

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Vol. LXX.—No. 39

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Rome and Modernism

THE modern era in human history which began with the Renaissance and the Reformation, has witnessed the rise of powerful critical movements which have challenged the assumptions of mediævally-inspired theology in every sphere of human thought. Prior to the 19th century, traditional theology ignored the new knowledge and continued to mutter its ancient shibboleths in sublime disregard of the contemporary advances in knowledge; "the heavenly science" of theology just ignored the current progress of more mundane terrestrial sciences.

To-day, however, such a merely disdainful attitude is no longer possible. The gulf between pre-scientific and unhistorical conceptions and legends of theology and the facts ascertained by science and history is too glaring to be ignored. This fact has not escaped the more intelligent defenders of theology and, accordingly, in almost all the Christian Churches the last half century has witnessed the rise of modernist movements, all more or less influenced by modern scientific and critical ideas, which seek, if we may modernise a Gospel metaphor, to pour the new wine of modern culture into the mediæval bottles of traditional theology.

In the Anglican Church we have men like Bishop Barnes and the aged but still ever-green Dr. Inge. Whilst in most of the Nonconformist Churches modernist movements appear to be active and influential. It is, for example, a far cry from the fundamentalist Gospel of John Wesley to the present day Gospel preached by, say, Dr. Donald Soper, the present *enfant terrible* of the Methodist Church.

However, it is in the Roman Catholic Church that the head-on clashes between mediæval theology and modernist criticisms have been most obvious. For the Catholic Church has codified and systemised its mediæval theology in a manner unapproached by any other Christian Church. In this connection, as Joseph McCabe relevantly observed long ago, many freethinking critics of Catholicism seem to be under the mistaken impression that Rome despises Reason and relies solely upon authority. Such a criticism is, however, wide of the remark. Far from preaching a purely authoritarian gospel, Rome prides herself upon her intellectual credentials. Roman Catholic dogma, in its own estimation at least, represents an impregnable fortress of reason impenetrably welded together in an all-embracing network of logic by St. Thomas Aquinas, the dean of Catholic theologians, and his colleagues the mediæval scholastic doctors. In this formidable corpus of dogma, as a witty Anglican modernist (Dr. Inge) has aptly commented, "There are no problems to be solved; only authorities to be consulted!" The last word upon the Universe and upon mankind has been said.

Modern evolutionary theory knows nothing of such finality as is here supposed and modern Biblical criticism

has long since demolished the "infallible" revelation upon which it is supposed to be based. Hence the solid framework of Catholic theology cannot possibly accommodate modernist ideas based upon the concept of Evolution as applied to religion and upon the findings of Biblical criticism.

Early in the present century, the modernist movement which had raised its head in the Church of Rome, was ruthlessly suppressed by the then Pope Pius X (now said to be due for canonisation) and his obscurantist Jesuit advisers. The world, however, continues to evolve along with modern knowledge, and Modernism has apparently been driven underground by the Vatican rather than been totally suppressed. To-day, it seems to be again raising its head within the Catholic fold.

Upon August 12 last, the present Pope Pius XII followed up his announcement of the forthcoming proclamation of the Assumption of the Virgin by issuing an Encyclical Letter "Humani Generis" ("About Mankind") which explicitly condemned a whole congeries of modernist heresies or near-heresies which are alleged to be infiltrating into the ranks of the Roman priesthood. The ground covered by the Encyclical is very wide and the Vatican's condemnations are obviously addressed to a widely scattered tendency rather than to any organised movement or coherent body of doctrine. In the Church of Rome "Modernism" is still a tendency rather than an organised party with clearly defined doctrines.

The Pope's latest authoritative pronouncement upon Catholic doctrine is, as one would expect from his recent announcement of the proclamation of the Assumption, a very conservative document. It reaffirms in substance, the mediæval attitude towards the relations between theology, on the one hand, and science and history upon the other. Even the archaic terminology used by the scholastic philosophy is defended against the demand for a more modern form of expression. Such mediæval doctrines as Transubstantiation are enjoined, along with the pre-scientific philosophical conception of "substance" upon which the Catholic dogma of the real presence depends for its validity. (It should not be forgotten in this connection that the philosophic Idealism of Berkeley has been condemned by Rome equally with modern Materialism; the matter inherent in the consecrated bread and wine must be "real" to become the Body and Blood of Christ.) Modern philosophies, the best known of which nowadays is probably "Existentialism," in which some Catholic philosophers dabble, is prohibited and seems to be formally condemned by this latest pronouncement of Pius XII. The supreme authority of St. Thomas Aquinas, the mediæval master *par excellence*, is explicitly upheld.

To the non-Christian critic, the most interesting parts of "Humani Generis" are probably those that deal with Evolution and human origins. The evolution of the human *body* from "pre-existing forms of living matter,"



is "permitted," but only as a speculative scientific hypothesis. As such, Catholic scholars are permitted to hold it and to pursue appropriate researches, a concession perhaps forced upon the Vatican by the bitter memory of the *cause célèbre* of Galileo, when the Church burnt its fingers so severely! However, there the concession ends and is promptly hedged round with restrictions; at most Evolution only applies to the human body, the "soul" is the direct creation of God. Whilst even with regard to the human body no Catholic may henceforward assert Evolution to be a proved fact.

Whilst as for Genesis, the utmost that may be conceded is that it is written in a popular style intended for a primitive audience; but its narrative was inspired by the Holy Spirit who safeguarded it from anything mythical or factually erroneous. Thus, Adam and Eve are historical persons from whom the entire human race descends—"Philogenism," the belief that mankind had other ancestors besides is expressly condemned. The Garden of Eden was a real place, original sin is a fact derived from "our first parents"; so presumably was the famous snake! From which it may be inferred that the Vatican does not go very far in its concession to Evolution, nor do the Biblical critics fare much better at its hands.

Last but not least, it is strictly forbidden to maintain (as apparently do some of the Modernists) that, "the Roman Catholic Church and the Mystical Body of Christ are not one and the same thing," a severe snub to Non-Catholic Christianity!

From all of which it appears safe to assume that "Modernism" will get short shrift in the Church of Rome and that a Catholic "Bishop Barnes" is unlikely to make his appearance in the Vatican. Also, perhaps, that Charles Bradlaugh was not far wrong when he predicted that the final battle will be between Rome and Reason.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### FREETHOUGHT AND CHRISTIANITY

THE columns of this journal have, in their time, carried news of many a controversy. This, I think, bears witness to the stability of editorial policy, and to the real affection with which many people, of widely varying views, regard *The Freethinker*. And that is why, following a recent letter, I am trying to set down here a change that has gradually crept into my mind of late. The fact that I trust the editor to print this article unaltered and uncensored is, I imagine, an ultimate tribute to a paper with whose general ideological line (to use an awkward phrase) I no longer feel myself entirely in agreement.

That is the point, indeed. For many years past I have called myself a Rationalist, a Freethinker and an Agnostic. I am (I hope) still a Rationalist and a Freethinker, though perhaps not quite in the way in which members of the R.P.A. or readers of this journal would define those terms. I am aware that I have never been a strict party-line Freethinker, any more than I have been a party-line Socialist or Anarchist. But Agnosticism on the religious issues was long my settled and avowed belief. I have never been an Atheist (I once had a long argument in print with Mr. Chapman Cohen on that issue). I have, to be quite candid, always felt that the average Atheist was as dogmatic in his own way as the average Roman Catholic or member of the Salvation Army in his. I always took the line that there *might* be a God; I thought that there was, indeed, no way to decide that point. And that is why for me "Agnostic" was the term I applied to myself.

If it is said that I always have had a leaning towards a vaguely religious philosophy, so that consistent Freethinkers would label me a "Reverent Rationalist" or "Wistful Agnostic," I do not know that I should wish to dispute that charge.

I have always been firmly opposed to authoritarian methods in every sphere. I still think that the fight of the Kremlin against the combination of the Vatican and Wall Street is a fight which may bring civilisation down in ruins. Even if the forecasts, made by scientists whom I respect, that all life on earth may one day be wiped out by man-made radio-active clouds, are too pessimistic, the fact remains that there are two authoritarianisms which may come to a headlong collision in a few months or years.

Repeatedly, in articles here and elsewhere, I have set out my idea of a "Third Force" which might somehow mediate between the extremes of the Vatican and the Kremlin. For a time I had hopes that Freethought might provide the nucleus of that "Third Force." Now I feel that this is impossible. For one thing, too many of the more doughty warriors of Freethought have already committed themselves to take sides. So many distinguished Freethinkers, from Prof. J. B. S. Haldane and Mr. Archibald Robertson downwards, are believers in Marxism as infallibly interpreted by Lenin and Stalin and are thus bound, in all honesty, to support one side in the struggle as few Christians outside the Roman communion would wish to do.

Who, then, has the power to do something in this *impasse*? I have been impelled, though at the beginning somewhat reluctantly, to conclude that this must be a function of a religious body, of a Church or a combination of Churches. For, after all, what has gone wrong with the world is not entirely a matter of politics, of economics, of military squabbles. These things may to some extent be regarded as symptoms or something wrong in the hearts of men.

I know that many who have read my articles for years past in *The Freethinker* and *The Literary Guide* will feel (in Dr. Joad's words) that this is "another good man gone wrong." But I ask them to bear with me a little longer. I am aware of the intellectual difficulties of the Christian creed as it has been interpreted in many Churches. But at the same time I am becoming aware that the old philosophy of what has been called "secular optimism" is not all it might be. In that tired little book called *Mind at the End of its Tether*, which was H. G. Wells's testament to the world, Wells confessed that he had for long been wrong. And when President Truman told his scientific advisers to go ahead with the hydrogen bomb he was only taking another step in the downward process which Wells had already foreseen.

What, then, is my conclusion? It is that if we are to stop this steady process towards catastrophe, something must be done to change men's hearts and minds. And to assist in that there must be room, inside some Christian Church, for any man honestly dissatisfied with the way the world is going—the man, in other words, who sees that evil is now in the saddle in *all* countries, and that well-meaning politicians, however they try, cannot do much to right things by purely political measures. In fact, it has become obvious that there is something wrong in the heart of man which must be righted before the world can improve. And (it is here that I take the plunge) only by a definite step towards a spiritual combination, which necessarily involves a belief in a power higher than human—in other words, by



a belief in the power of God to help man in some degree—can humanity improve its position.

I refuse, in fact, to believe that the whole human world is going over the edge of the precipice, smashing all hopes of a happy future, in a matter of years. But I see that if we merely take the power-politics attitude to the world which is now so general, that will happen. And, outside power-politics, there is only some kind of religious philosophy to fall back upon. I know my words are vague, but please read on.

There will, of course, be many readers who will at once object that any sort of belief in Christianity is logically untenable in the 20th century. I myself have written to that effect in the past. But I now consider that there is one aspect of the Christian religion which is sane and logical, which cannot be called reactionary, which accepts the findings of science without becoming dogmatic. This kind of religion has its right wing (to use a political term for a theological phenomenon) with the Church of England Modernists; its left wing is with the Society of Friends and the Unitarians. The religious attitude of these people is not absurd; it is logical. I know that readers who have honoured me with their attention here in recent months will have sensed in my writings an increased respect for these lines of thought. Readers who see *The Inquirer* (the Unitarian weekly), *Science and Religion*, and *The Modern Churchman*, will find contributions to the same effect in those magazines.

And then, finally, one thing which clinched my increasing suspicion that no pure belief in the complete value of the theory of evolution as a firm and ultimate basis for a philosophy of life will suffice for me, was a study of Sir Arthur Keith's recent massive *Autobiography*. Sir Arthur Keith, in other words, showed me (probably quite unconsciously, as far as he was concerned) the unavoidable conclusions at the end of the road on which I had so long ago set my feet. And I saw enough to make me draw back. That it should be the reading of a book by an eminent Rationalist which finally made me see the wisdom and the desirability of a moderate form of Christianity, is something slightly ironical. But that the Freethought and Rationalist Movement (save for its Marxist fringe) is largely unconscious of what is happening in the world seems to me to become increasingly obvious. It is only that, for instance, that one can account for the real reverence still apparently felt for a dull and out-moded philosopher like Herbert Spencer, or a writer of downright bad prose, like J. M. Robertson.

So that, my friends, is that. I hope that I may be permitted now and then to continue to report here on books that seem to me to be worthy of study by thinkers of all schools. What I have written now will, no doubt, appear to many readers to be a slice of very special pleading. Yet years ago I wrote in *The Literary Guide* (I was then on the editorial staff of that journal) asking for more warmth of emotion in Rationalism. And even though (as on that occasion) the present article brings a flood of letters, stressing my errors and logical flaws, I can assure my critics in advance that I have not taken this step without long thought.

After all, I have had some sort of connection as a writer with the Freethought and Rationalist Movement for nearly 20 years (my first article in *The Freethinker* dates from as far as back as 1932), and one does not change from as far as back as 1932, and one does not change such a habit of thought unless assured that the situation demands something new.

It was, remember, the Archbishop of York who recently said: "Unless we make an effort to create new social

institutions we may well follow the dinosaur and the dodo into extinction." I do not know any Freethinker who penetrated as deeply into the present dilemma of man as that.

I am not, I would add, a formal member of any Church, though I am, I think, working out for myself a theological position which many Church members would share. But, for one thing, I happen at the moment to live in a district where the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches are not represented. I am, however, perfectly sure that the course I am now taking is a course which will have to be taken by more and more people if the world is not to go up in flames. I know that there is something odd in the power of evil driving a man, almost against his will, to something near a belief in God. But that is what is happening to me. It may happen to many more people in the months ahead. Yet at the same time I insist that I am still (though not in the exact sense propagated by this journal) a Freethinker.

JOHN ROWLAND.

### IN COMPETITION WITH FATIMA

DURING the passage of the Pilgrimage of the statue of our Lady of Fatima from Watalla to Mutval, Colombo, the hundreds of onlookers, amongst whom was the Rev. Padre Nicolas Pereira, Parish Priest of Watalla, saw the sun change and become totally blue, then turn slowly on its axis.

This remarkable phenomenon was described in all the Indian Press including the *Goa Mail*. The correspondent of the *Ceylon Observer* having been a witness, stated: "While the sun spun round, from time to time the sky round it changed into a halo of diverse colours.

When the statue reached a curve in the Negombo road it was halted to receive a golden rosary presented by a number of children assembled there. While this act of devotion was taking place someone cried out: "The sun is spinning!" The car containing the statue proceeded on its way while the crowd gazed at the sun which was now spinning rapidly. Suddenly it turned a deep blue and maintained this colour while it wheeled round rapidly for more than an hour, eventually disappearing below the line of visibility.

N. F.

(*Diario de Noticias*, Lisbon, Aug. 3, 1950.)

### REWARD FOR VIRTUE

Lo, a lean cat, which creeps along a wall,  
Rubbing its empty belly on the bricks:  
Despite nine lives, will death to it befall,  
Its little soul be ferried o'er the Styx;  
And if those lives were godly, upright, nice,  
Will nine eternities spend chasing mice.

B.S.

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## ACID DROPS

To clinch the matter of the Assumption so to speak, the Pope is going to use a special pen when he signs the proclamation that it is now a dogma. On the pen are carved two angels, and the nib is, of course, of gold and there is to be a specially made inkwell. A fountain pen or a ball pointed one would smack too much of "modernism." Once signed with such a pen and such an inkwell, the gates of Hell cannot prevail against the dogma.

All the same, not all Catholics appear to be very happy over the event. One of them, a Mr. W. Sandell, "hoped and sometimes prayed" that the Assumption would not be made into a dogma—as he says in the *Church Times*. He also hoped that the dogma "would not be made absolutely necessary for salvation." Well, we can reassure him here. If he does not believe it as a dogma, he will surely frizzle for all eternity in the Lake of Fire. The Pope is going to stand no half nonsense here.

The Christian Evidence platform in Hyde Park was described by the *Church Times* recently, in comparison with the Roman Catholic one, as being of a "much weaker calibre in speaking ability and evangelistic zeal." To this, the Secretary of the C.E.S., replied by pointing out that they had had during the summer twenty priests, including two D.D.s and one Ph.D., the others holding university degrees. What a confession. Here was a body of presumably educated men doing their best to bolster up their dying creed, and doing it so badly that it called forth a rebuke from the chief non-Roman Catholic journal.

But if university men can thus fail, what about the C.E.S. laymen? For sheer ignorance they would indeed be hard to beat. The Christian Evidence Society, founded to propagate evidence for the truth of Christianity, has utterly failed to do so, not only in the past, but much more so now. We doubt if even the Archbishop of Canterbury could tell us of what use this ridiculous body is to anyone.

We have often pointed out the comparative uselessness of a parson's job, and have suggested that they should find something worthwhile and socially useful. We therefore have pleasure in recording the fact that the Rev. G. White has found himself a job in Greenock shipyard as a rigger's mate. He will, no doubt, find his new work vastly different from his previous one, for he will have to show some results at the end of the week—in his previous job it did not matter.

It is some time since the National Union of Protestants have been on the warpath, as the last occasion when they joined battle and in which they were severely routed, must have shaken their morale. However, it looks as if the armistice gave them an opportunity to gird their loins and they have returned to the fray at St. Mary the Virgin, Pimlico, where, during the Communion, eight men stood up and shouted "Blasphemy!" Obviously, these brawlers don't know the Act of 1551-1552 to which we called attention the other day.

Pilgrims are queueing up in Rome for the Pope's blessing, and the *Sunday Post* reports that over 25,000 were shut out of one of the greatest audiences ever held at which a crowd of 45,000 were present. We must ask one

of our Catholic friends just what it feels like to get a special blessing.

The Assumption Dogma raises an interesting question of the kind in which the Jesuits will revel now that God's mamma must make her earthly manifestations in the flesh (the dogma doubly asserts this). Will she be able to knock at the "Iron Curtain" with a physical hand? This seems to be suggested in an article in the Jesuit fortnightly *Civilita Cattolica* which says that the "Soviet Union alone has remained hermetically closed to the visits of the Virgin."

In the U.S.A., so we are told, relatives of street accident victims are pestered by undertakers and lawyers almost before the victim is dead. In England, we are not quite so blatant, but a pit disaster such as the tragic affair at Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery gave some of our own ghouls an opportunity to cash in on the emotions of all concerned. The *Daily Mirror* has a photograph of a group of the Salvation Army at the pit head praying and singing hymns. It is good to note that the rescue team and onlookers do not seem very interested, they no doubt realise that the time for prayers is past. Incidentally, if the Salvationists think God could help, they ought also to be blamed for the catastrophe, then He logic is alien to a religionist.

An order forbidding the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Sector of Berlin was published on September 7. The Sect is accused of carrying out, under a religious cloak, systematic agitation against "the Democratic order." Remarkable! This was the same reason for which the Witnesses were banned in New Zealand during the war. Oh, Democracy, what sins have been committed in thy name!

There is, surely, nothing more humourless than an editor of a religious newspaper. Take, for instance, the *Catholic Herald* which reports that "Roumania's Reds mould children's mind"; "Roumanian education system an assembly line for producing Communists"; "Political consciousness is developed in schools by Red Flags, Communist slogans, pictures of Marx, Engels, and hymns to Stalin." The editor should substitute the Catholic Church for Roumania, and for flags, hymns and slogans, relics, litanies, and prayers; and for "hymn to Stalin," a hymn to the Pope, and what is the essential difference?

Another of God's mysteries: A coach carrying many devout pilgrims returning from a Holy Year pilgrimage to Rome crashed near Ravenna. A priest was killed, 27 priests and students with some women and children were injured. And yet coaches returning from football matches—with drinks on the way—and with no one counting beads or saying prayers rarely, if ever, have any accidents. We doubt if even Aquinas could solve this riddle.

All the same, there is no mystery about another case. Administrator Kolarik, appointed by Czechoslovakia to the Olmutz diocese, and who publicly declared that it would "afford him the greatest pleasure to hang all Czech bishops" recently dropped dead in the street. What could he expect? God does look after his own sometimes.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

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London, W.C. 1.

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 FRIEDENKER (Switzerland), DON BASILIO (Italy).

Will correspondents please write on one side of the paper, and keep their letters brief. This will give everybody a chance.

## SUGAR PLUMS

The Glasgow Secular Society, as usual, is quick off the mark for the indoor season. On Sunday, October 1, the first session will be opened by Mr. R. H. Rosetti, President of the National Secular Society, in the McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, with a lecture on "Man's Animal Ancestry." The lecture begins at 7 p.m., admission is free, with Donation Tickets obtainable from the local secretary, Mr. J. Barrowman, 53, Rampart Avenue, Knightswood, Glasgow, W.3. The Glasgow Secular Society has a long record of service in the Freethought cause and you can help by joining the Society, attending its lectures, and making its activities known among your friends.

A Nottingham reader reminds us that the late Rev. C. H. Spurgeon described an Agnostic as an *ignoramus*. Obviously the Rev. F. Martin, of the *Sunday Graphic*, is no better informed according to the paragraph in last week's *Freethinker*. Our advise to the Rev. F. Martin is to spend a few minutes in his local public library and consult a dictionary as to the meaning of the word Agnostic when applied to a belief in God and the supernatural. He will find the definition also applies to him.

Any reader interested in modern art and the work of new artists will be cordially welcomed by John Olday at his studio at 28a, Tavistock Road, W. 2 (near Westbourne Park Underground Station). This is his first exhibition, but Mr. Olday has, in the past, made a big name for himself as an uncompromising cartoonist, and is by some critics considered second only to David Low. He has worked both here and in Germany—where, incidentally, with his wife Hilde Monte, he had some share in the bomb plot at Munich against Hitler. The exhibition will be open from 12 noon to 6 p.m. every day (except Thursday) for six weeks.

All sufferers from rheumatism should welcome the publication of the series of broadcast talks given by a "doctor" published by the Empire Rheumatism Council, Tavistock Sq., London, W.C. 1, for 1s. Simply written, they deal with the many kinds of rheumatism known—fibrositis, sciatica, neuritis, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, and gout, which are all carefully detailed, and for which are prescribed the best modern treatment. There is a Foreword by Lord Horder and we can fancy nothing could help sufferers more than the expert advice given in this extremely valuable pamphlet.

## ASSUMPTION—CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT

THE Church of Rome has always insisted on its sweeping claim to be the one and only mouthpiece of God and His authorised representative on earth. While it has condemned all dissenters as "heretics," it has at least not sought to interfere in their deliberations over their own internal affairs. Now the Church of England, in an endeavour to out-herod Herod, has taken the extraordinary and unprecedented steps of telling the Roman Catholic Church what it ought and what it ought not to believe! Even the Archbishops of Canterbury and York cannot really imagine that their approval or disapproval of the new Article of Faith can in the least degree affect the issue. Within the four walls of their Consistory Court the assembled Catholic hierarchy may be relied upon to bear with Christian fortitude the condemnation of the English prelates (*not amongst those invited!*)

The British Church seems to have chosen a singularly infelicitous occasion to revive its famous "protestation." The Catholic paper, *The Universe*, remarks that the only surprise registered among Catholics is that the Assumption is not already an Article of Faith. I must confess I was also under the impression that it was, and am not aware of any differentiation made between the belief and veneration paid to the Immaculate Conception and that paid to the Assumption. They are both treated as high festivals of the Church. Historically, I should have said that the Assumption has had more general acceptance throughout the ages than the Conception; for one thing it has a more dramatic appeal to the imagination of the superstitious. But I must leave its historical aspect to others. The two questions which are of import to the Rationalist are: Why is the Catholic Church promulgating this Article of Faith just now?; and Why is the Protestant Church taking the unprecedented step of intervening in Roman affairs?

Let us first consider the "official" answers to our two queries. The pronouncement of the Assumption as an Article of Faith was on the agenda of the 1870 Consistory (when Papal Infallibility was laid down). Owing to political events of that year, when, on the defeat of Napoleon III by the Prussians, the Italians seized the opportunity to take possession of their capital, that Consistory broke up in some confusion. From one point of view, therefore, it is merely catching up with arrears and promulgating something already decided upon but unavoidably delayed by extraneous circumstances. From the theological angle the doctrine follows logically on that of the Immaculate Conception. Since God could not be born out of a sin-infected womb, the curse of Original Sin had to be lifted from his earthly mother. For the same reason her body could not be allowed to suffer the decay and disintegration of the physical process which in theology is termed "corruption." For time is, in theology, an earthly factor, and God could not be contaminated before or after the event of birth in the body of his earthly mother. She had, therefore, to be "assumed" into Heaven before the physical process of decay could commence. I do not propose here to comment on the workings of the Catholic mentality, but merely wish to point out that the new dogma is the logical consequence of earlier dogmas, and is, therefore, a poor case for the Protestant bishops to base a protest on.

The "official" reasons for the Church of England's effort to quash this new pronouncement are two, namely, that "there is not the smallest evidence in the Scriptures" of it, and that its promulgation "gravely injures the growth of understanding between Christians." The



former is so typically Protestant that one can only wonder at its being made; Catholic doctrine is based on tradition and its claim to apostolic succession, and the Scriptures are merely one of its sources of knowledge and inspiration. As regards the second reason advanced, it presents the feature of muddled thinking so characteristic of the Church of England—surely the most illogical of all the Christian Churches. The real stumbling block to "union" is always the Catholic claim to be the one Holy Mother Church and its head, the Pope, the one, final, infallible arbiter. If and when the Church of England can swallow that, a small matter like the Assumption is not likely to present any insuperable difficulty. And if one can believe that a Jewish carpenter was really God come down to earth to redeem mankind from "sin" by spilling his blood, I have never comprehended the difficulty in swallowing the minor dogmas of the Catholic creed.

I think the only interpretation we can put on the action of the English bishops is that it was intended as a gesture to demonstrate their willingness and enthusiasm for Christian unity, and to put the blame for failure to realise it on the other fellow. If so, it was an insincere gesture, for the bishops know very well that unity, that is, unity of doctrine and authority, are out of the question. Either the "heretical" sects must make their submission to Rome, or Rome must discard so much of her own tenets as to amount to submission to Protestantism.

Apart from the "official" reasons and the assertion that 73 per cent. of Catholics have asked for the dogma, the Catholic Church's action, just now, is not so clear. It must, I think, be taken in conjunction with certain other pronouncements made recently by the Pope; he has condemned "errors," such as, that angels are not persons, the assertion that the Bible is infallible "only in matters concerning God," that membership of the true Church is not vital to eternal salvation, etc. He warns the faithful against dialectical materialism, historicism (Benedetto Croce's philosophy), and existentialism, while not specifically condemning them. Evolution, Rationalists will be interested to note, is permitted "to be the object of research and discussion by the competent in both fields (of science and theology)." His Holiness's dissertations on the book of Genesis are also interesting, but are too long for me to quote here.

We may, I think, take the trend of these pronouncements to indicate a tightening of the reins, to prevent the faithful getting out of hand, while at the same time avoiding an irreconcilable conflict between the Church and the modern trend of science. Catholic papers are loud in warning that any let up in doctrine, at the present time, is the road to defeat and disintegration of Christianity.

For Freethinkers there is a more general warning. *Credo quia absurdum* (I believe what is absurd) is not an approach confined to the Catholic Church to-day. It is a growing feature of political systems such as Fascism and Marxism. That is the real lesson for Freethinkers!

P. C. KING.

### AN OPINION OF BRADLAUGH

IN his book *Elections and Recollections*, Sir Alfred E. Pease makes some interesting observations on Charles Bradlaugh.

On page 21 he says (writing in 1932): "There are many now living who remember the heated debates about Charles Bradlaugh . . . though Joseph Pease's objection to the oath was a religious one and Bradlaugh's exactly the reverse." Forty-four pages later we read:

"My Diary, 1882"—February 15: "Had an argument with Dale (the late Sir Davil Dale, Bt.) on the Bradlaugh question; he says I am 'politically unsound.' My view is: Bradlaugh is not legally entitled to affirm (there is no law allowing him), he declares an oath not to be binding on his conscience when any form of promise is binding on an honourable man. He avows himself an Atheist and a Republican and now says he is willing to take the oath. The oath contains an appeal to God and a promise of allegiance to the throne and constitution; it is there for a purpose that should not openly be abused. The House of Commons is perfectly free to exclude a professor of subversive or immoral doctrines or any one it considers a 'bad subject.'

It often has disfranchised constituencies, and is competent to semi-disfranchise Northampton. It is more a question of tolerating open disloyalty and aggressive irreligion than one of religious toleration."

Bradlaugh's appearance has been a strong point of abuse with his opponents, so the following observations of Sir Alfred are worth noting: "That nasty fellow, Bradlaugh, has been re-elected for Northampton with a 107 majority. The question was not one of excluding Atheists, for many of these have entered the House, such as John Morley." Morley had been sufficiently aggressive, once as an author to write *God with a small "g."*

Nothing but Bradlaugh's blatant advertisement of his obnoxious opinions raised the question, and "there was no ground for his claim (at that time) to affirm, for this right is confined to those with religious scruples."

Then he goes on to describe the man.

He says Bradlaugh was a massive man with a large peculiar face and an upper lip like a saddle flap. "His loud, full voice could not put an 'H' in its right place. When interrupted in his orations, which were most denunciatory, he would stop and glare with an assumed air of being unfairly used, and shout, 'Hi 'ope the 'Ouse will 'ear me.'"

But Sir Alfred also says: "He made some telling and excellent speeches and a few outrageous ones. I found him very pleasant and sensible . . . in such private conversations as I had with him. I made his acquaintance by beckoning to him when he was looking for a seat in the House of Commons luncheon room. The next twenty minutes changed my opinion of him, which hitherto had been that he was a ruffian.

"His hatred of all those who had no use for his politics declined in the generally tolerant atmosphere of the House. Before his death he was quite popular with many Members in all quarters of it, and we all came to regard him as a more honest politician than his colleague, Labby."

Later, Sir Alfred again refers to the Bradlaugh Affair.

"And now the tiresome Bradlaugh case was disposed of. The Speaker got rid of it thus."

"Referring to Bradlaugh who was sitting on the front bench below the gangway on our side, he put forward his view, which was equal to a ruling, i.e., that he could not *qua* Speaker have any cognisance of proceedings in the previous Parliament nor could the House interpose before Members had been sworn in.

"Hicks-Beach rose, but was called to order—he then claimed to rise 'to order' and remarked that after this dictum of the Speaker he could only protest, whereupon he was called to order again and swearing began."

This book, published by John Murray, contains a variety of incidents concerned with the author's parliamentary life, but may not be easily come across.

J. COULTHARD.



## HOMER: NO HOMO

ONE of the most absurd forms of teaching is to give a host of details of persons who never lived. Classical professors are great at conjectural *lives of the ancients* by publishing biographies for "college use." Students are crammed with fiction, and myths become men.

"Homer" is a glaring example of this style of make-belief. There is much taught about *him* as an actual person, but as a matter of verified facts there is no evidence that he ever existed. On the other hand, a diligent search reveals a vast amount of information which proves, philologically, that Homer is simply a name-word referring to characteristics, which in course of time became metamorphosed into a man; but, really mythical as Pygmalion's wife, Galatea, came to life out of a block of marble.

Homer is a world-wide name for a universal shadow, and as children love Santa Claus to bring gifts down the chimney, so do classical historians devoutly aver that the wonderful "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" were composed by a poetical genius, born in Greece, during the 8th century B.C., and that everybody knew him as HOMER, who delighted the people by reciting his poems to them. Of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," we know that these are compilations from writings of antiquity, more remote than the 8th century B.C., and that although Herodotus and Aristotle rank Homer with the Olympic gods, the modern Masters of grecian literature emphatically declare that Homer is familiar to them as a man, and for anybody to say otherwise is consummate foolishness.

Every reliable commentator of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," and biographers of "Homer" are explicit with their *facts*; but, each writer contradicts all the others. Consequently, Homer is claimed as an Egyptian, a Babylonian and even as Solomon, while as Prime Minister, Mr. Gladstone says in his "Homeric Discourses," "everybody knows that Homer was a native of Greece." There are, however, as many different *proper* names for Homer as there are signs in the Zodiac, and there are 19 distinct cities in which he was born, and for this *fact* Homer was re-named "UBIQUE" everywhere! He had several fathers, all putative, but unknown, and nothing is mentioned of the more important parent, his mother, because Homer never had one. All his biographers stress the words, "Homer was born with a tuft of hair upon his thigh," and this strange birth-mark in greek is "OMEROS," thigh, and in latin, "HOMER," thigh, or femur.

We are told that Homer was blind; some authors declare, "from birth." Now, "OMEROI" is the greek for "blind" and "Homer"! Hence, unable to read or write. The Babylonians claimed Homer as their "hostage," and OMEROS signifies hostage.

To write HOMER in the greek language, "OMHPOY," displays a mystical appellation which has been explained by Richard Porson, the famous Cambridge Professor of Ancient Greek, as meaning "out of sight."

The Hebrew word "Homeroz" and the greek word "Omeros" both mean "words" as applied to poetical narrations, and the assyrian term "HOMEROCH" is translated as "pieces of sacred writings" many of which are found in the "Odyssey," another name for "Pagan Bible" or "Book of Holy Writ."

Nobody knows anything of Homer as a man, and the climax of absurdity is over-reached by an ancient medal in the British Museum, where Homer is depicted "blind" and reading a book, probably Æsop's Fables."

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

## SOME SAMPLES OF CHRISTIAN TOLERATION

The late-lamented Mr. Gladstone once declared, in an unguarded moment, at the Mansion House, that Christianity carried the blessings of tolerance wherever it went. A glance at the following list (very incomplete) of sentences on Freethinkers during this present century will show the falsity of the Grand Old Man's opinion:—

- D. I. Eaton, two years' imprisonment.
- R. Carlile, nine and a-half years' imprisonment.
- Jane Carlile, two years' imprisonment.
- Mary Anne Carlile, two years' imprisonment.
- Robert Taylor, three years' imprisonment.
- John Clève, four months' imprisonment and fine of £50.
- H. Hetherington, four months' imprisonment.
- Chas. Southwell, one year's imprisonment and fine of £100.
- G. J. Holyoake, six months' imprisonment.
- Adams, one month's imprisonment.
- Paterson, eighteen months' imprisonment.
- Robinson, one year's imprisonment.
- Finlay, two months' imprisonment.
- Matilda Roalfe, two months' imprisonment.
- Robert Pooley, twenty-one months' imprisonment (five months served).
- G. W. Foote, one year's imprisonment.
- W. J. Ramsey, nine months' imprisonment.
- H. A. Kemp, three months' imprisonment.

It is worth while recalling that Charles Bradlaugh had to win the seat which Northampton gave him in the face of the most bigoted and terrible opposition. Mrs. Besant was deprived of her child by an order of the Court of Chancery, and the Marquis of Queensberry had his seat in the House of Lords taken from him.

## THE MYTH THEORY

SIR,—Mr. H. Cutner seems to have missed an important pronouncement by the late Professor Canon Cheyne. Writing in the "Hibbert Journal" an article entitled "Judas Iscariot," July, 1911, said: "Not only is Judas Iscariot unhistorical, but I have come to the conclusion, and I think many other critics likewise, that the whole of the twelve apostles are unhistorical."

Regarding the work of Hiemojewski, perhaps Mr. Cutner also has missed the able summary of this work in Professor Drews' "Witnesses to the Historical Jesus."—Yours, etc.,

T. G. KIRKBY.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.: MESSRS. ROTHWELL AND SHARPLES.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—7-45 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, September 23, 6-30 p.m.: Messrs. E. ELSMERE and T. M. MOSLEY.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. A. CALVERLEY and L. EBURY (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

## INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Political Catholicism," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (London).
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Human Nature and Human Progress," Mr. J. HUTTON HYND.
- West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Loco. Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford, E.15).—Tuesday, September 26, 8 p.m.: A meeting.



## WOMEN, IN OUR HOURS OF EASE

### I

It is reported that a brokendown actor walking along the Embankment looking for an empty seat saw one with a lady of easy virtue resting upon it, she obviously as impecunious as himself. Approaching her the actor swept off his hat and made a deep bow, exclaiming, "Isn't it a shame, madam! The two oldest professions in the world; both ruined by amateurs."

In spite of wide amateur practice and competition, made easier now by ready accessibility of contraceptives, the demimonde continue to flourish. It is a clever French phrase for them; the halfworld, its denizens demimondaines. Neater than Anglicised demirep, which is apparently a shortened version of demi-reputable, that is semi-respectable. Though moralists would shudder at there being any sign of respectability about them at all, not a tithe or a hundredth, much less a half.

We English steeped in Bibliolatriy have much information in the Bible about daughters of joy, and some expressive words for them. Harlot is most frequently used. Curiously it comes to us through old French from Italy, where it meant a vagabond, male or female. The latter being easily procurable at low price her general title became fixed upon prostitutes.

That word has no necessarily feminine gender or innate sex implications. Simply it means to sacrifice one's capacities, to humiliate one's genius, sell for a trifle what should be dear. So by obvious transference it got fixed upon commercial trading to a man of a woman's body.

Whore also has Biblical associations, being used rhetorically as a comprehensive term for gross sin, excessive wickedness. Thus prophets and preachers inveighed against the Whore of Babylon, the Scarlet Woman, setting theologians and commentators speculating and explaining and attributing ever since.

A concubine was not a sinner and concubinage not sin in Eastern eyes. Where many wives were allowed a set of secondary wives, often slave girls, was created. It was a form of polygamy, still common in many parts of the world. Like other moral standards, our sex ethics are largely determined by geography, economics and heredity.

Notably in regard to this an adulteress appears always and in all places to have been denounced and punished, often by death. That was, the breaker of marital vows or trespasser upon them. This is explained by male jealousy and possessiveness, the wife being the man's most private and exclusive property, to be dedicated and sacred to himself.

Drawn also from Bible stories we get Delilah and Jezebel as types of magnetic but loose-living women.

### II

Back to the fourteenth century can be traced strumpet, spoken often in old plays and books. Bawd similarly antique may be man or woman trading in sex. Doxy of the same period was like harlot, the beggar's mate.

From classical Greek comes Hetaera or Hetaira. They were sometimes women of culture and refinement, talked with and consulted by philosophers and other high men, as well as visited professionally when tired of their own home-secluded wives.

Courtesan presumably has the same aristocratic or noble implication. Ladies of the court could be kindred of titled men. Also they might be their favourites or mistresses, or of princes and kings, like Charles the Second's inamoratae promoted to be duchesses.

Street women or street walkers prosecuted by police for soliciting often state themselves to be actresses. This is

a slur upon a hardworking profession. But actresses is a term difficult to define when girls are, as frequently happens, not actually in stage engagements at the moment. Furthermore, they may defend themselves by analogy with Nell Gwyn, orange girl at Drury Lane Theatre door, performer on its stage, and later Charles the Second's darling.

Kept woman, fancy woman, are popular elusive terms used to avoid harsh or definite words for such. Light-o'-love serves the same purpose, as does paramour and wanton in old English. Adventuress was one out to make more than passing profit from the fascination of her body.

More vulgar term for girls purchasable—or maids vendible as Shakespeare has it—is bag. This may be derived from baggage, something worthless or of little value, as old clothes, an encumbrance, weighty to drag about; or may be outright lewd, a bag being a receptacle.

Cow refers to that animal's readiness to receive attention from any bull, while of parallel nature bitch and grey mare are ill-tempered, tyrannous, domineering over the male as well as avid for his embraces.

Tart is equally slang for the over-sexed, uncontrolled female, one bought instead of loved. From the United States comes in low-life language Moll, broad and tomato. All, whatever technical or backstreet cognomen is attached to them and their trade—"She was mistress of her trade" sings the seashanty "Rovin'"—all of them are excused or summarised in the words of a popular American satirical poet when he makes Mehitabel cry to Archy—

"So cheerio, deario;  
What else can a lady do."

A. R. WILLIAMS.

## FAITH

WITH only some occasional glimpses of partial truth, which are always contemptuously rejected without examination, it is not surprising that man clings to faith in future bliss. Faith which might be defined as a pathetic belief in the highly improbable, is the hypodermic injection he must have to be kept going. As his better half is equally superstitious in fundamentals, he must have faith, willy nilly. Her vision of reality stops short at uncovering her partner's pretensions.

So faith persists, despite the inescapable conclusion that the sole evidence for such faith lies in what a Freudian would call a "wish neurose," and despite the fact that the whole of science is nothing but a mass compilation of evidence to the contrary. If Homo Sapiens was so named to imply sagacity, surely Homo Erectus would have been more apt.

F. W. RENNIE.

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