

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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A GREAT DEAL of confusion exists, not only among religious people but probably also among freethinkers, as to what exactly the blasphemy laws are, how many of them there are, how they fit together and what is the chance of any of them being invoked today—and with what consequences. This confusion is largely the result of trying to legislate in a field of intangibles like "God," which are capable of widely differing interpretations.

Some freethinkers will maintain that every attack on Christianity constitutes blasphemy, and that THE FREETHINKER commits blasphemy every week. I cannot share this view: it seems to hark back to the notorious declaration of Lord Chief Justice Hale in the seventeenth century. This judge proclaimed that Christianity was the law of the land, so that any attack on it became an act of a traitor. At the second of the trials of G. W. Foote in 1883, however, the judge, Lord Coleridge, said categorically that Christianity was *not* the law of the land, and spoke these historic words:

*The mere denial of the truth of Christianity is not enough to constitute the offence of blasphemy. I now lay it down as law that if the decencies of controversies are observed even the fundamentals of religion may be attacked.*

The Bowman Case of 1917, which established the right of a society to inherit legacies and other monies for anti-Christian purposes, confirmed the ruling of Lord Coleridge. Lord Sumner similarly said that Christianity was not the law of England and the House of Lords judges endorsed this. They also said that scurrility was an essential element in the offence of blasphemy at common law.

## A Whip in the Corner

It would thus appear that it is not the fact that religion is attacked that constitutes blasphemy, but the *method* of the attack. Now, although this may seem to lessen the brutality of the blasphemy laws, it nevertheless adds to the confusion. It would be quite amusing, if the blasphemy laws were put into effect, to hear magistrates and policemen sorting out blasphemy from scurrility, heresy from profanity, and vulgarity from that old favourite, "likelihood of causing a breach of the peace," a formula that has been used to cover a wide and indeterminate range of behaviour.

What would *not* be amusing would be to see a Christian jury trying a secularist. And that is why the blasphemy laws, even in disuse, are a menace. They are a whip in the corner ready to be taken out just so soon as the Churches regain the power to do so.

## A New Cheap Booklet

The reader who wishes to go into some detail about the subject will no doubt go to works such as *A History of the Crime of Blasphemy* by G. D. Nokes, but for a quick look at the position as it stands today an invaluable booklet has appeared in which a modest sixpence buys sixteen pages packed with all the essentials, put together for the Society for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws by a first rate

authority on the subject, Mr. R. S. W. Pollard, whose work for Marriage Law Reform will already be known to many.

Mr. Pollard manages to get the maximum amount of information in the minimum amount of space, and he must have been beset by the problem of what to leave out. His method is to state concisely what the law is now and how it has developed through its history, for of course the

offence of blasphemy dates back to the time when the Church had immense power—a power which has dwindled into less obvious, but more subtle and insidious, forms today. He gives the relevant facts and dates and also those of the attempts at reform by re-

pealing the blasphemy laws. It was Bradlaugh's Bill which set the ball rolling in this connection, but after it failed to pass its second reading in 1889 the subject was not again debated—though several times raised—till Ernest Thurtle's Bill in 1930.

The fate of the latter is probably well known. Pandering for votes, the Labour Government made a sorry mess of it. In Mr. Pollard's words, the Government "was determined to emasculate the Bill and this was done in Standing Committee."

It finally began to look like a Christian Bill to *extend* the blasphemy offence! No progress has been made since.

We think so highly of this booklet on blasphemy that the Pioneer Press has agreed to handle copies, and for the absurd price of sixpence we hope many readers will include it in their next order for books.

## The Task for the Propagandist

But, armed with the facts as presented by Mr. Pollard, it will be for the freethought propagandist to point the moral. The whole horrible story of Christian persecution under the blasphemy laws is not even to be touched upon in sixteen pages. But the booklet is sure to remove misunderstandings and provide information. The actual Bill for repeal, Religious Prosecutions (Abolition) Bill, is given in an appendix.

I have heard it argued by freethinkers that only a Christian can blaspheme, and not a freethinker. This is certainly true in regard to some forms of blasphemy. For example, to "take the name of the Lord in vain" means to mock God. But if God is a non-existent he cannot be mocked. Therefore the atheist cannot here commit blasphemy. He cannot deride what he does not believe to exist. So he is incapable of blasphemy against God.

But although God does not exist, the Book of Common Prayer does, and there is a blasphemy law of 1558 specifically defending it from attack. The Holy Ghost is fictitious, but the bishops who talk about it are *not*, and there is on record the dictum of Lord Chief Justice Coke that "to disturb a preacher is to disturb God." This was to constitute an act of blasphemy.

It is interesting to note that an Act of 1697 stipulates that blasphemers must be Christian or have been made

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## The Blasphemy Laws To-day

By G. H. TAYLOR

Christian at baptism. This apparently puts them in a position to blaspheme. There is at least some modicum of sense in this, so it is not surprising that no prosecution has taken place under this law.

What the Churches *could* do if people were ignorant to let them have the power and means, can be seen from

## The Church in Society

MANY PEOPLE must be growing critical of the Archbishop of Canterbury's frequent and one-sided statements on political and social affairs.

Churchmen, like politicians, are of course entitled to express their views freely in a democracy. But politicians in the long run stand or fall by the policies they advocate. In contrast, the Primate utters his pronouncements from his position of monolithic security at the summit of his Church hierarchy.

Furthermore, because of the establishment this hierarchy within our society is automatically endowed with a prestige which more and more people throughout the Commonwealth must feel it does not deserve.

Is the time yet ripe for the Church of England to be disestablished? Some have sought to justify the social existence of the establishment by regarding it as one of those institutions which, like the House of Lords and the Throne, are said to act as a "check" to ensure that democracy proceeds by cool-headed progressive stages and not by hot-headed revolution.

Those of us, however, who really have democracy and progress at heart can hardly doubt that what the established Church tries to check (all too often like the Lords) is the spontaneous development of thoroughly rational, humanitarian and progressive thought and action.

Dr. Fisher's remarks at the time of the free-vote on the abolition of the death penalty, and, more recently, on Lord Altrincham's suggestions for modifying what he considers anachronistic elements in one of our institutions (to mention only two instances), illustrate the Church's characteristic attempts to stifle enlightened social aims.

Is not the pressure exerted by the Church on the monarchy, and thus indirectly on social and moral questions affecting whole societies, also something of an anomaly in the new pattern of the Commonwealth? Let us list the contradictions involved:

1. The members of the self-styled "Church of England" form only a fraction of practising Christians even in this country.
2. Increasing numbers of people are finding the whole religious approach to social and moral problems unconvincing, and feel that undue (or artificial) prestige accorded to religion prevents adequate public recognition of the many healthy attempts to approach such problems along purely secular lines.
3. Viewing the Commonwealth as a whole, we see the Throne, which peoples of many nations, many religions and many sects are asked to regard as a link in an otherwise divided world, subjected to the arbitrary influence of one particular sect of one particular religion.

Because of these contradictions, has not the time come for this religious structure, which, plant-like, has managed to twine its tendrils round the pillars of State, to be gently severed from the body-politic, and transplanted to a less-favoured soil, where (if it is hardy enough) it may continue to bloom as one flower among a hundred others?

PETER DREWITT

[The substance of the above also appeared as a letter in the *Sussex Evening Argus*.—ED.]

what they *did* when such conditions operated. Tortures, imprisonments, fines, executions, exclusion from offices, were the lot of many who dared to use their reason against the dogmas of a religion which makes a parade of love, meekness and mercy as its moral code!

*Abolish the Blasphemy Laws* by Robert S. W. Pollard. Price 6d. Postage 3d. From The Pioneer Press.

## Miracles, Inc.

"The time has come," the Preacher said,  
 "To talk of wines and gins—  
 Of saints—and souls—and singing mass—  
 Of savages—and sins—  
 And whether Angels really dance  
 Upon the heads of pins"?

"But wait a bit," the people cried—  
 "We came to see your skill:  
 We've faith and hope and charity,  
 And most of us are ill . . ."  
 "You'll go home changed," the Preacher said,  
 "I guarantee you will."

The faithful stood and formed a line  
 For colds and aching backs,  
 Some had got spots before their eyes  
 And others gout attacks . . .  
 And all the rest, it could be said,  
 Were hypochondriacs.

The Preacher and the Saviour God  
 Were really on the go.  
 They passed the plates around again,  
 Conveniently slow,  
 While all the little cripples stood  
 And waited in a row.

The deaf-mutes and leukemias  
 And polios as well—  
 The blind, the lame, the suffering  
 All praised Emmanuel . . .  
 They sat and waited hopefully  
 To get the Healer's spell.

Some other people followed them  
 And more came up to see  
 Some miracles that Coe could do  
 For those that paid the fee . . .

"I weep for you poor ailing folk,  
 I deeply sympathise."  
 With sobs and tears he counted cash  
 And looked towards the skies—  
 Holding the hundred dollar bills  
 Before his streaming eyes.

"My friends and sponsors, thank you all—  
 We've had a lot of fun.  
 Let's search our billfolds once again."  
 But answer came there none—  
 And this was scarcely odd, because  
 He'd emptied every one.

RICHARD BRIGGS.

—NEXT WEEK—

BILLY GRAHAM IN NEW YORK  
 By H. CUTNER

# Rationalism in America To-day

By ELDON SCHOLL

[A Report to the International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers, Paris, September, 1957, by one of the founders of the American Rationalist Federation.]

AT THE TURN of the century America was as active as other countries in the Rationalist movement. Dozens of speakers such as Ingersoll and Remsburg toured the country and organisations and publications flourished. Senators and mayors took active parts.

Organisations were going strong, to name only a few: The Rationalist Association of Chattanooga, Tennessee, the American Secular Union and Freethought Federation, Boston Freethought Society, Kansas Freethought Association, San Francisco Materialist Association, and many others. In 1908 New York Bohemians organised a Freethought Education Federation, and in 1909 the Rationalist Association of America was founded in St. Louis. There were also several groups in Canada. When one organisation like the Los Angeles Liberal Club could attract over 200 audience, and conventions brought hundreds of delegates, we have good illustrations of the strength of the movement at that time.

Times have changed, however, and most of these organisations have disbanded. The reason for the decline of Freethought-Rationalist activity is a subject in itself. No doubt the automobile, motion pictures, radio and two world wars were partly responsible. The opposition changed too and Freethought failed to adapt itself from theological battles to more practical court battles and the education of children.

Some of the older organisations held their ground. The Freethinkers of America continue with Joseph Lewis as President, bringing court cases in defence of liberty as he did as far back at 1926, although no longer with ten branch societies. The National Liberal League, which had 200 local branches in the 1930's, remains with its New York offices.

The Bohemians and the Germans continue with the strongest membership organisations. In many of the histories of the Rationalist movement in America little or no mention is made of these groups, which even today probably outnumber the English-speaking local societies, and are in better financial condition.

Four German groups remain, the largest of which is the Freie Gemeinde in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with its large building, which also serves for the meetings of the Jefferson Free Thought Society. The Freie Gemeinde has just celebrated its 90th anniversary. In Chicago the Freisinnige Gemeinde is a well-organised group. The German School Association and Free Community in St. Louis has its own building, which also serves as offices for the Rationalist Society of St. Louis. This group is 110 years old.

The Polish organisations, the Sokol, were appropriated by Christian groups, which also accounts for the loss of several Bohemian societies. Bohemian Freethinkers maintain three Rationalist schools in Chicago, Illinois, for their children, and three camps. They have their own cemetery and crematorium, as well as an insurance company. Their hour long radio broadcast, sandwiched in between Christian programmes every Sunday, has been operating for 25 years. The Chicago Bohemians own eight buildings and have published their Czech periodical, *The Age of Reason* for the past 46 years. There are Czech Rationalists in nine other cities, which together own 18 buildings. All these groups belong to the Czech Rationalist Federation of America, with headquarters in Chicago.

The oldest freethought publication in America is the monthly *Truth Seeker*, founded in 1878. Other papers are *The Age of Reason* of the Freethinkers of America, the mimeographed *Ripsaw*, the mimeographed *Secular Subjects* of the Rationalist Society of St. Louis, the *Secularist* of the Pioneers of Independent Thought in Chicago, and *The Atheist* of the 4As in New York City. Two irregular publications are *The Comet* and *The Hornet*. The latest and fast growing journal is the *American Rationalist*. The *Progressive World* has the largest number of pages; the Friendship Liberal League publishes the popular *Liberal*, and the Milwaukee Freie Gemeinde produces, part in German, part in English, *The Voice of Freedom*.

Other papers, not of a Rationalist nature, but deserving mention, are *The Humanist* of the American Humanist Association, and its membership journal, *The Free Mind*; *The Ethical Outlook* of the American Ethical Union and its membership paper, *Ideals at Work*; *The Humanist World Digest*, *Doubt* by the Fortean Society, and *Unity* of the Unitarians.

The first attempt to bring Freethought out of its dormant condition was the formation of the United Secularists of America in 1948, which took over the *Progressive World* magazine. The United Secularists have recently discontinued conventions annually to meet once every five years. Its present active groups are in St. Paul, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Seattle and Salt Lake City.

In 1955 the American Rationalist Federation was organised in an attempt to revitalise the movement, starting with nine societies situated in New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Milwaukee. Five state-wide organisations have begun and other local groups are considering affiliation. The Friendship Liberal League, one of the Federation members, has recently purchased a building. The Federation itself publishes only its internal bulletin.

Other groups not affiliated with national organisations are the Freethinkers of San Diego, the Jefferson Philosophical Society of Colorado, the Ingersoll Forum of New York City and new groups springing up in Oklahoma, Iowa and in the South.

A century ago less than 20% of the population were members of churches or synagogues. Today it is reported that membership is over 60%, in all 100,162,529. Roman Catholics claim a baptised count of 33,396,647, and the Protestants 58,448,567, plus 30 million children under age. Judaism reported 5,500,000 affiliated with its congregations; and there are 63,000 Buddhists. Several groups do not give numbers, e.g. Christian Scientists. With a total population exceeding 170 million there are many unchurched and an open field for Rationalists.

While the general attitude of Americans has liberalised in regard to religion, the church organisations have gained strength and a building boom is under way, taxing membership to the limit to pay for expansion. Religious education is gaining again in public schools after the setback due to the McCollum court case. School bus services and text books are given to some parochial schools, and nuns still teach in a few states. Many church organisations own tax-free businesses, placing a strain on the taxpayer to make up the loss.

There is opportunity for action in America, and free-thinking bodies are now trying to get back on their feet and grow, so that the movement will become strong

(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

A branch of the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago is the Moody Institute of Science—which is distinguished, these days, by proving almost entirely from Science that the Bible is true. Its chief speaker is Dr. George Speake, and he is out to prove all the time that Science corroborates faith in God. We have not at hand any of his "Sermons from Science in an Atomic Age," as they are called—but no doubt he points out that if there are atoms, who could have created them but God Almighty? Who could have given scientists the brains to discover atoms but the Lord? How could we get electricity from dynamos if God had not planted the electricity there first? Who created the Universe if the Genesis story wasn't true?

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Dr. Speake points out that "there is a growing conviction among men of science that man is basically spiritual in nature, and has a destiny beyond mere physical existence." And this is shown by the fact that, "the deeper one penetrates into the secrets of nature, the clearer becomes his awareness of law and order." We have an idea that man observed "law and order" long before he discovered the atom—though the scientific explanation of these terms is of course radically different from the theological. But the idea of going to atoms and electrons and protons to prove the Bible leaves us breathless with excitement. How does Dr. Billy Graham stand up to Dr. George Speake?

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A new Bible will shortly be published in Philadelphia—a translation from "original Aramaic manuscripts" which, the publishers claim, "will correct many errors" in the Authorised Version. This is particularly interesting because even at this day the A.V. is considered by the majority of Christians to be literally God's Precious Word inspired in every letter and comma, and could under no circumstances have "many errors." However, we shall look forward to an account of the "Aramaic" originals—who translated them from the Hebrew, and when and where. We are always specially intrigued when new discoveries of "original" Bible Manuscripts are made. We always thought that there were *no* "originals."

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We are not surprised that the Rev. T. H. Clarke of Saxelbye Rectory has discovered that, after all, the Biblical Sabbath and the Christian Sunday are two different things. All the repressive laws against not keeping Sunday as a Sabbath Day were thus impudent expressions of tyranny imposed on us by a Church which well knew the difference. Saturday—the seventh day—is the Biblical Sabbath; Sunday is, says Mr. Clarke, "a weekly day of Resurrection"—though he does not state what Resurrection. Sunday is the pagan day devoted to the worship of the Sun, and the Gospel writers made this clear when they put in the mouth of Jesus the words "I am the Light of the World." This refers to nothing but the Sun.

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"Question time" on ITV's "About Religion" recently meant a few questions mostly on whether public schools were or were not out of date by some schoolboys, with Fr. Groser making a few fatuous replies. Religion was, of course, treated as literally true—provided that it was Christianity, and not a breath of "heresy" came from the boys. It was actually a deplorable exhibition.

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For some reason we have never been able to fathom, the word "mysticism" causes nearly as much heart-searching as the word "religion." The "saints" in religion can be

paired with the "mystics" in mysticism. A Russian called Ouspensky used to write "mystical" books which were talked about with bated breath—and now a posthumous work containing his "answers" to questions on mysticism has been published. He wants people to go in for "ways" or "paths"—like Buddhism—particularly the "Fourth Way," which seems a conglomeration of the usual nonsense paraded by "occultists."

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Naturally, Ouspensky wants us to study "ourselves," with sympathetic exercises, and by degrees, so that we can arrive at "self awareness." We will then find out that "there is hardly any difference between sleeping and waking." In fact, after a long and arduous course of his "mysticism," you will at least arrive at "the mysterious *I am*"—a wonderful achievement. That there are people who must be impressed with this kind of aberration should not surprise us. Look at the hundreds of millions who implicitly believe in Christianity.

## For Newcomers — XIII

### CHRISTIAN CLAIMS

PUBLIC BATHS in pagan Rome were the last word in construction and luxury, and wherever the Romans settled they built public baths; whereas only in recent years Christian England adopted the practice of bathing!

With paganism routed, Christianity spread over Europe and bathing went out of existence; dirt and disease reigned supreme. "The most admired saints were those who had become a clotted mass of filth."

Athanasius says enthusiastically that St. Anthony had never in his long life been guilty of washing his feet. The condition of the body of St. Simeon Stylites was so horrible as to be intolerable to bystanders. "Throughout the monastic period cleanliness of either the clothes or the body was regarded as a pollution of the soul, a sign of sinful pride."

We pursue cleanliness today because it pays, and mechanical and chemical sciences have provided the means to its easy accomplishment. Not less astounding is the claim that Christians are happy and joyful, as if all the rest of the world's inhabitants are miserable.

The Puritan Sunday was one of unmitigated gloom. It has given way to the advent and development of the steam engine, the bicycle and the motor car. The Christian religion can scarcely be called one of joy. Nowhere can we find that Jesus ever laughed. He wept.

He denounced competitive religionists and cursed the barren fig tree, but we look in vain for any signs of joy. Fortunately, today there are no Christians.

There are people who attend churches and chapels, and these are a diminishing number.

H. IRVING.

### RATIONALISM IN AMERICA TODAY

(Concluded from page 307)

enough not only to develop a rationalist philosophy and to protect its own organisations and individuals, but to bring about a secular government free from clerical domination. It is possible with vital, democratic and alert societies that plan for the future instead of living in past greatness.

All American Freethinkers and Rationalists should take pride that the World Union of Freethinkers meets and stands for a common cause.

Diogenes once entered a temple and cracking a louse on the altar-rail, solemnly said, "Thus does Diogenes sacrifice to all the gods at once."

# THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.  
TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

All Articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

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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.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Room 4, 83 Suffolk Street, opposite West End Cinema).—Sunday, September 29th, 7 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Confessions of an Atheist."  
Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street).—Sunday, September 29th, 3 p.m.: J. P. MORRISON, "Bishops and Boodle."  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Thursday, October 3rd, 7.30 p.m.: MARGARET KNIGHT, M.A. (Department of Psychology, University of Aberdeen, author of *Morals Without Religion*), will give the 48th Conway Memorial Lecture, "Physique and Personality." Chairman, Dr. Julian Huxley, F.R.S.

### OUTDOOR

- 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 N.S.S. (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: D. SHIPPER.  
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

## Notes and News

WHEN Mrs. Margaret Knight comes to London at the beginning of October she will be kept very busy. On Thursday, October 3rd, at 7.30 p.m., she will give the 48th Conway Memorial Lecture in the Conway Hall. The lecture is organised by our friends of the South Place Ethical Society, and the Chairman is Dr. Julian Huxley. Then, on the following Sunday, Mrs. Knight will discuss the merits of Christianity and Scientific Humanism with Dr. Donald MacKay. This discussion is under the auspices of the West Ham and District Branch, National Secular Society, and will take place in Stratford Town Hall, London. Admission is free to both meetings.

WE welcome the formation of the Northern Ireland Rationalist Association in Belfast, and are pleased to note that several National Secular Society members were among the founders. After a mid-August informal gathering, the Association held its first proper meeting on September 3rd and its second on September 17th, when Mr. T. Yelland spoke on "Freethought." Northern Ireland, with its strong religious antagonisms, sorely needs an active freethinking group and we wish every success to the new Rationalist Association and to its Hon. Secretary, Mr. Richard Montague, 29 Lincoln Avenue, Antrim Road, Belfast.

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BRADFORD Branch, National Secular Society, reports a most successful season of outdoor lectures. These will continue for the present, but the Branch is now looking forward to its indoor meetings. The first will take place on Sunday, October 6th, when the speaker will be Mr. F. J. Corina. Mr. Corina will be visiting Glasgow to address the Society there on October 27th, but the Glasgow Secular Society begins its indoor meetings a month earlier—on Sunday, September 29th—when Mr. J. P. Morrison will speak on "Bishops and Boodle." Glasgow Secretary Mr. J. Barrowman asks readers to note this year's change from evening to afternoon meetings. The new time is 3 p.m., but the venue remains the same: Central Halls, 25 Bath Street. We hope Glaswegians will turn up in force.

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THANKS to the keenness of local Secretary Mr. W. Perkins, and the splendid support of Portsmouth Branch, Secularist propaganda is causing a stir in Worthing—and in the Sussex press. In order to draw people into the Society from neighbouring places, the possibility of a joint Brighton and Worthing Branch is now under consideration. Those who are interested should write to Mr. W. Perkins at Valley Holme, Grinstead Lane, Lancing, Sussex.

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ITV recently gave us Dr. Donald Soper dealing with a few dozen hecklers in quick-fire style. And nobody would wish to deny that Dr. Soper is a fine platform man (what sort of a Christian he really is, is another matter!) but for Mr. Bernard Levin of the *Manchester Guardian* (14/9/57) to write: "Now, unless my eyes and ears, as well as my information, are conspiring to deceive me, Dr. Soper had no notice of any of the questions; yet he kept up a running fire of replies that left me breathless in the rear," is strangely naïve. Does Mr. Levin believe that the programme was unprepared? Where does he think the "hecklers" were found? If he thinks they are members of the National Secular Society, he is well off the track, let alone in the rear. Mr. Levin might like to know that Dr. Soper declined to debate with a representative of the N.S.S. only a few months ago.

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It would unduly strain our limited space to refer every week to the local press controversies in which our readers and supporters are engaged in the freethought cause. Mr. O. C. Drewitt (till recently Father Norbert Drewitt) and his brother, Mr. Peter Drewitt, have been getting lengthy letters in the *Sussex Evening Argus* criticising the social influences of the Church today. In the *Barnsley Chronicle* Mr. Drewitt has made public his renunciation of religion. In the course of a letter he wrote: "I have already made it clear, both in *Tribune* and in *THE FREETHINKER*, that I have come down definitely on the humanist side after 20 years and have given up the title of priest." Incidentally, at Barnsley the latest controversy between freethinkers and Christians in the *Chronicle* sees Bible morality under fire from excellent letters by Mr. H. Irving of Barnsley and Mr. J. L. Shepherd of the N.S.S. Executive.

# Over to You!

By COLIN McCALL

WE ARE USED to tall stories from America. Even those who have never read Mark Twain or Artemus Ward, can hardly fail to have heard—via Mr. Walt Disney—of the fabulous deeds of Davy Crockett. But at least we know how to take them; and they are good fun as long as we don't take them too seriously. The latest American story I have heard seems almost as incredible as its predecessors, but I confess I don't know whether it is true or not.

It concerns President Eisenhower — and God! And the version I have in front of me is taken from the Canadian *Vancouver Sun* of June 25th 1957. It is, though, a reprint of an article by Philip Roth of *The New Republic*, Washington, D.C. To complicate matters, it is based on a report by Norman Vincent Peale (December 1956) which reads as follows: —

"He (Congressman Walter Judd of Minnesota) told me this fascinating story about President Eisenhower. Mrs. Judd had been having a visit with Mrs. Eisenhower who told her, 'Ike goes into bed, lies back on the pillow, and prays out loud, something like this: "Lord, I want to thank You for helping me today. You really stuck by me. I know, Lord, that I muffed a few and I'm sorry about that. But both the ones we did all right and the ones we muffed I am turning them all over to You. You take over from here. Good night, Lord, I'm going to sleep.'" And,' added the president's wife to Mrs. Judd, 'that is just what he does; he just turns over and goes to sleep . . .'"

Can it really be true? Or is it a case — as Huckleberry Finn put it—of "There was things he stretched but mainly he told the truth"? Mr. Roth rightly says that the deeply religious man generally speaks to his god with words of "awe, fear, and wonder;" in a "language of humility." But there is nothing of that here. The president "speaks each night to the Lord from the quiet of his bed," continues Mr. Roth, and "As the president himself is half way through his fifth year in office, it would perhaps be fitting to examine the short prayer which has helped to carry him through to the present, the prayer with which he attempts to crash through the barriers of flesh and finitude in his quest for communion with God."

It certainly would seem "fitting"; and you will be pleased to know that Mr. Roth proceeds with his examination in delightfully satiric vein. The "I and Thou" relationship that Martin Buber saw between man and God has been changed to the "more democratic" You and Me. The Lord, says Mr. Roth, "is not so much his shepherd, Mr. Eisenhower indicates, as his helper, his aide-de-camp. He is a kind of celestial secretary of state, and one who apparently knows his place in the chain of command; it is quite clearly stated, 'You stuck by me' and not 'I stuck by you.'" Mr. Roth finds some difficulty with the next sentence in the prayer, particularly over "a few." "A few what?" he asks with some justification. But he quickly admits that "such questions are academic, for God would doubtless know precisely the decisions to which Mr. Eisenhower is alluding," seeing that the two work hand in hand. "The vision of a soul alone in the night confessing to his God that he has failed Him is in a way the tragic vision, the supreme gesture of humility and courage," says Mr. Roth. But he also detects a less noble attitude. To admit failure is one thing; "to sneak out on a partnership is another." One should think that partners "must pay the debts just as they shared the profits together."

*Ethically*, of course, Mr. Roth is right; but surely this is a *political* problem. And I feel that Mr. Roth has hardly

done justice to the president's side of the case. Behind the seeming arrogance, beneath the apparent absurdity, I glimpse a certain rationality: not perhaps *your* rationality; not, I hope, *my* rationality, but rationality of a sort. If I were asked to say *what* sort, I think I should refer you to *Primitive Culture*, where Sir E. B. Tylor showed that the animistic savage, crude as he is, is more logical than the modern spiritualist. The former believes the spirits are in everything and responsible for everything; the latter relegates them to a minor role beyond the realm of ordinary knowledge. The former is consistent: the latter is not.

Well, President Eisenhower as revealed in Mrs. Eisenhower's words (via Mrs. Judd and Messrs. Judd, Peale and Roth) strikes me as consistent too. Primitively consistent, if you like; but consistent nevertheless.

Consider the recently adopted official motto of the United States: "In God We Trust." We have probably seen it halo-ing the head of the Statue of Liberty on the American 3 cents and 8 cents stamps—and maybe some others. Do you see the consistency now? America—or the American government; and in either case this includes the President—puts its trust in God. At least it does so on its stamps and in speech—in theory, as it were. I have strong doubts, mind you, whether it does so in practice, despite the avowed religious opinions of the Dulleses and the Lucases.

It is precisely because of this gulf between theory and practice that President Eisenhower may seem in one respect to be acting against American principles when he puts *all* his faith in God (and this most passive of Presidents really seems to do so sometimes), but he is acting consistently towards God and that must surely be considered more important. I am prepared to believe that even the late Senator Joseph McCarthy regarded inconsistency towards God as a worse crime than un-American activities. Let us get things in their right perspective. God must come first, and if a nation places its trust in Him, I assert that it is perfectly logical for that nation to turn its unsolved problems over to Him, daily, weekly, or annually. But I do not answer for the consequences.

## The Aesthetic Argument

WHERE do some religious people get the notion that aesthetic values prove the existence of a god?

What they apparently mean is that beautiful objects suggest a nice god.

It is conveniently comforting to overlook the ugly facts of nature, all the bestial cruelty and chaos in the universe. Myths about parthenogenesis, little stories about "Bethlehem" and sexless cherubs are so much more enjoyable than the facts of Hiroshima or the executions in Kenya.

In any case, aesthetic values never rationally implied the existence of a deity. They are bound up with the phenomenal world and give no clue whatever to any "transcendental object."

In a society of atheists beauty will remain, and aesthetic values can be trusted to look after themselves.

The universe is not altogether nice, anyway, and we are not going to make it objectively worse by ridding humanity of illusions. Conversely, phantasies will not improve it.

Moreover, we don't want to be happy infants, but rational human beings, and the entire cumulative evidence of science—including, and perhaps above all, biology and psychology—is unfavourable to religion. O. C. DREWITT.

# Paris 1957

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

THE 32ND INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS of Freethinkers, organised by the present international body, and fourth to be held at Paris, met in the Saulnier Hall, adjoining the Grand Orient (not far from the Folies Bergères and the Sacré Cœur). The first public event was the meeting on Friday evening, September 6th, when leaders from different countries spoke on "Freethought and Today's Problems" in a packed hall. The President duly presided and the speakers, Maître Jean Gremling, that remarkable young man from Luxemburg, once prominent in the "resistance," now a leading barrister and one of his country's delegates to Benelux; Belgian ex-Senator and ex-miner, Arnold Boulanger, carrying his 82 years like a rock; French engineer and savant Jean Cotereau; and orator printer André Lorulot, who had risen from a sick-bed to attend the Congress, appealed for courage, patience and unrelaxing effort in the face of forces making for international dissension and threatening war. The second Congress to be held at Paris, the audience was reminded, was attended by few (in 1900), but five years later the Congress, again at Paris, marched in a triumphal procession of one hundred thousand from the hall where they were meeting to the slopes of Montmartre, where rises today the Sacré Cœur, to inaugurate the monument to that Chevalier de la Barre judicially murdered in 1766 for failing to salute a religious procession and for quoting Voltaire. The 400 present in 1957 might be again 100,000 in 1962 given favourable circumstances. Lorulot was the only one of the speakers who had been present at that memorable Congress of 1905.

On Saturday, after listening to reports from the officers, Congress appointed two of its members to check the Treasurer's statement, adopted a revised set of regulations proposed by the Committee, elected the new Committee to operate till the next Congress (De Ronde retiring, McCall was elected in his place), and then settled down to hear reports on the Freethought situation in the different countries represented: Finland, Italy, New Zealand, Belgium, United States, France, Great Britain, Germany, Austria, Mexico, India, and Holland. We also had reports touching on the position in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia, and Israel, in all of which countries freethinking propaganda has been suppressed; in Israel apparently all marriages not consecrated in a temple of some kind (synagogue, mosque, church) have been declared unrecognised legally and the children illegitimate. These enlightening reports took some time and were not completed till Monday afternoon. In the meantime, on Saturday evening the Seine Federation (the hosts and organisers of the Congress) offered to us a *vin d'honneur*, a warm welcome and a very friendly evening. On Sunday the main subject was "The Vatican Concordats and U.N.O." As the great Italian jurist Finocchiaro-Aprile had been unable—owing to illness and age (he is 83)—to make the journey to Paris, N.S.S. President F. A. Ridley provided the main report (which has already appeared in the columns of THE FREETHINKER, and is a very noteworthy piece of work), which was followed by interesting additions from Germany and Austria. Sunday afternoon we were frequently photographed. Out of doors the rain fell unrelentingly from Saturday noon till Sunday evening, but in the Salle Saulnier all was sunny.

The vast subject of the world's population was presented to us by Professor Chandrasekhar (who arrived in Paris from Madras on Sunday evening and left for New York on Tuesday morning) in a very lively discourse; by Prof. M. Kahane, who had just returned from China and related

what he had seen and learned there; by Prof. Wolff and André Lorulot, calling for the genuine emancipation of women in all countries; and encyclopædically and massively by Jean Cotereau. By Monday afternoon the Congress was beginning to feel that the world was overcrowded, but had still fire enough to challenge the wording of the resolutions proposed by the Resolutions Committee. The Committee stood up to the challenge, and finally the two resolutions (the text will be given in full later) were adopted in their words. The President brought the Congress to a close about 6 p.m. The new Committee met straightaway and decided to hold the next Congress at Brussels in 1959, combined with the celebration of the centenary of the birth and demi-centenary of the martyrdom of Francisco Ferrer (whose daughter, Mme. Ferrer Vilar, was present at the Congress). The subjects to be discussed will be "Science and Freethought" and "Religious Instruction in Schools."

The dinner which followed at 8.30 p.m. at the Cercle Républicain, where the clock was dominated by a figure of Gambetta, was a very satisfying feast, with varied oratory in many languages and accents, all jolly.

## From Ghana

AT A CONFERENCE in the Ghana Legion Hall in Koforidua on Sunday, 4/8/57, the Ghana Rationalist Group was officially inaugurated.

Election of officers resulted in Dr. G. Saunders (of Kumasi) becoming President and Lieut. R. C. Hewlett, Secretary. Local secretaries were also appointed for the Accra, Western, Ashanti and Eastern regions. It was decided to adopt the Memorandum and Articles of the R.P.A., but to modify these to suit conditions in Ghana.

Opening the discussion, Lieut. Hewlett stated the objects of the Association: 1, To encourage a rational approach to human problems; 2, To promote the maximum use of science for human welfare; and 3, To defend freedom of thought and civil liberties;—and stated that the immediate task would be to "create in the public mind doubts about religious beliefs and superstition."

Dr. Saunders maintained that Ghana owes a "deep debt of gratitude to the missions" and that for the present the organisation must not be violently anti-anything, thus arousing hostility. It was decided that an *aggressive* policy be initiated for a membership drive and booksellers be encouraged to sell rationalist literature.

Sympathetic masters in colleges should be approached, as it was felt that colleges were a fertile field for recruitment. It was decided that propaganda work could take the following forms: 1, Lectures; 2, Radio broadcasts; 3, Letters in the local press. Suggested topics were rationalist views on libation, local customs, etc.

Accra secretary Mr. K. Y. Attoh was requested to contact the local radio authorities with a view to arranging the participation of members in the popular "Seconds Out" programme. It was decided to form a members' library at Koforidua for those who wished to order certain books. In the afternoon session Dr. Saunders lectured on "The Ethical Value of Materialism" and Lieut. R. C. K. Hewlett on "Humanism and God." It is always pleasing to see the emergence of a new group, especially in a new country, and the Ghana Rationalist Group certainly seem to be embarking on an active and ambitious programme. We wish them every success.

D.S.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## HAIR-SPLITTING

Mr. Dent's hair-splitting is characteristic of those who deem their Atheism the sum total of Freethought. Had I said that the forward thrust, at a sufficient speed, of an airplane of a certain wing-contour and weight, would create a vacuum into which naturally it will rise, would I have to say "I believe"?

I am quite certain that, after considering the delicate balance and the intricate co-ordination of the components of the amazing Cosmos of which I am a part, I have with me all the force of human logic to support my flat assertion that there is a "Something" behind it all.

Though I can neither define it, locate it, nor give it a name, like the laws of aerodynamics, it is indisputably there. Knowledge of it, of course, is so remote that discussion of it is mere playing with words.

ARTHUR B. HEWSON.

## IS THERE A GOD?

It matters little whether few or many believe in the existence of a God. It is not a question of majorities, but of sound evidence. Each of us possesses five senses with which to weigh the evidence and if we are unbiased *free* thinkers—and every person should be—why do we differ?

Only two alternatives face us. We must either decide in favour of a powerful and intelligent Ruler of the Universe, or in "blind chance." But in view of the law and order that is operating everywhere, blind chance is unthinkable. We do not see God *physically*. But what Paul calls "eternal power and Godhead" can be *clearly seen*, being *understood* by the things that are *made*." (Rom. 1: 19, 20.) For this reason Paul could find "no excuse" for people not believing in God's existence; neither can I. Nature *reveals* Him. Blind chance reveals nothing.

Our earth is not an independent unit. As is stated in James 1: 17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is *from above*, and cometh down from the Father of Light (sun, moon and stars) by means of which God (or blind chance?) gives "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night," which, said God, "shall not cease as long as the earth remaineth." Gen. 8: 22. Only "eternal power," etc, could promise that.

The Athenians of 2,000 years ago were persuaded by nature that a God existed, for they erected an altar "To the unknown God." Paul declared Him unto them in Acts 17: 22-31. *They* did some freethinking. "Go *thou* and do likewise." W. MILLS.

## GHANA BAPTISM

Just compare the following naming or "christening" custom of my tribe, the Fantis of Ghana, with baptism of Christianity, and judge which of the two is more intelligible. Unfortunately, the Christian latter is steadily ousting and obliterating the former. And the same is true of many other ethically beautiful and fruitful customs.

Parents select a name of this or that relative or clan member whose character or outstanding qualities the infant is supposed to emulate in life. Relatives and clan members assemble. The Head of the clan or a clan uncle or aunt places the infant on his or her lap. Then commences the essential part of the "naming."

Calling the infant by the name chosen by the parents, he or she dips the tip of a finger in water and dropping it on the tongue of the smiling, crying or indifferent child, says: "Kofi, if you say water, it is water." He does this thrice. He then repeats the same thrice with wine, saying: "Kofi, if you say wine, it is wine."

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After this, wine and refreshments are served round and healthy cordial jokes pour out in warm fellowship and presents are handed out to the baby.

The meaning of the water and wine ceremony is this. The baby is a human being. Therefore if he grows up, he must realise that if he says that this thing is water he must mean nothing else but what he has said. If he says something is wine he must not mean that it is water and not wine. In other words, he must recognise the principle of identity. He must be honest and true to his words and adhere to his convictions and what he says. He must not say one thing and mean another.

The water also symbolises meekness, the wine strength. These he must blend. He must be firm or yielding as the occasion demands.

Now, instead of this very commendable, fruitful and beautiful custom, what is now becoming prevalent among my people is giving a child a name of a saint (someone who lived hundreds of years ago in another part of the world and amidst different circumstances and environment and whose biography may be packed with miracle), and pouring water on the child's forehead and saying "I baptise thee in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

ERNEST GRAVES-ABAY-IE (Ghana).

## A NEW POLISH JOURNAL

Dr. Andrzej Nowicki, President of the Polish Society of Atheists and Freethinkers, has sent me two copies of the Society's 16-page magazine (a little larger than THE FREETHINKER page size), *Biuletyn*.

The magazine features articles and news of the movement and gives a free advertisement to the German *Der Freidenker*, the *American Rationalist* and the *Bulletin* of the Manchester Branch N.S.S.

DAVE SHIPPER.

## N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18TH.—Present: Messrs. Ridley (Chairman), Alexander, Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Gordon, Johnson, Pustan, Taylor, Warner, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Ebury, Hornibrook, Shepherd and Mrs. Venton. New members were admitted to the Edinburgh, Portsmouth, West London and Worthing Branches. With new individual members these numbered 10. It was agreed to produce Mr. Ridley's *Problems of Church and State* in pamphlet, and Mr. Taylor's *Religious Revival* in leaflet form. The President and Secretary reported on the World Union of Freethinkers Congress in Paris. The formation of a Northern Ireland Rationalist Association was noted with pleasure; lecture expenses for Glasgow, Manchester, and Wales and Western Branches were agreed. Arrangements for Mrs. Knight's discussion and Mr. Drewitt's lecture were given. Dinner and Conference matters were also considered. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, October 23rd, 1957.

## OBITUARY

ETHEL LOUISA ALMOND was a charming woman, loved and respected in East Grinstead, and her death is a sad loss to the Freethought movement, for she was always staunch and forthright in the expression of her views. At her own and her husband's wishes a secular service was conducted at Crawley Crematorium by Mr. J. W. Barker, of the Kingston Branch N.S.S. Mr. Almond, to whom we send our sincere sympathy, tells us that religious people present were impressed by the service. Mrs. Almond was 73.

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