have survived their vanished age and have now long been enrolled in the selected *corpus* not only of French, but of World literature.

to other than the common tax-supported school," and this for the reason that "they seriously and conscientiously want their children to have an education which combines secular learning with religious knowledge." But is the sending of Catholic children to Catholic schools really a matter of free choice? I think not, and again we need look only as far as Healy's "Moral Guidance" to find that "The children should be sent to a Catholic school, for, according to church law (Canon 1374), Catholic children are forbidden to frequent non-Catholic schools, and this prohibition includes grade schools, high schools, colleges, and universities." Healy further enlightens us by saying that "The natural law forbids risking harm to one's faith or morals unnecessarily. Parents would sin grievously if they sent their children to any school or college where there was evidently proximate danger to faith or morals."

One official Catholic source praises the public schools and says that Catholics volutarily prefer to send their children to parochial schools, while another equally official source heaps abuse upon the public schools and threatens Catholic parents with eternal damnation if they do not send their children to parochial schools. The explanation is precisely this: officials of the Catholic Church adhere to a strict "party line," but suit their public utterances to their particular audiences. The kindly remarks by Father Davis were intended to be presented over a national radio network, while the deprecatory comments of Father Healy were intended only for students in Catholic colleges and universities.

The moral of this "story" is that non-Catholics interested in preserving religious freedom should not be misled by cleverly planned propaganda. Catholicism remains opposed to any educational systems or institutions which do not teach Catholic doctrine. Any apparent deviation from this "party line" is purely for effect.

[Reprinted from *The Liberal* (U.S.A.), July 1957.]

Interview with Arthur B. Hewson

WHEN it became known that the editor of the *American Rationalist*, Mr. A. B. Hewson, would be spending a vacation in the British Isles this summer it was decided that this presented a fine opportunity of personal contact with an eminent American freethinker. Mr. Hewson being equally enthusiastic, he was entertained on his arrival in London by a more or less informal "reception committee" consisting of Messrs. Wm. Griffiths, F. A. Hornibrook, C. McCall, D. Shipper and the present writer. We met an entirely charming, quietly spoken, knowledgeable veteran of American Freethought who has sixty years of adult freethought activity behind him. The handsomely produced magazine he edits is now in its second year of publication and serves a wide area.

Over a dinner in Soho we had the chance to exchange opinions and impressions and we soon found our new friend had some pretty clear-cut ideas about freethought and its propaganda today. The hours sped away, leaving their profits in all our minds, and when the final reluctant Good-night came it seemed like the premature interruption of a promising discussion.

We have space for just a few of our questions and the reactions they drew from our esteemed guest.

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Would you describe yourself as an Atheist?

Certainly. I have never come across any conception of God that makes sense. We don't need any such hypothesis. What is needed is to deal with the realities of life from a positive standpoint.

Does that mean you would tie up the freethought movement with some political line of approach?

No, I am thinking more on lines of organization. That's the whole keynote. If we don't develop the social side of our Freethought-Humanist work we shall inevitably fail in our objects. We must compete with the Churches or go out of existence.

Go out of existence?

Yes, just that. Take a case. A man devotes pretty well all his leisure time to Rationalist propaganda. He not only spends his time but also his money. He has two children, we'll say. The boy marries a Protestant, the girl perhaps even a Catholic. And because they have been brought up as tolerant broadminded folk they will allow the offspring to be brought up in accordance with the religious principles of their partners. And the old man's life work is wasted. He might never have been a Rationalist at all for all the effect he has had on posterity.

And the answer is — ?

Youth groups. We mustn't let the Churches monopolise the social life of the young. We must train our people socially as well as intellectually.

We have, of course, in London the Conway Hall for that purpose, in connection with the Ethical movement, but we don't notice the young flocking there in their thousands.

It's a matter of technique, and a big problem. I am a member of a Unitarian Church which has been, as you would say, infiltrated by us Rationalists to such an extent that in thirty years, although we have had four ministers, not a single prayer has ever been uttered, nor any assumption that there is a supernatural. Here then, is a thought. You need a plant, what better way to get one?

Is the word 'Church' a good name for you?

It's a matter of expediency. Do things gradually. Give them water they can swim in.

Would you accept the term 'Scientific Humanist'?

I'm called one of the "Mavericks" because I don't wear

labels, you know. But I can wholeheartedly accept that term Scientific Humanism. It gets us away from the negative attitude.

Don't you see some purpose for the purely negative though? Look at the Catholic menace, even more serious in your country than ours.

Yes, I agree that's important, but we can be positive and still be militant. But let us relate our militancy to the realities of life and not to such things as Jesus and the Bible. *You mean we keep the Bible alive by talking about it?* Exactly. Let it drop. The people are letting it drop. Who cares? It has nothing to offer modern life.

How do you rate the chances of an all-American unified Freethought organisation with local autonomy?

The chances at present are nil. We are faced with radically differing ideas on how to propagate rationalism, and some of our groups are little more than personal ones. There is also the difficulty of the great distances.

What is your opinion of the change of front shown by organised Rationalism in Britain?

Well, I'm a member of the R.P.A. so I suppose I'm entitled to my grouch. The appeal of *The Humanist* has been narrowed by its pedantic approach. It should be broadened to take in a wider rationalist public like it once did.

★

Our visitor was of course equally interested in what we had to say about the situation in this country. The following day he entertained the Secretary and myself at his hotel and we had another "session". Altogether his visit formed a most valuable contact and the *American Rationalist* and THE FREETHINKER have already a growing common readership in both countries. They have also a mutual writer in our contributor (or should I say our phenomenon?) Dave Shipper who was responsible for suggesting our meeting. An article from Mr. Hewson will appear in these columns next week.

By the way, the word *Maverick* which our American friend used may not be familiar. It has some historical connection and refers to unbranded ranch animals. In literary parlance it would therefore designate one who refused to wear a label to describe his views.

I close with a quotation from the current number of the *American Rationalist*, by Mr. Hewson:

"We must rear our children with a full understanding of their personal responsibility for the establishment of the kind of world in which Life will find its finest flowering. Their understanding then will not be befogged by the idea that responsibility for that kind of a world rests elsewhere than within themselves, or that their potential capacities can be increased by prayers to non-existent ears."

G. H. TAYLOR

Another Convert

Once upon a time a lion, a really magnificent animal but now too ill to do any more hunting, lay dying and before its fast-glazing eyes little antelopes, gazelles, etc. played quite near but the lion was too far gone to pursue them. A traveller who happened to be a vegetarian came upon the lion and, thinking to relieve its sufferings, poured a little drop of milk on its tongue. The poor lion, being far too weak to spit it out, swallowed it with its last dying gasp.

The traveller, after making sure that the lion was *really dead* went around the world bragging of how he had succeeded in persuading the lion to turn vegetarian before it passed to rest in the Great Unguessed!

W.J.D.

This Believing World

More and more of our daily newspapers allow religious questions to be discussed — though most of them are entirely on the side of "our Lord". What does emerge, however, is the uneasiness caused by the "divided Churches." Christ of course is never blamed — it is always the Churches with their "dogmas." They have failed the people. The truth is that it has taken the Churches centuries to *civilise* the teachings of Jesus with all its nonsense about demons and devils, and its myths and miracles.

★

In a Kilburn paper is asked — where would "our Lord" be if he was with us today? The answer is quite simple. He would be with Father Divine the negro God, with Mrs. Eddy, and possibly with Joseph Smith the Mormon. No one outside a lunatic asylum would dream of calling him the Son of God. In fact one pious correspondent of the *Kilburn Times* admits that "his so-called followers would put him in a mental home". Of course. It would be no use blaming the dogmas" of the Churches, but the actual teachings of Jesus Christ.

★

It was certainly a great idea for ITV to get Group Captain Cheshire, V.C., to talk about the "amazing" Turin "Holy" Shroud — about which he has written so much since he joined the Roman Catholic Church. He gave his viewers a photographic facsimile and pointed out how it tallied completely with the account of the shroud in the Gospels. If it wasn't Jesus on the Shroud — who was it?

★

People like Group Captain Cheshire appear to think the Shroud's authenticity is guaranteed because nobody has been able to say how the "image" appeared upon it, and because some 50 years ago an "Agnostic" asked if it wasn't Jesus, who was it? Exactly what qualifications even an Agnostic has for investigating something like this Shroud, we were not told. The Roman Catholic Church itself has not yet guaranteed its authenticity — probably because it knows its true history. That it is a fraud must surely be obvious to anybody who has read about it — otherwise why has not the Church pronounced in its favour?

★

The results of some experiments on ducks recently by some French scientists will certainly upset believers in the Bible Creation Story. The scientists are asking "How far can scientists go towards creating life?" for they have "created" an artificial breed of ducklings "never before seen on earth" — according to the *Daily Express*. Its science writer, Chapman Pincher, avers that "scientists have already gone a long way towards creating life itself from dead, inert chemicals." That is, "certain chemicals automatically take on the properties of life if they are brought together under the right conditions." Thus, in spite of the Catholic Pasteur who is supposed to have given the death blow to spontaneous generation, it can now be proven by scientific experiment.

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In other words, the experiments have shown that "under the right conditions," certain combinations of complex chemical substances can form *living* organisms — a tremendous proof in favour of the theory of Evolution. Of course, believers in God Almighty are horrified — how dare mortal man intrude into the domain where the Lord has always reigned so triumphantly? Still, they have one consolation. Who created the chemical substances from which life emerged? It *must* have been God himself. Thus, no blatant infidelity can ever shake the truth of the Bible!

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool recently begged the Archbishop of Canterbury to stop bickering as to whether he (of Canterbury) was descended from St. Augustine, or his brother of York came down from Wilfred. What really mattered was "that they loved each other until they reached the truth." No doubt Dr. Heenan meant this (or some of it) but when a Roman Catholic talks about "truth," meaning religious truth, the only truth he recognises is when it is buried in the Church of Rome. The Church of England is "heretical," and all good Catholics must shun it as they shun rampant Materialism. Dr. Fisher, of course, looks forward with "hope and promise for the Christian Church in the whole of this land"—but this would never do for Rome. Only the Church of Rome must be the "hope and promise." Hasn't Dr. Fisher found this out yet?

The Rising Generation

XXV—THE SEPTUAGINT

ONE OF the books extremely difficult to obtain is an English translation of the Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is supposed to have been made about the year 280 BC — but no one really knows by whom, when or where for certain. No one really knows either from which Hebrew text it was translated for they differ in hundreds, perhaps thousands of places.

Now, the interesting thing about the Septuagint is that it was *the* Bible of the early Christians, and certainly even of the Jews for two or three hundred years. Nearly—some critics say all—every citation of the Old Testament in the New comes *not* from the Hebrew Bible but from the Greek one. In other words, if there really was a Jesus who quoted the Old Testament in proof of anything, he quoted the Septuagint; for neither he nor any of the Gospel writers knew any other Bible. Even if the quotations from the Old Testament were merely put into the mouth of an imaginary Jesus, they still come from the Septuagint.

The Hebrew language, in which the modern Hebrew Bible is printed, was a dead language in the time of Jesus except for priests and students. The language they spoke was Aramaic, the language in which Jesus spoke in Palestine. But there were Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria, and for them no doubt the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, for that was the chief city of culture and learning as well as for trade.

The real problem for critics is, from what text was the Septuagint translated? *Nobody* knows, for there is no Hebrew text of the Old Testament as it was then in existence. The text of the Hebrew Bible we have dates only from about the sixth century.

The problem is still more complicated because the *Latin* text used by the Roman Catholic Church was, in the first place, translated *not* from the Hebrew Bible but from the Septuagint; though it is claimed that the present Latin text, known as the Vulgate, was revised by Jerome in the fourth century with the Hebrew in front of him. All the early English translations were made from the *Latin* text, and therefore have at their base the Septuagint. Our Authorised Version, still the most widely used all over the English-speaking world is really only a *revision* of earlier translations.

It is only comparatively recently that English translators have used the present Hebrew text to correct obvious errors.

But the real point with regard to the Septuagint is—if it is a translation of an *unknown* Hebrew text—which it is—of what authority is the Bible?

H.C.

THE FREETHINKER

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All Articles and Correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals. THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or 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 at the Office.

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. CHIVERIEL (California): Please tell us exactly what film you are referring to.

CLEMENT WALKER: It was an eminent geologist and osteologist Prof. Buckland, who discovered that the "bones of St. Rosalia" at Palermo, which for centuries had been associated with miracle cures, were the bones of a goat.

GUSTAVUS: The problem of jealousy and its abolition is dealt with by Prof. J. C. Flugel in his book *Men and their Motives*. The tendency to jealousy is aggravated in adolescence by the notion of property in love affairs.

C. V. MACINALLY: Hardy's poem *God's Funeral* is an example of what you have in mind. It depicts a slow procession moving across a plain at twilight bearing a strange form which they have themselves created and which the mourners can no longer keep alive.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, August 11th, 6.30 p.m.—G. H. MILLS and Mrs. H. M. ROGALS (Manchester). Literature on sale.

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

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

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

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. D. TULLMAN and L. EBURY.

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

Sunday, 3 p.m. (Platt Fields) Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, etc.

Sunday 8 p.m. (Deansgate Blitzed Site): Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH or WOOD.

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: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: R. POWE. Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE.

Wales and Western Branch (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: D. SHIPPER, A Lecture.

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

INDOOR

Orpington Humanist Group.—Sunday, 11th August at Sherry's Restaurant at 7 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "A Secularist looks at Humanism."

Notes and News

THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS to the International Congress of the Humanist and Ethical Union was delivered by Lord Boyd-Orr at the Conway Hall on July 26th, to an audience which contained many foreign delegates. Speaking on "Mankind Today" he considered the startling social

changes of our day when air transport had foreshortened both time and space. Similarly the problem of production had made wealth available on a scale undreamed of in previous centuries. The two major problems of our time were to get this wealth fairly distributed and to abolish war which, due to the new weapons, had acquired a suicidal character. The present United Nations was, in his view, a more efficacious instrument than the old League of Nations had been. The recent Bandoeng Conference had stressed the end of colonialism, and if mankind could get through the current crisis, a glorious future lay before us. He concluded by emphasising the prospects of a Humanist philosophy, the startling possibilities being ultimately due to the independent thinkers, the heretics of the past.

★

THERE HAS BEEN a further development in the little drama in which Mr. Joseph Lewis, editor of the *American Age of Reason*, offered ten thousand dollars for a polio cure by Preacher Jack Coe, who was boosting himself as a faith healer. Not only did this would-be miracle-worker fail to cure anyone but he recently died from polio himself at 39.

★

ON SUNDAY, 14/7/57 the Wales and Western branch N.S.S. combined with Cardiff Humanist Group for the first annual outing of the two groups. A train-excursion to Bristol was made and after an ascent of the picturesque Cabot Tower, a visit to Bristol Zoo followed. In the evening the party visited the N.S.S. platform on The Downs, and a large meeting was addressed by Mr. Caines and Mr. Shipper.

★

IN ACCORDANCE with the N.S.S. policy of seeking to remove religious privileges, the following letter was sent from our office on July 2nd.

The Rt. Hon. Peter Thorneycroft P.C., M.P.,
Chancellor of the Exchequer,
Sir,

We were surprised to read that you were considering giving "some assistance to clergymen, ministers of religion, and the Churches generally" in your next Budget.

We think it is grossly unfair to single out a profession for special privileges in this way, particularly a profession that already enjoys other privileges over the rest of the population. That religion should enjoy its present privileges is bad enough; that you should be considering increasing them is astounding.

The larger Churches of this country have enormous incomes and should be in a position to support themselves. (In the case of the Church of England it owes a great part of this income to its formerly being endowed). If they cannot support themselves it is because the people of this country have found them wanting. The people should not be taxed to support the clergy; religion should not be kept alive artificially when it is intellectually dead.

We trust, therefore, that you will reject the idea of further concessions.

Yours faithfully,
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
(signed) Colin McCall
(Secretary)

The letter has been formally acknowledged and is to be "laid before the Chancellor."

NEXT WEEK

MILITANCY

H. CUTNER replies to critics

You Have Been Warned!

By COLIN McCALL

The Irish Catholic proudly declares that it has received the blessing of five Popes. It is one of those papers that induces nausea in the non-Catholic—and no doubt also in advanced Catholics like Mr. Bernard Wall. It is filled with sacred hearts and slushy sentimental pictures of saints and virgins. Its intellectual standard is fairly represented by the first item in a "Think it Over" column on June 13. "No matter how great the scientist," it reads, "he can't do what the cow does. Humbly he must watch her make green grass into white milk." If that gem of fatuosity should deter you from reading more of this article, I really cannot blame you. But you will do so at your own peril. That same issue of the paper contained—in its own words—"Warnings of Universal Woe." I feel it is my duty to pass them on.

These "grave warnings to mankind" have been given at various times since the early nineteenth century, and they have been published in a leaflet which has circulated widely throughout Spain and Portugal during the past year. The leaflet bears the imprimatur of the Archbishop of Salta and the Bishop of Corrientes, dated February 27 and February 7, 1956, respectively. So it is not to be treated lightly. Indeed, Mr. G. Leslie Baker tells us that there has been much speculation whether the punishments mentioned are "those next to be meted out to the world by God's offended majesty" and about "their possible connection with the secret of Fatima, which is widely believed to be due to be revealed in the year 1960." Who would treat such matters lightly? Certainly not the Catholic authorities at Fatima — or local hotel-keepers — who must be looking three years forward with relish. And who knows, perhaps a further secret to come in 1970!

But what of the warnings themselves? To the authors of the leaflet "It seems as if Our Lord through Himself, or the medium of the most Holy Virgin, or persons of great sanctity, has been warning mankind for several years concerning a major event to come." One of the reasons why it only "seems" this way, is because the terrible prophecies have not all received the necessary official sanction of the Church. But they have all appeared in books or other publications bearing "the necessary ecclesiastical approbation which, at least, guarantees that they are not against Catholic faith and morals."

In 1819, Maria Julie Jahenny de la Faudais warned of three days of continual and horrible darkness, during which blessed wax candles will give light. One candle will last for the full three days, but none will burn in the houses of the wicked. During the three days, "the demons will appear in horrible and abominable forms and will make the air resound with terrible blasphemies." Appropriate accompaniment will be provided by thunder and lightning; "a cloud as red as blood will cross the firmament" and the earth will shake to its foundations. The sea will add its quota in the form of gigantic waves; all vegetation will be destroyed; but the blessed candles will burn on obliviously while the earth becomes a "huge cemetery" for the wicked and the just. Three quarters of the human race will perish. "The crisis will come suddenly and the punishment will be universal," we are told. The last two prophecies seem contradictory (perhaps the latter should read "the punishment will be *three quarters* universal"!) but it is plain that terrible things are in store for most of us.

Anna Maria Catherine Emmerich's message (1824) was succinct. "Satan will be unchained 50 or 60 years before the

year 2,000," she told us. Presumably he is prowling around somewhere now, so keep your eye open for a cloven hoof! St. Gaspar de Bufalo (1837)—who was canonised just over a year ago — informed us that the three days of darkness would ensure the destruction of the impenitent persecutors of the Church." The survivors would be scarcely better off though, for they "will see themselves as if alone on earth because in truth, the world will be covered with corpses."

The Blessed Ana Maria Tiaggi (1837) — filled in a few details. God, she said, would send two punishments, one originating on earth and taking the form of wars, revolutions, etc.; the other sent from heaven. Here again, it was to be darkness for three days and three nights; so intense that nothing would be visible. The air "will become pestilential and poisonous, and will harm, although not exclusively, the enemies of religion." The faithful must remain in their houses the whole time "saying the Rosary and pleading with God for mercy." "All the enemies of the Church (known and unknown) will perish all over the earth during the universal darkness." Then — surely rather an anticlimax — "St. Peter and St. Paul will intervene in the election of a new Pope."

Sister Maria de Jesus Crucificado de Pau (1878) made no secret of her low opinion of humanity. During the darkness, she said, "those living depraved lives will perish." "Only a quarter part of mankind will survive," she added. Our Lord in Heede, Germany (1945) himself expressed a similar view. "Mankind has not listened to my Holy Mother, who appeared at Fatima to exhort people to do penance," he announced. "Now I come myself at the last hour to admonish the world. I am very near," he warned, and for those not in a state of grace "it will be terrible." This generation deserved "to be annihilated," but he would build his kingdom "suddenly, sooner than people expect," with a small number of the elect.

Berta Petit of Belgium was privileged to receive visits from the Virgin (in 1943) and Christ (in 1945). Both visitors saw an awful prospect which Berta generously passed on for our benefit. They spoke of "lightning that will blacken nations in fire and blood" (Virgin) and "a frightful hurricane" that will "let loose all the forces with fury" (Christ). "That is the moment to abandon yourself to the sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary" added Berta's—uninvited? —male guest.

When Mary visited Adelaide Roncalli in Bonato, Italy, on May 13, 1944, part of the information was "hush hush" and was confided to the Bishop of Bergamo. This seems hardly fair if it concerns the destiny of us all, but the ways of Providence are not our ways. Perhaps it is for our own good that Adelaide should tell us only that "unimaginable misfortunes" were planned for the second half of the twentieth century, if we do not listen to the petitions of the Virgin. The petitions — *The Irish Catholic* indicates — were substantially the same as at Fatima.

I think I should — on your behalf — express our thanks to the holy ones who have so considerately shared the vital information they obtained at first hand. Had they not done so; had Mr. Baker and *The Irish Catholic* not printed it, readers of *THE FREETHINKER* might have remained ignorant of their dark future. Now there is a slight chance of joining the chosen few. Wait a minute though, there is a further note! "Private revelations, even if approved by the Church, are not dogmas of Faith. Only human credence can be

given to them — that is to say, similar to that given to a person whose knowledge and truth cannot be doubted.” “Above all”—we are cautioned—“the end of the world is not being alluded to.” Ah! that puts a different complexion on the matter. The “last hour” doesn’t mean the end of the world! “Private revelations”; “human credence” . . . I’ll risk a life of “depravity”!

The Emperor’s Clothes

By LOUIS MICHEL

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was an Emperor who was persuaded by some unscrupulous rogues that he was wearing robes which were invisible to the common herd, but which clever people could see quite clearly. All his subjects outdid one another in claiming to see the clothes until one day, when the King was strutting around in his birthday suit a young lad cried out that the King was naked and everyone realised what stupid fools they had been. The story puts me in mind of the very first man who, when everyone was bowing down to the Thunder and Lightning, must have said NO, I will not worship this stupid God of yours who puts such stupid people in charge of his affairs, and such stupid fools on Earth to believe in what they say.

According to the Gospel or Good News in the second part of the Bible, if any man accepts Jesus as the true Son of God and has faith in him as the “Way” of salvation, such a man is changed in some subtle way and is drawn into the “Body of Christ,” which is his church, and becomes somehow different from all other men not having followed this course. Chief among these people are Ministers, Reverends, Bishops, Cardinals etc., who are in such close contact with God and his will for mankind, that they are able to make a full time job of directing men and women along the right paths, and giving guidance and comfort when doubt arises.

This is at least the theory.

In practice, not only do these “inspired” leaders contradict one another on almost every matter of importance, but proclaim such diverse notions that by choosing your particular sect or “Church” carefully, you can live almost any way you wish, and still be within the “Divine Law.”

A recent case in point was the controversy over the intended marriage of Princess Margaret to Peter Townsend. According to C of E “Law” regarding marriage, Townsend, although divorced, is still “spiritually” married and cannot, therefore, marry again.

If, however, the Princess had not been so directly connected with the C of E she could have found half a dozen other denominations which would have been only too pleased to have married the couple, as many of them stated in the National Press. Both attitudes are supposed to be inspired by the same God, and we are supposed to believe that the Clergy know more about this than the common man.

Another even more serious attitude concerns War. The anti-war Christians generously state that the pro-war Christians are none the less sincere Christians, even though they do not oppose all killing. Neither group can see the absurdity of claiming that *both* views are the result of being guided by the same God. And not even the “Inspired” leaders in the Churches realise what slaves they make of themselves by believing such rubbish, and teaching others to believe it too.

Before a man can obtain a job at say £11 per week in any ordinary trade, he must satisfy his prospective employer that he can do the job, knows what he is doing and is capable of a certain amount of initiative and progress.

Some Ministers are paid, according to a newspaper report,

not less that £11 per week, and for this they are not expected to be capable of anything except a measure of theological knowledge. Even the tests contained in the Bible itself are completely ignored, it not being necessary to remove by faith even a small pile of sand.

Lesser texts such as those in Mark 16-17 and 18 are not even imposed, although failure would help to reduce the large number of Ministers to more economical proportions. As it is, this body of completely unproductive individuals cannot even cure themselves when sick, let alone us, without turning to mortal means and medicines.

If a bridge has to be built across a river, any one of a dozen engineers will be able to give sizes, loads and materials necessary, and their figures will agree with each other. If, on the other hand, the man in the street wants to know if Capital Punishment is right or wrong, and is foolish enough to ask a dozen different Ministers for the Will of God as they know it, he will end up more confused than ever. Slavery existed in the world for hundreds of years because the religious leaders supported it by Divine Law and opposed it by Divine Law. Witchcraft, disbelieved by every intelligent person today, was so feared by the divinely inspired clergy of the middle ages that they burned to death thousands of women and children in an effort to stamp it out and beat the devil.

Waving and thumping their Bibles, yelling about Heaven and Hell (which not one of them knows the slightest thing about from actual experience) and generally putting *fear* into the hearts of men (in the name of a God of Love) they rigidly opposed and still oppose every step forward, every scientific and material advance, yet they still get paid for it, still live in rent free homes (heated on Sundays by fires forbidden by the Bible which they insist every one else must live by.) Are we to be fooled by these self-appointed dictators who try to tell us that the invisible suit of clothes is the real thing. What a pity the Emperor himself is so impotent in letting people know the truth. Or perhaps there isn’t any Emperor?

It Occurs To Me

A progressive theologian solves an old difficulty by replacing it with two new ones.

* * *

The highwayman demands your money or your life: the Catholic Church demands both.

* * *

Christian apologists occasionally stumble over the truth: then they pick themselves up and scurry off as though nothing had happened.

* * *

Women often give themselves to God when the Devil wants nothing more to do with them.

* * *

Religion is as helpful as throwing a drowning man both ends of a rope.

* * *

Confession is good for the soul and bad for the reputation.

* * *

The High Church cannot endure a gambler unless he’s a steady winner.

D.S.

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

Speaking in Ferndale, S. Wales, the Rev. Howard S. Stanley secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, said: “We have been having lean and disappointing years. Every year since 1925 we have been going backwards.”

CORRESPONDENCE

GODS AND GHOSTS

There is so much in THE FREETHINKER on the denial that God and Jesus exist. This seems to me to be a mistake, because if a nervous child ran in from the garden terrified at having seen a ghost, it would surely be no good to assure it that there was no ghost there; but if it was taken out into the garden and shown that the ghost was only a pair of steps against a wall, the child's fear would be gone entirely. Isn't this a more thorough way of dealing with things "supernatural"?

The term Deity seems to have come down to us from Zeus, the sky god. The sun and sky were supernatural to primitive man, but science has made them part of nature to us. God is something vital to us which we do not understand, and when we do, it is God no longer. I see that one derivation of the word is Sanskrit "godha"—secret.

Jesus was one of the many hundred Messiahs which the Jews, in their agony, hoped would release them from the Romans. A book called *The Other Side of the Story* by Rupert Furneaux was the first one to put Jesus and Christianity into a reasonable historical setting for me, and it did what finding the steps would do for the Ghost-frightened child.

Another theological concept, Hell-fire, has now been made an everyday affair in the H-bomb. Perhaps organised religion lost its trump card when science took hell-fire from it? It no more comes from God, but from man. Man knows less about himself in the West than anything else, so we do not know whether we shall survive. When one thinks of the suffering that we have inflicted, through the ages, on animals and our less fortunate fellow creatures, it would not be surprising if this suffering at last boomerangs back to its creator.

RUTH POULTER.

GILBERT MURRAY

Father Crozier, in his letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, said, "as far as human frailty can judge, the soul of Gilbert Murray entered eternal life at peace with God."

It is recorded of the American author Thoreau that when, on his deathbed, he was asked by a clergyman whether he would like to make his peace with God, he replied that he had never quarrelled with him. If the same question had been put to Dr. Gilbert Murray before his mind was clouded over he might well have made a similar reply.

A. L. SCHUE

WHY BE MILITANT?

If Mr. G. S. Smelters had read more deeply into my article I think he would have discerned that it was written in the awareness that absolute knowledge is not and, in the nature of things, cannot be ours. If God exists, he constitutes the principle and essence of the universe. How, then, with less than knowledge unbounded can we definitely show that God does not exist?

We may feel moral certainty (as I do) that no being exists that we could call God; but moral certainty and actual proof are not the same thing. Such proof, as I put it in my article, "presupposes the possession of final scientifically established facts of the evolution of the universe and all that is in it." I should have thought it sufficiently clear I was not referring to the (Darwinian) principle of evolution, which appears to me established beyond reasonable doubt. But Mr. Smelters, assuming that I was so referring, goes on to make observations about evolution and monotheism that have no relevance to my case.

We may say, of course, that an anthropomorphic Deity in which the majority believe is demonstrably absurd. But this does not dispose of the idea of a good many thoughtful, well-informed people that perhaps there is in the universe an order of reality of which man knows nothing, if he ever will. I do not think it worth while to speculate on such a possibility; yet I cannot altogether rule it out. Anyway, there is in me what I would call cosmic piety, born of my consciousness of our inevitably limited understanding and apprehension of but partial truth. And Newton's words appeal to me as expressing the true scientific spirit: "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay still undiscovered before me."

G. I. BENNETT

MILITANCY

I think the tendency is to resolve this problem into terms of black and white. To be, or not to be, militant? That, I suggest, is not the question. The problem is not *whether* to be militant, but *when* to be militant. Let us eschew the general principle and consider the matter from the standpoint of expediency in given cases. Let the tactic match the circumstance.

It is a matter of psychology—and of common observation for that matter—that the person who is verbally smitten is not converted; he is antagonised. It is not a matter of intellect, but of emotion. He simply will not permit himself to see the superiority of your argument. I once heard Chapman Cohen at Liverpool utterly demolish a reverend Welsh minister named Pugh, who had brought a large following of young men, with whom I was sitting with a view to judging their reactions. It is still keeping within the bounds of accurate language to say that Pugh's case was utterly riddled beyond repair and that Pugh himself presented a sorry sight at the end of it, easily the smallest man, not in size but in prestige, I have ever seen climb down from a platform. Metaphorically a wreck, his face and temper showing the outward signs of his ordeal, he had run the gauntlet of derisive laughter from the audience for over an hour, and it probably seemed to him a lifetime.

This was militancy at its brilliant best. But it didn't convert the young men. It merely riled them. They talked of "mere wit" and "arrogant debating tricks." The people who were made happy by the debate were the Freethinkers. Moral: adopt militancy when you have a chopping-block as a means of getting the case over to the spectators, but don't expect to convert the chopping-block.

If you wish to convert your opponents or win over an audience, then the Margaret Knight method is the best.

N. FIELD.

NSS EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, JULY 24TH—Present: Messrs. Ridley, (Chairman), Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Gordon, Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor, Warner, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Alexander and Hornibrook. Sympathy was expressed to Mrs. Venton on the death of her husband and regret at the death of Mr. Brighton. New members were admitted to Birmingham, Bradford, Dagenham, North London, Nottingham, Portsmouth, San Juan and West Ham Branches. With new Individual members these totalled 21.

Letters to the Chancellor of the Exchequer (on likelihood of tax relief for the clergy) and the *News Chronicle* (on Edward Rasey) were approved; the Nat. Union of Ratepayers' Association's decision to take no action on rate relief for the clergy was regretted, the problem of Disendowment and NSS objects was considered and it was agreed to retain the word pending further investigation. Branch matters from Bradford, Manchester, Portsmouth and Wales and Western were dealt with. It was agreed to advertise again in *The Rationalist Annual*. A successful debate at Dagenham between the General Secretary and the Methodists was reported by Mr. Warner. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, 21st August.

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