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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Mexico—A Secular State

IN general, the history of Latin America since its liberation from the Spanish yoke, has not been a very edifying one. The clerical oppression, the almost medieval power, political, economic and cultural, of the Roman Catholic Church, until recent times the only legal religion throughout the sub-continent conjoined with an out-of-date feudal economic system and geographical isolation have kept Latin America priest-ridden and illiterate down to our own times. The "dead hand" of the Catholic Church which owned some 40-50 per cent. of the land in South and Central America, combined with an effete and reactionary agrarian oligarchy closely allied with the Church to prolong the sway of medievalism in the Americas under very similar conditions to those which existed in medieval Europe.

There is, however, one Latin American Republic which represents a striking exception to the state of things depicted above. Formerly one of the most backward and priest-ridden lands in the world, the Republic of Mexico has staged in our own lifetime one of the most remarkable anti-clerical and social revolutions in modern history. The political and intellectual progress made by Mexico since the First World War has been so amazing that from the standpoint of Freethinkers and of social radicals Mexico may well be regarded as the most progressive country in the world to-day. It has always appeared to us rather surprising that this remarkable experiment in social progress and applied secularism has attracted so little attention this side of the Atlantic even amongst thinkers who cherish broadly identical views with those so brilliantly exemplified and put into practice by the Mexican revolution.

It would be probably true to say that Mexico, in proportion to its far more limited resources, has achieved as much social progress as Soviet Russia and the "New Democracies" of Eastern Europe, whilst avoiding that quasi-religious fanaticism and ruthless suppression of opposition opinion of every shade which makes certain aspects of the present Soviet regime so distasteful to many who otherwise are broadly sympathetic with its ultimate social ideals. In present day Mexico, complete political and cultural democracy exists, and a generous asylum is provided for European refugees of all political complexions. Whilst in religious matters, the classic secularist principle of absolute equality of opinion before the law; "a free church in a free state," is, thanks to the Mexican Revolution, rigidly applied.

The world-wide howl of horror against "godless Mexico" vociferously raised by the former master of Mexico, the Roman Catholic Church, constitutes the most effective possible testimonial to the efficacy of this rationalist principle as accepted and put into practical effect by the "Laic" Republic, the present day constitution of which corresponds almost exactly with the aims advanced here for the past eighty years by the National Secular Society.

It has not always been like this in Mexico. Far from it! In fact, ever since Cortez conquered Mexico with incredible cruelty in 1519-21, the former Spanish colony was ruled by a close oligarchy in both Church and State which conformed to the general pattern in the Spanish colonial empire "upon which the sun never set."\*

In the Mexican colonial set-up in the empire of "the most Catholic King of Spain and the Indies," the lion's share went to the Church, which not only owned some 40 per cent. of the land but exercised concurrently a complete religious and cultural dictatorship.

In 1572, the Spanish Inquisition was introduced into Mexico. In 1664 even the pious municipality of Mexico had to petition the then King of Spain to prohibit the ordination of more priests as there were already 6,000 unemployed clergy. The whole educational system remained entirely controlled by Rome throughout the three centuries of Spanish rule. Alongside of the Church was a small oligarchy of enormously rich landlords, mostly permanent absentees from their vast estates. This co-operative of exploitation lived and waxed fat on clerically-imposed ignorance and on the ruthlessly oppressed masses of poverty-stricken Indian serfs.

To add to the spiritual blessedness of this clerical paradise, the Blessed Virgin appeared at Guadeloupe, in Mexico, to give her Divine Blessing to the whole social order some time before she deigned to put in an appearance in the Old World at Lourdes and Fatima!

The political revolution which put an end to Spanish rule under the inspiration of the French and American Revolutions, did not at first make much difference to the clerical regime which remained in force substantially unaltered throughout most of Latin America down to the present century. In Mexico, however, a small group of courageous individuals inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution, carried through laws in Congress in 1833-4 which deprived the Catholic Church both of its educational monopoly and its medieval exemption from taxation. A little later came that great statesman, Benito Juarez, a full-blooded Indian, who is now regarded in Mexico as Abraham Lincoln is in U.S.A. In the '50s the "Ley Juarez" compelled the Church to alienate all land not directly used for religious purposes; in itself, a social revolution in view of the Church's vast possessions. A beginning was also made of introducing democratic institutions.

The Catholic Church reacted promptly. Using its international diplomacy it provoked an armed invasion of Mexico by Louis Buonaparte, "Napoleon the Little" as Victor Hugo called him. The French took Mexico City and Napoleon made a pious Austrian prince, Archduke Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico, under whom the Church reimposed its "dead hand." However, the Mexican patriots under President Juarez, supported by U.S.A. due to the Monroe Doctrine which prohibits European intervention in the Americas, eventually

\* An arrogant description of its world wide sovereignty first coined by the Spanish, not the British Empire.



reconquered the country and Napoleon's puppet-emperor was shot; a "crime" which provoked a ferocious denunciation by the Vatican.

Despite this setback, Catholicism managed to retain much of its former influence until the present century when a series of presidents, Obregon, Calles, and Cardenas, carried through an anti-clerical democratic revolution. Church and State have been completely separated, secular education is now controlled by the State and is free and universal: the all but universal illiteracy has been virtually abolished. The vast estates of the Church and of its close allies the feudal landlords, have been secularised or broken up amongst the former landless Indian peons, a social system of radical democracy has been established.

In international affairs Mexico has been equally progressive. She was the only non-Communist country actively to support the Spanish Republic. Whilst during the recent World War, Mexico was an ever-open and generous refuge for Hitler's victims.

All this progress was not achieved without the most violent opposition on the part of the Church of Rome, which has never had the reputation for lightly letting go its prey. The Catholic world press rang, and still rings with denunciations of "godless Mexico" and its sacrifice in "despoiling" the Church. Gifted English novelists, such as Grahame Green, who ought to know better, swell the chorus. Nor did Rome stop at words. Catholic inspired generals took up arms for "King Christ" against the "Masonic" Republic. President Obregon was actually murdered by a Catholic fanatic. The American Catholic hierarchy tried to provoke the intervention of the U.S.A. In 1936, Cardinal Pacelli, then Papal Secretary of State, now Pius XII, personally exerted himself to bring about a clerical fascist revolt in Mexico.

All in vain! The Mexican Revolution still unfinished, continues. It constitutes one of the brightest chapters in the history of our tormented and frustrated age.

F. A. RIDLEY.

## THE ILL-STARRED HAPSBURGS

*TRAGIC EMPRESS* is an excellent translation by H. J. Stenning of Maurice Paléologue's *Empress of Austria* (Saturn Press, 1950, 8s. 6d.). There are seven fine plates in this fascinating volume and it is also enriched by brief sketches of the leading personalities whose careers coincided with the lives of the tragic actors in this dark drama in Austrian history. One cannot help recalling Shakespeare's reflection that "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," when perusing this book's sombre pages, while the tragic events it records reveal the truth that we are all the creatures of the force of circumstances over which we have little or no control.

Elizabeth Amelia, Duchess of Bavaria, was wedded to the Austro-Hungarian ruler, Francis Joseph, in 1854. The bride was a girl of striking personal beauty and superior intellect, but unfortunately she was the offspring of a family long tainted with insanity. Her husband's mother, the Archduchess Sophie, was very adverse to her son's marriage with Elizabeth and was furious when her objections were disregarded. Ascending the Austrian throne at the age of 18, the Emperor's foreign and domestic policy was mainly dictated by his domineering mother and her favourite officials. In fact, for the first time in his life, Francis Joseph defied his mother when he chose a wife for himself.

The splendours of the marriage ceremony were impressive, but the new Empress soon sickened of stiff court ceremonial and sighed for freedom. Also, her husband, long familiar with illicit intercourse, treated his sensitive bride too roughly. As our author observes: "On the marriage night he had virtually raped her with impetuous ardour. And this brusque initiation had left her, for a long time, wounded, mistrustful, restive and disenchanted."

Naturally, she soon resented the tyranny of her mother-in-law as well as the traditional Court etiquette. The advanced books she read were thought improper in a pious Empress, while her unconventional conduct scandalised all who bowed before the shrine of Mrs Grundy. Then she was expected to give birth to a boy, whereas two girls appeared before her ill-omened son, Rudolf, was born. Coming from Catholic Bavaria, as she did, in Romanist eyes her latitudinarian propensities "profoundly shocked the sectarian and militant puritanism of the Archduchess." So the Empress sought consolation in travel and her tour in Italy proved one of the few happy periods of her wedded life.

Throughout the recurring troubles that beset the then Austro-Hungarian Empire, Elizabeth's tact and courage lessened the anxieties of her husband. But the complete failure of his foreign policy and his pitiful submission to maternal interference, greatly lowered him in Elizabeth's estimation, until her disillusionment became complete.

In 1860 her family's hereditary ailment was made manifest and her sufferings were so severe that her life appeared endangered. Her physicians diagnosed her disease as tubercular and she proceeded to Madeira. There she regained composure through her readings of Shelley, Shakespeare, Leopardi, Keats, Schopenhauer and Heine, as well as the writings of other celebrated authors. On her return to Vienna, her mysterious malady returned, so her doctors sent her to Corfu, where serenity was for the time restored. But when returning to Vienna she found that the autocratic and officious Archduchess had virtually taken possession of her two surviving children and the elder woman's positive refusal to surrender them to their mother's custody and control led to a very bitter quarrel and estrangement. As the Emperor supported his mother, the Empress decided to leave the Capital and never return. Then, despite her entreaties, the only concession the Empress would make was the promise of an occasional reappearance in Vienna for special ceremonial celebrations. Thus, the world might see that her marriage bonds, had not been irrevocably broken.

Elizabeth's experiences had caused her to become a convinced fatalist. She declared that: "Politics do not interest me; they are only a ridiculous make-believe. Statesmen think they are shaping events. What nonsense! Everything that happens is the result of what has gone before." Also, when in her most disconsolate mood she frequently cited Macbeth's despairing description of human life as a walking shadow, "a poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Austrian defeats at Magenta and Solferino in 1859 and the disaster at Sadowa in 1866, were a terrible humiliation to the Empire. Yet Elizabeth played the predominant part in reconciling Hungary with Austria and the Ausgleich was consummated when Francis Joseph and his Empress were crowned as King and Queen of Hungary in 1867, at Buda.



When charged with the disasters that had overtaken Austria, the Archduchess Sophie became very unpopular and retired in a sullen temper. The Empress then removed all the fallen Sophie's adherents from the Viennese Court. Meanwhile, Elizabeth had become an object of idolatry in Hungary where she paid long visits to the magnificent residence and estate the Hungarian authorities had given her.

Comparative cheerfulness alternated with feelings of deep depression and Elizabeth's interminable travels brought no permanent relief. Then she manifested a morbid desire to watch the antics of the insane. She even incurred danger from the attacks of raving lunatics and, while in London, spent long hours in Bethlehem Hospital for the mentally deranged.

Her son, Prince Rudolph, now a young man, displayed marked intellectual ability and his range of interests was remarkable. Traditional political and religious beliefs he renounced. This unconventional behaviour in the heir-apparent to the Austrian Crown alarmed and bewildered his pious and pedantic father. He entered the army and, despite his mother's disapproval, young Rudolph was betrothed by the Emperor to a daughter of Leopold II. But the bridegroom's attitude towards his bride was one of utter indifference as their dismal "honeymoon" clearly showed. Still, he remained firmly convinced of the need for a reconstructed Austrian Empire, which he wished to remodel on French or British principles. Again, to the scandal of the Court, he openly fraternised with journalists, financiers, Jews and other unfashionable people. The Archduke's plans were submitted to the Empress Elizabeth who proved indulgent, if sceptical. Her mournful conclusions she conveyed to her son when she said: "Fate holds nothing in store for Austria but dire calamities. No power on earth can avert the coming catastrophe." This was a prediction only too completely fulfilled.

The death of Ludwig II of Bavaria was a stunning blow to Elizabeth, for to him she grew greatly attached. Meanwhile, Rudolph, a highly sexed youth, had become more and more familiar with the haunts of vice for which Vienna had long been notorious. His neglected wife feared for his sanity and was aware that he had contracted venereal disease. He constantly dwelt on the delights of voluntary death, but when she expressed her fears to the Emperor he dismissed them as imaginary.

Paradoxically enough, Elizabeth decided that her long absences were unfair to her husband and she recommended an actress as a substitute for a wife. This arrangement was made and apparently to the satisfaction of all concerned. Rudolph's dissipations, however, terminated tragically. His unconcealed relations with Marie Vetsera, a girl of sixteen, caused so much scandal that the exasperated Emperor threatened to disinherit him unless he forsook her. Rudolph was granted a farewell visit to Marie, but when at dawn his attendant went to awaken him, he found the door locked and barred. Alarm spread among the Crown Prince's servants and when at last the door was forced open, two dead and nearly naked bodies were found lying on the bed. "The whole appearance of the room suggested that Rudolph had killed Marie Vetsera before turning the revolver on himself."

The nature of the tragedy was for a time concealed and Elizabeth again sought serenity in travel when, in 1898, at Geneva, while she was strolling on the pier, an Italian Anarchist stabbed her to death.

### CHRISTENDOM IN GERMANY—NOT SO UNITED

Monsignor Ludwig Münch, Apostolic Nunzio *pro tem.* with the Bonn Republic, sounds a worried note in his reports to the Holy See.

In many respects, the partition of Germany suits the Vatican book. It was a hard blow to Roman Catholicism when in 1918, after the First World War, the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy of the Habsburgs fell to pieces; this arch-Catholic realm had always been the strongest pillar of the Vatican. The Pope therefore schemed that Western Germany might make up for the loss of the Austrian bulwark in Europe, if properly severed from the Protestant Eastern part of Germany. With the majority of the inhabitants of the West being Catholics, its policies would be mainly determined and guided by devout Catholics, but in addition it would constitute what could be considered to be the nucleus to attract all Catholics from Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary for the formation of their political union. This great political confederation should be given back to the rule of the Habsburgs.

The realisation of these plans was entrusted to Cardinal Juitzer of Vienna, Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich, the Primate of Germany, and Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, the plot became doomed to failure, however, through the political developments in Czechoslovakia and Hungary that could not have been foreseen then.

With Adenauer as a pliable tool in their hands, the Vatican tries to engulf the German Protestants as well.

The Protestants in Western Germany, in their overall majority, are the leaders of that Liberal Party of Financial Magnates to which Theodore Heuss, the President of the German Federal Republic, belongs. They quite naturally look towards union with Eastern Germany as a means of protection against Catholic predominance and arrogance.

Martin Niemöller, chairman of the Protestant Church of Hesse, had the courage openly to assert that "the Bonn Republic had been hatched out in Vatican City with Myron Taylor as match-maker." As their latest step to bolster up this shaky Church dependence, the State Department collected by plane the Jesuit Riccardo Lombardi and brought this famous missionary orator speedily to Frankfurt for an intense propaganda campaign.

Abridged translation from "Don Basilio," by P.G.R.

### TO THE ORTHODOX

Down on the Square a preacher stands  
Thumping his Bible and waving his hands,  
Bidding the people to "Come to God"  
And bow beneath "His Chastening Rod."  
The people pause, then shuffle past  
Faces averted, with eyes downcast;  
The preacher halts whilst his comrades there  
Pour out a hymn on the darkening air.  
"Peace on Earth, Goodwill to man"—  
Was how the quavering song began;  
I shook my head and sadly thought  
What "gods" had on poor mankind wrought.  
I thought on tortures foul and black,  
On Smithfield, thumbscrew and the rack.  
On Torquemadas fearful power,  
On groans and shrieks from many a tower,  
Where priests of God with fiendish gloat  
Leered with glee on the mangled throat  
Of the victim—a mother's only son,  
Bereft of life ere half begun.  
I mused on murders mounting pace  
On Judah's luckless hunted race,  
My thoughts sped on to son or wife  
Victims of the priestly knife;  
Of gods insatiate, a thirst for gore  
Of Baal and Moloch and of more,  
Of Aztec gods (of whom the World's well rid)  
Whose victims skulls formed one vast pyramid;  
Of gods of Earth, of Sun, of Fish and tree  
Of gods grotesque and great variety.  
Such were my thoughts when from the Square  
I heard the preacher ranting there.  
But though he shouted loud and long  
And roared upon the passing throng,  
They each one to his consternation  
Declined the proffered invitation;  
Doubtless deeming of greater worth  
The things pertaining to the Earth,  
Than placing either hope or store  
In Superstition's worthless lore.



## ACID DROPS

**The Church Missionary Society** is suffering very badly in two ways. The first is, that people are not stumping up as much as they did to provide African and other natives with braces and a Bible; and the second, is that "there is a lamentable lack of recruits." The glory of Christ in an African kraal in a jungle no longer appeals to that spirit of adventure which gave us David Livingstone. There was also a deficit in the income of the C.M.S. last year of £49,000, and lack of recruits "threatens our very existence," lamented the president of the Society, Mr. Grubb. He considered "something has ebbed from the life of the nation." Perhaps the nation is now determined it will no longer be hard-earned cash.

**The organisers of the Festival of Britain** have some qualms of uneasiness regarding its opening on a Sunday next year. *Reynolds News* reports that if the exhibition and the amusement park section is shut on Sundays, the financial loss will be great. The "bogey" responsible for the jitters is our old friend "Misery Martin," that energetic but misguided secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society, whose successes lately have made him quite confident of being able to stop the so-called desecration of the Sabbath when the Festival opens next year.

**There is but one way** to spike the guns of "Misery": a determined effort must be made to overhaul the Sunday Observance Acts before 1951. This could be done despite Misery's contention that over 400 M.P.s are against the legalisation of Sunday amusements, for no politician will risk losing his seat by going against the wishes of his constituents; politicians follow public opinion, they do not lead. The remedy is in your hands.

**A "Biologist"** writes in the *Church of England Newspaper* that "in almost any evolutionary view, a first man, indeed, a first pair (whom we may call Adam and Eve), are a biological necessity." How one can even think of a "first man" is rather difficult, but to a "Christian" biologist this is simple. The fact that Adam and Eve were created perfect, and we, their descendants, have "fallen," may be good theology, but it is damned bad biology.

**A few Roman Catholic typists**, we understand, influenced General MacArthur in refusing to allow the Japanese any birth control information, though we also understand that the general himself is devoutly religious. We now note that the Vatican paper, the *Osservatore Romano*, is hotly attacking the United Nations for suggesting that a little birth control information might improve living standards in congested and poverty-stricken areas. Better a thousand times that children starve to death than help to keep their numbers down in the best and safest way. Yet we are often asked, why do we attack the Church of Rome (which never, never does any harm)?

"**The fewer threats** in the religious class the better," insisted a London woman teacher the other day. As she is a Catholic, she must have spoken with knowledge—that is, she must have known how the children are regularly threatened in classes where the beautiful, simple story of gentle Jesus is always being told, or perhaps we ought to say, we think it is told. But have not children always been threatened in the name of Jesus? How many saintly ministers of the Word can

manage to avoid any reference to the Devil and his Hell when teaching religion?

**We note**, that the *Universe* has reprinted Chesterton's story that he had lunch with "half-a-dozen British scientists," all Atheists, of course, and they all carried about with them a favourite mascot, a lucky charm, or a ju-ju. Needless to add, Chesterton's deep sympathy prevented him from giving us any names and so, alas, it is quite impossible to find out whether the eminent Catholic convert was pulling our legs, or merely just lying. Perhaps he told the story to detract attention from the fact that he, like almost all Catholics, really did carry about some silly lucky charm, say, a coin blessed by a priest, or a string of cheap beads (i.e. a rosary), or even an old bone called a "holy" relic.

**About eighteen "scientists"** are studying the "Holy" Shroud to find out why it has an image of "our Lord" impressed upon it, though other believers have got at the truth with a delightful short cut. The Shroud was shown to Teresa Neumann, the Bavarian woman who goes into a fit of religious ecstasy every Friday. Immediately she saw it, she declared, "That is our dear Lord." If that does not settle the problem, no matter to what conclusions the scientists come, then we suggest she should be given the sack. Of what earthly use is a mystic who cannot settle such a little problem?

**What awkward questions** Catholics ask, to be sure! Here is one of them who asks the *Universe* for information about St. Joseph, and is flatly told there isn't any. All that the world knows about this old gentleman who married a girl of 15, and was told by an angel in a dream that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Ghost, is found in the Gospels, and even there we get precious little else. So little, in fact, that there are actually unbelieving materialists who declare that Joseph is just fiction like Mary and Jesus. But it would never do to let the sheep hear such awful blasphemy.

**The eightieth birthday celebrations** took place, the other day, of the Christian Evidence Society, with the Archbishop of Canterbury in the chair. In the past, we used to get very little evidence from its platform, if any at all; but we agree that it always was a commodity most difficult to gather. In any case, Dr. Fisher seemed rather dissatisfied, for he wants the evidence (if any) given with confidence, and not in "the jargon which the clergy too readily employ."

**Dr. Fisher went even further.** He claimed that for 100 years Christianity has been on the defensive, but was now high time for its message to be delivered in the spirit of assertion. We don't mind either way, whether Christianity is asserted, or merely defended, if there is no evidence whatever that it is true. And the C.E.S., in 80 years, has not discovered any. It should be added that the Secretary—as usual—wants more money to find the evidence, or to pay very reluctant clergy goodly sums to declare they have some, when they quite well know they haven't. So far the clergy are not available.

**Hot Gospellers invaded Bermondsey** public houses to recruit people to church last week. The missionaries claimed to have visited seven pubs before closing time. But what worries us is, did they pay for their own drinks?



# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

Messrs. Watts and Co. have asked us to point out that Prof. B. Farrington's Conway Memorial Lecture *Has History a Meaning?* is published, not by them, but by the South Place Ethical Society. We greatly regret the error.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIDENKER (Switzerland), DON BASILIO (Italy).

## SUGAR PLUMS

Only one more week to the National Secular Society's Annual Conference at Sheffield, and by now names and addresses of delegates, with details of hotel accommodation required, should have been sent to the General Secretary at 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1. Members of the N.S.S., other than delegates, who intend to be present at the Conference should see that their current card of membership is available for gaining entry into the business sessions, also that their hotel accommodation has been booked.

International Summer School, World Union of Free-thinkers, Dinard, Brittany, September 3rd-9th, 1950, at the Hotel de l'Univers (inclusive daily charge 800 frs. apart from beverages). Assemble on Saturday 2nd and Sunday 3rd; 4th to 8th daily excursions either in the neighbourhood or by boat down the Rance, or farther, with halts for discussion of freethought problems in French and English; 9th and 10th disperse. As the places are strictly limited, please apply without delay to: C. Bradlaugh Bonner, 4, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C. 4. The return fare from London to Dinard is £6 17s. 6d. third class. Passports are required, and a Bank of England permit to obtain French money (a Bank or a Travel Agent will see to this).

Mr. J. Clayton reports some very successful open air meetings, especially one held in Blackburn Market. We also receive at the office unsolicited testimonials to the excellent work being done by Messrs. Clayton and Brighton in their respective areas. They both have enthusiasm, information and personality, and are always an acquisition to our platform.

If we have had occasion to observe casually (and even Homer nods) that Shakespeare was a Freethinker, we are immediately inundated with protesting letters to the effect that it was not Shakespeare who wrote the Plays, but someone else! However, blood-pressures can now be lowered, and the age-old question may yet be settled—perhaps! For the *Glasgow Evening News* quotes a report from Italy that Shakespeare (among others) "will write the leading articles in *Aurora*," a spiritualist magazine to be published in Ancona. Stratford-on-Avon may yet be able to justify its racket. If this does not satisfy the Shakespeare controversialists, what will?

## SEX IN RELIGION

### II

IN Mr. Ernest Busenbark's *Sex, Symbols, and the Stars* will be found nine intensely interesting chapters dealing with the many forms and aspects sex symbolism has taken through the ages.

As there are male and female in the world, so there had to be male and female symbols—mostly positive for the male, and negative for the female. At first, the symbols were unmistakable at first glance, male or female, but time, and possibly a more refined way of looking at things, simplified them. The rock-hewn pillar became merely the figure one, and the rock-hewn cleft, a circle or oval. Our number ten is the perfect number in consequence, and it is so even for the Jews whose letter "jod" or "yod" is the tenth letter of the alphabet. The cross, as we have it now, was once a stick in a ring, and the swastika is a very simplified version of a male symbol. The two triangles interwoven, as used by Jews for their symbol, singly represent male and female.

Thus, whatever could be roped in which could be likened to some aspect of sex, was added to the other symbols and an astonishing collection can now be made. Many of them were deliberately painted in one form or other in some of our most admired religious paintings by medieval artists though it is doubtful whether the Church recognised exactly what they were perpetuating.

Nowadays, people pooh-poo a good deal of this symbolism, claiming that we see phallicism everywhere, but anybody who has mixed with stout defenders of psycho-analysis will know that they also see phallicism in all sorts of things—more often than not, most absurdly. As it happens, we can trace in ancient paintings, drawings, and designs of all kinds, the way in which sex symbols have been worked. Examples can be seen in India and Egypt particularly, and they have been reproduced in learned volumes published *not* for the masses.

Here is a passage from Mr. Busenbark's book dealing with the fish symbol:—

The fish is a well-known religious symbol, sacred originally to Ishtar, Isis, Venus, the Japanese Kwan-non, and other deities of the sexual nature. It was also frequently associated with the sun. In the opinion of some writers, the fish became a symbol of abundance because of its fecundity. . . . It was a symbol of the Egyptian Goddess Hathor, and was worn as an amulet to bring domestic felicity, abundance and general prosperity. Inasmuch as every detail in ancient paintings and sculptures had a definite meaning, there is more than a remote possibility that the peculiar fish-shaped eyes which Egyptian artists gave to their paintings of female figures originated in the belief that fish were symbolic of the sexual nature. Substance is given to this thought by the fact that in India, Parvati, the mother of mothers is sometimes described as fish-eyed in the sense that she is amorous-looking. In Scandinavia, the fish is a common symbol of Frija, goddess of marriage, from whom is derived the name of the sixth day of the week. . . . The Bible Joshua is described as the son of Nun, a word which in Hebrew, signifies fish and woman, or rather the sexual parts of woman. . . . Arabs, Jews, and other Semites, considered Friday to be woman's day, the day particularly dedicated to Ishtar, Ashtarte, Mylitta, Beltis, Venus, Isis, and other goddesses of fertility . . .



There is a great deal more but it is difficult to make any selection from such a big book. It would, however, be interesting to know whether Jesus was called a Fish because he was of an "amorous" nature, or because—as I hold—he is partly the sun, and partly a sign of the Zodiac, with a mixture of ideas from many Pagan Gods.

In his chapter on the symbolic meaning of numbers—there are crowds of people who believe that numbers influence one's life—Mr. Busenbark deals very fully with the Cabala. "In recent times," he points out, "mystics have revived the Cabalistic system by combining it with the Pythagorean theory of numbers, and have dressed it up with terms borrowed from modern science under the name of Numerology." And I can add that most of the believers in this fantastic nonsense are thorough Christians, and would possibly scorn what they call "pagan" superstition. This chapter is an excellent one for it exposes quite a number of beliefs and ideas not generally known. You can prove, for example, that the numerical value of the word Maria—the Greek name of the mother of Christ—can be formed so as to equal that of Christ. It is 152 which, added together, equals 8. Now put 152 under 521 and 215 and add together, and you get 888, the number of Christ in Trinity.

Take the famous number 666, the number of "Anti-Christ" or "the number of the beast." The sum of all the numbers from 1 to 36 gives you 666 which is "the grand number of the sun." It is done in this way: "The Hebrew name for the sun is Shamash, the number of which is 640. Add 26, the number of YHVH (Jehovah) and it gives 666." When the Lutherans were combating Rome it was easily shown that Pope Leo had the "number of the beast" for *Id Bestia Leo = 666*.

It is true that all sorts of surprising "truths" can be found by Numerology, but also other results not quite to the liking of believers. For example, the number of Satan is calculated as 364, and it can be shown that the number of God on the same principles, can be made 364. The curious reader will find in Mr. Busenbark's book a great deal of most interesting out-of-the-way information on numbers in their relation to the triangle, the pyramid, the square, the cube, and other geometrical figures.

And so with Astrology which, in the opinion of its expert believers, is thoroughly scientific. There is a fine chapter in the book on this "science," and another on the "Ages of the Gods," both full of curious information, little known except to students, and linking up with Biblical prophecies both from the canonical and non-canonical books. Another chapter deals with the various "Holy Trinities" in religions, as well as the influence the writings of Paul had on the fortunes of Christianity. And, Mr. Busenbark adds, after dealing with the problem of Jesus, "It becomes apparent that the historicity of Jesus cannot be established by a calm, critical appraisal of the evidence presented, but must be accepted through faith alone." It is a conclusion to which he comes only after a very thorough and searching analysis of the New Testament story and I recommend it particularly to all those who still believe that there was a Man called Jesus going about "doing good"—whatever that really means.

But was there a "Trinity" in Judaism? The one clear affirmation Judaism insists upon is the "One" God idea as distinct from the three Gods of Christianity. It would prove interesting to get some learned rabbi to reply to the facts and authorities given by our author showing how the "trinity" permeates the Jewish religion, though admittedly on the mystical side.

Freethought, though despised and boycotted, has often been lucky in its writers. Dupuis' *Origin of all Worships*

is a monument of learning, d'Holbach's *System of Nature* is a veritable explosive against superstition, Robert Taylor's *Diegesis* played havoc with the documents in support of Christianity, while the massive scholarship of Cassel's *Supernatural Religion* made mincemeat of the credibility of the Gospels. These are only a few of the Freethought works which have convinced millions that Christianity is not true. To them I must add Mr. Ernest Busenbark's *Symbols, Sex, and the Stars*, which deals mostly with that side of religion usually hidden, with it fairly and fearlessly, and also with many other phases of superstition and credulity making his book, as Mr. Benjamin truly remarks in his Introduction, "a mariner's compass on the vast sea of symbolic mythology." It is, indeed, more than that, and I should like to see it winning a great and growing public.

H. CUTNER

## LET'S LEGALISE VOLUNTARY MEDICAL EUTHANASIA

(Concluded from page 191)

THE New York Euthanasia Bill of 1949, though it also had the open support of more than 1,700 physicians and surgeons of that State, failed of passage because of religious opposition, principally Roman Catholic, opposition which continues despite such eloquently God-denying evils as infantile paralysis and tuberculosis, spinal meningitis and gastric cancer; earthquakes that kill thousands of men, women, and children. It was facts of these kinds that drew from that great and good American, Robert G. Ingersoll, these atheistic statements:—

"Nature produces without purpose, sustains without intention, and destroys without regret."

"The supernatural does not and cannot exist."

The truth is that medical euthanasia, voluntary or otherwise, cannot possibly go hand in hand with belief in a God. The one automatically excludes the other unless one is able to believe in a Jekyll-Hyde sort of deity. In 1946 a certain Roman Catholic prelate characterised as "anti-God" a proposed law to authorise voluntary medical euthanasia. He was right. He was right, however, for a reason very different from the one he had in mind. Voluntary medical euthanasia is anti-God, and for essentially the same reason that we may say the same of our annual "March of Dimes" for the cure and prevention of infantile paralysis, and of our various cancer research foundations. These and similar humanitarian activities are anti-God, because they seek to eliminate with the hand of human mercy certain dread natural evils which every theist and also every pantheist must of necessity, even if unwillingly, look upon as caused or permitted by a God.

The God-belief is responsible for the most terrible chapters in the annals of man's inhumanity to man. In the last analysis the God-belief is responsible for the ghastly horrors of the Inquisition, for the ruthless slaughter of the Albigensians, for the monstrous wrongs and sufferings of The Thirty Years War, for the continent-wide insanity of witchcraft persecution. Yet the God-belief, mainly because it is useful to many clerics and politicians and to selfish financial and industrial interests that find it to their material advantage to foster in the popular mind religious doctrines and concepts, is constantly kept before the American people by means of the Press, the motion picture, and the radio; a process of mass indoctrination which, without regard for the precious and vital democratic principle of equal freedom of speech, is made practically to exclude from Press and



screen and radio, all conflicting views; a harmful and potentially ruinous procedure which, as respects American broadcasting stations, is unopposed by the Federal Communications Commission, a Government "watchdog of the airways" which, on July 19, 1946, growled loudly and bared its teeth in warning to licensed radio station operators, but which has been cowed by powerfully organised clericalism into silent assuiscence.

In view of the fact that the jury which acquitted Carol Ann Paight of the charge of second degree murder was allowed to do so only on the grounds of temporary insanity. the testimony in her defence that she was mentally deranged when, in the manner of Richard Corbett, she took the life of her cancer-stricken father, must be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. The laws of the State of Connecticut made it necessary for jurors and defence counsel to wear Hypocrisy's humiliating mask in order to save the defendant from unmerited imprisonment. A verdict of guilty as charged, or even of manslaughter, would have made it a virtue to harden the heart, and would have branded pity and mercy as crimes. The mercy-killing of a human being is sternly forbidden by the church of which Carol Ann Paight is a communicant, even when the suffering of the patient is very severe and prolonged; but her deed in putting an end to the life of her cancer-doomed father was an act of the highest rationality, inspired by grief and love and compassion, which gave the lie to her church and a withering rebuke to society. For her courageous act she is to be commended. By her deed she demonstrated that, at the moment of its commission, she was saner by far than is any priest or prelate of her church who has denounced medical euthanasia. She has served greatly to hasten the coming of the day when the men and women of these United States will, in general, perceive the truth that human history being what it is, "God" cannot reasonably be said to have the merit even of being a "vital lie."

Whether human death be regarded as the gateway to another life or as an endless personal extinction which is equivalent to a dreamless sleep with no awakening, voluntary medical euthanasia for persons with incurable maladies that cause intense or acute physical anguish is an application of the Golden Rule, a rule of human conduct which was enunciated and practised in its positive as well as its negative form by the agnostic or atheistic Confucius five centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. Voluntary medical euthanasia is morally right. There is against it no reasonable argument. It is a humane necessity. If it is morally right to administer an anæsthetic to prevent pain in a surgical operation that lasts much less than an hour, it cannot be morally wrong to give an overdose of morphine or a fatal injection of air into the veins to prevent days or weeks or months of unbearable and hopeless suffering. There is no satisfactory alternative to the legalisation of voluntary medical euthanasia. In the absence of this greatly needed humanitarian reform, which would insure and dignified as well as painless death, the Richard Corbette and the Carol Ann Paights, in defiance of human law and religious prejudice, will continue to obey the "unwritten law" and do that which it is the duty of every State to authorise. In the absence of such authority the Hermann N. Saunders and the Abraham Lincoln Goldwaters of the medical and surgical professions will continue, openly or secretly, to give in mercy to incurably suffering patients the kind nepenthe of death.

The fact that no State in this Republic has legalised voluntary medical euthanasia for persons who suffer, or

who may be expected to suffer, because of a disease for which there is no cure is an affront to common-sense, a grievous wrong against humanity, and a grave reproach to the nation. Death has no terrors for any rational and enlightened man or woman. It is the dying, not death itself, that we have cause to dread. Every incurable sufferer has a perfect right to refuse peaceful and painless death for himself; but no one has a right to dash from the lips of an incurable sufferer in adequate possession of his or her mental faculties the cup of hemlock for which he or she had asked. To every opponent, lay or clerical, of the legalisation of voluntary medical euthanasia I say: Suffer if you will to the bitter end when you come to die; but do not presume to compel me or any of my loved ones to do likewise.

Let us, therefore, my fellow citizens, without needless delay; take appropriate action through our legislatures to legalise, with adequate safeguards against fraud and abuse, voluntary medical euthanasia for incurably suffering adults of sound mind and, upon the court-approved petition of relatives or legal guardians, for irremediably suffering babes, children, and adolescents, and also older persons who, for one reason or another, are mentally incompetent. Let us unlock with the key of humanitarian good sense and let us remove the anti-euthanasia handcuffs that well-meaning but misguided custodians of certain religious beliefs and fears have fastened upon the wrists of the physician. Let us by an act of law put an end to an abhorrent barbarity which, however unwillingly, must of necessity be looked upon by its defenders as the act of a God. Let us bear in mind that no one was born of his own volition, and hence that not even God could justly require a human being to endure even one minute of unmerited suffering.

Remember, my fellow citizens, *some day it will be your turn to die.* ROBERT H. SCOTT (U.S.A.).

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. HAROLD DAY.
- Great Harwood (Town Centre).—Saturday, May 20, 6 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL and G. WOODCOCK. (Bombed Site, St. Mary's Gates).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL and G. WOODCOCK. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, May 31, 8 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL and G. WOODCOCK.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. F. A. RIDLEY and R. A. CALVERLY. (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Messrs. F. A. RIDLEY and R. A. CALVERLY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: Messrs. A. ELSMERE and T. MOSLEY. 6-45 p.m.: Messrs. A. ELSMERE and T. MOSLEY.
- Preston (Town Hall Square).—Sunday, 3-15 p.m. and 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Padiham.—Wednesday, May 24, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- Worsthorne.—Friday, May 19, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

- Irish Rationalist Society (Hynes Cafe, 55, Dame Street, Dublin).—Tuesday, May 23, 7-30 p.m.: "Religion versus Reality," Mr. HARRY WALSH.
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Ethics of Socialism," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.



## MIND AND BRAIN ACTIVITY

MR. SIMMONS in his (misplaced) attempts at facetiousness appears to be somewhat confused. First, he confuses the meaning of "chain reaction." That is, a chain reaction in atomic fission with a purely psychological response on my part (I believe that a distinction can be made between "reaction" and "response.")

I would enquire: "What precisely has your annoyance to do with the validity of my arguments?" One can sympathise with Mr. Simmons' annoyance at "The nasty way he put it." I really am sorry. I ought to have realised that there is nothing like the truth for nurturing. Once again, please accept my apologies. I must reject as unfounded in fact and held in error his innuendo that I, an opponent of materialism, give merely my own interpretation to Cohen's definition and then proceed to an "argle-bargle" whatever that may be, beyond saying that I do, Mr. Simmons does not go.

I would inquire further of Mr. Simmons where do I say that he personally claims that the human mind is fitted to know the innermost secrets of the universe. However, whether he claims so or not, the pre-supposition is implicit in any materialistic interpretation of nature. As I previously pointed out—"In proportion as one lowers the status of mind in the universe, so one should doubt its findings." One could ask: "What relevance has the (alleged) possibility of the total destruction of humanity got to do with my arguments?" Mr. Simmons then once again confuses the meaning of chain-reaction from (2) above. I would be eternally grateful to him if he would indicate, seeing that he is: "entirely sceptical of the idea that man can, or will, know more than some of the secrets of the universe," if he will indicate by what criterion he judges the truth of a proposition. Could it be that his criterion is: that which is true, is that which does not annoy Mr. Simmons?

Mr. Simmons could read with profit Bradlaugh's definition of atheism, or so it would appear from his remarks: "I am equally convinced that if some of these secrets are known, no living being on this Planet other than what is known as the human mind can have knowledge of them." The whole question of the mind being brain activity I leave to a later date. I believe that if there is anything in philosophy that can be shown to be false, then this view certainly can.

One fact emerges from Mr. Simmons' letter: It is that he has an undue appreciation of his own intrinsic worth. With reference to his remarks on psycho-analysis, I do not wish him to do anything; nor were my remarks addressed solely to him as he would have his readers believe—however that may be.

My remarks on "rationality" in the "mind" were addressed to those few misguided "materio-determinists" who claim to be rationalists. I have to thank Mr. Simmons for not only giving me my case, but also for adducing further arguments in my support. One of the difficulties facing the materialists is to show how rationality can enter into physiological processes, which it must, if "mind" and all that the term implies is "brain-behaviour." I leave to a later date a full discussion on a "cause-effect relationship." I would point out that in view of what Russell\*, Collinwood†, and Miss Stebbing‡ have written on the subject the

\* "Logic and Mysticism."

† "Metaphysics."

‡ "Introduction to Logic."

phrase "cause-effect relationship" is extremely ambiguous.

In conclusion, I would ask Mr. Simmons whether the grin he would indulge in would be vacuous. From his diatribe I would say that the possibility that it would is not very remote.

VERNON CARTER

## FREETHOUGHT DICTIONARY

ARROGANCE.—Arrogant conduct or insolence. An example of this is found in the pulpit, where the notion that man is God's favourite animal, planted in the centre of the Universe solely to praise Him, dies a very lingering death. The theory has been proved false for hundreds of years, but the old argument still persists when, every Sunday, numberless bible bangers pop up in pulpits just like so many Jacks-in-the-box, in an attempt to deny the obvious. Could anything be more arrogant?

Actually, of all animals, man is the only one which can justly be called a brute. It is not possible to imagine a company of educated dogs in Dogland paraphrasing Burns by saying that dogs incarnate to dogs imagine countless thousands whine; though one can imagine them paraphrasing Walt Whitman by saying that "the more they see of man the more they love the rest of creation." Despite man's talk of brute creation, one finds the lion more noble; the rat braver; the goat kinder to his family and more faithful to his wife. If there is an exception it is the fish, which mainly preys on its kind.

And what more fish-like than man? The human embryo, in its second month in the womb, is just a bulbous head with a long curling tail, almost exactly like a tadpole. He lives in a water sac; he has gills; he has a fish-like kidney, which later change to a frog-like one and still later to the human sort; he has his eyes on the sides of his head at that stage, and no arms or legs. Moreover he is bisexual at that time and can develop as either male or female.

These facts are elementary to any medical student and this is the creature which eventually emerges into the light of day to assert his lordship over the rest of creation and that this enormous flywheel on which he is taking a giddy ride, was created for the sole purpose of giving him that ride.

F. W. RENNIE

**NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY**  
CITY MEMORIAL HALL, BARKERS POOL, SHEFFIELD

**Freethought Demonstration**  
**WHIT-SUNDAY MAY 28th, 1950**

Chairman: **R. H. ROSETTI**

Speakers:

**J. T. BRIGHTON**  
(Chester-le-Street)

**J. CLAYTON**  
(Burnley)

**H. DAY**  
(Bradford)

**L. EBURY**  
(London)

**F. A. RIDLEY**  
(London)

**T. M. MOSLEY**  
(Nottingham)

Doors open 6-30 p.m.

Commence 7 p.m.

Admission Free. Reserved Seats 1s.