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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Our Pagan Festivals

ALTHOUGH the birth of "our Saviour" is celebrated every Christmas on December 25, there can be but few intelligent Christians who are unaware that this date is purely of pagan origin, and that Christmas was celebrated in some form or other wherever the Sun Myth penetrated.

There is no evidence whatever that the Babe of Bethlehem was ever born at all, let alone on December 25; but there is plenty of evidence that the date, or some approximate date, was well known to the ancients. Even the very orthodox Catholic Encyclopedia, which lets the cat out of the bag more times than many people suppose could possibly happen, admits that "the believers in Mithras observed Sunday as well as Christmas"—both being of course festivals of the Sun. But Sun Myth festivals were known long before Mithra became such a powerful God.

In Chambers' *Book of Days*, a vast compendium of curious lore which once had a great vogue and can still be read with profit, the author was obliged to confess that there was no evidence or very little that Jesus Christ was born on December 25; and he rather shamefacedly agrees that "it is well known that many and, indeed, the greater number of the popular festive observances, by which the winter solstice, that is, the shortest day, is celebrated, are referrible to a much more ancient origin" than Christmas. And he adds:—

"Amid all the pagan nations of antiquity, there seems to have been a universal tendency to worship the sun as the giver of light and life, and the visible manifestation of Deity. Various as were the names bestowed by different peoples on this object of their worship, he was still the same divinity. Thus at Rome, he appears to have been worshipped under one of the characters attributed to Saturn, the father of the gods; among the Scandinavian nations he was known under the epithet of Odin or Woden, the father of Thor . . . whilst with the ancient Persians, the appellation for the god of light was Mithra . . . and with the Phoenicians or Carthaginians it was Baal or Bel. . . ."

This is interesting because it was written about 30 years after Robert Taylor did three years for "blasphemy" for saying almost the same thing just as plainly. And it should be added that Taylor was heartily disliked by many of his fellow Freethinkers at the time for saying so—just as, indeed, he is sneered at even these days. Taylor's great crime was that he boldly called Jesus Christ the Sun, and our modern reverent Rationalists will not stand that.

In his third lecture on the Star of Bethlehem, he says that the "mystical" words, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the King" form part of "a picture in words of the annual phenomena of the solar system," and that all the

circumstances of the history of Jesus Christ "from his imagined conception by the Virgin Mary to his death, resurrection, ascension, and final coming again (as he does) every year to judge both the quick and the dead"—that is to divide an equable proportion of his light and heat to both hemispheres, is based entirely on what we call for short the Sun Myth.

Taylor gives some interesting researches into various names like Tsour, Zor, Aster, trying to show how we make up names like Zoroaster, Petra, Peter, Jupiter, Pater, Easter, Mithra—all of which, as he believed that Jesus Christ was a myth, helped to make him heartily disliked, as I have already intimated. The God Jesus was by most of his contemporary Freethinkers given up, but the "Man" Jesus was quite another matter.

Most Freethinkers, these days, as well as Christians, cheerfully give up December 25 as the actual birthday of Jesus, yet claim that if we do not know the day, that does not prove that he is a myth. And one is perforce to leave it at that for the time being.

But what about some of the other "paganisms" in Christianity? Even Cardinal Newman had to admit that "the doctrine of the Logos is Platonic; that of the Incarnation, Indian, that of a divine Kingdom Judaic, that of angels and demons (and a Mediator). Persian; that the connection of sin with the body is Gnostic; the idea of a new birth, Chinese and Eleusinian; that of Sacramental virtue, Pythagorean; that of the Trinity, common to East and West; and that of the rites of baptism and sacrifice equally ubiquitous"—as John M. Robertson shows in his very valuable *History of Free-thought*.

In ancient Rome, Christmas was celebrated under the name of Saturnalia, or the festival of Saturn and the merrymaking that followed was not exactly what we should call innocent fun. As a matter of fact, up to comparatively recent times, the merrymaking in England was not either. The Master of Ceremonies was called the Lord of Misrule, and "misrule" was really another name for licence. The festival was brought to England by the Romans, and soon got mixed up with Druidical rites and superstitions, and then with those brought over by the Angles and Saxons.

The mistletoe was connected with the mystic rites of the Druids, and whatever the case may be now, it used to be carefully excluded from church decoration. Even the ivy was taboo because of its connection with Bacchus. As for the yule log, everybody knows that it is pagan to the core—derived as it is from the Scandinavian feast of Jul, when, at the winter solstice, huge bonfires were burnt to honour the God Thor.

This "burning" at the time of Christmas is even kept up by the Jews whose "Feast of Lights" takes place just about this time. The reason they give is that during the Maccabean rebellion there was no oil to keep a light burning before the Tabernacle for more than a day; so God "stretched" the period to eight days by a miracle; which reminds one of the miracle Jesus performed when

his father Joseph made a door too small, and Jesus stretched it to fit.

We Freethinkers then need never be ashamed of taking part in all the Christmas festivities, for at their root is the universal custom of worshipping the re-birth of the Sun through which the days begin to get longer. We can dispense with the "worshipping" and enjoy the holiday—there is not a scrap of "religion" in the whole get-up.

Is Father Christmas Santa Claus? He is often called so, but Santa Claus is really St. Nicholas, the patron saint of children and "giving," though, says Chambers, as he is responsible for the birch rod put into naughty children's stockings instead of sweets, "the benignant character of the saint is in this instance woefully belied." The Christmas tree is Scandinavian and was in use for many centuries in Germany before being introduced by Prince Albert when he became Prince Consort.

Thus, few festivals are so saturated with paganism as is Christmas. But as everybody knows the story of the Divine Babe of Bethlehem was worked to the utmost last year, as it is every year. The Crib is worth millions of money to the Church, and it will be a long time before religions can dispense with such a valuable piece of propaganda. It is not the Birth of the Babe of Bethlehem which is really celebrated, but the birth of all babes.

H. CUTNER.

## THE VIRGIN'S KISS

OF all the many refined tortures invented by the Holy Inquisition there was, perhaps, none so diabolical in its ingenuity as that which owed its origin to the artistic talents of Valdès, the eighth Inquisitor General of Spain. Torquemada, the first Inquisitor General, had devised the Quemadero, consisting of four hollow plaster statues, named Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Into the bodies of these four plaster prophets were placed, alive, the unfortunate creatures who had been condemned as enemies of the Catholic Church and of the Most Holy Inquisition. The wood, introduced through apertures, was then set alight, and the victims suffered the agonizing death of slow combustion. But Valdès thought he could go one better than this. He imagined a machine about which his only hesitation seemed to be in the choice of its name. In appearance it was a *Mater Dolorosa* (Mother of Sorrows); but in the principle of its action is caused him to think of "a Virgin's kiss" (*el beso de la Virgen*). He eventually decided that both names should be used. In action it would be "the Virgin's Kiss" and afterwards the Virgin would become the "Mother of Sorrows."

Valdès then set to work. First of all he modelled a small statue. He consulted good Catholic artificers and familiars of the Inquisition. He showed them the statue, explained to them his ideas, provided them with sufficient funds, and urged them on to the early completion of the work. While the workmen were thus engaged, Valdès busied himself in seeking a female victim who should be worthy to receive the first kiss of the Virgin. Among his favourites was one Pedro Espinosa who knew all about the new invention of his master. Valdès requested this favourite to find for him, for the inauguration of his machine, a pretty young female who had been accused of some heresy. Pedro informed him that he had just what he wanted. Jeanne Boharques, whose sister had been burned at the last auto-da-fé, was then lying a prisoner in the dungeons of Triana. She

was young and beautiful and, after inspection, Valdès considered her an ideal subject to receive the first "kiss of the Virgin." He ordered that Jeanne should be given a comfortable chamber, be well nourished, and encouraged to believe in her pardon and eventual deliverance. From what subsequently occurred, the reason for this hypocritical treatment can easily be guessed.

The statue was at length completed and, on a certain day, Valdès sent out his invitations for the witnessing of the new spectacle. The performance took place in the Torment Chamber of Triana. On the platform were Valdès and his guests, and the lights were so arranged that they were in shadow, while the principal actors were brilliantly illumined. At a given signal a curtain was drawn, and displayed an iron statue of natural size placed upon a pedestal which rose and fell in such a manner as to put the head of the statue on a level with the head of the human being destined to be its victim. This statue represented a woman soberly attired, with bare arms. The arms were ingeniously articulated at the shoulders; at the elbows, and at the wrists; the hands had outstretched fingers, and nails of steel. "Here," said the voice of Espinosa, who was acting as master of the ceremonies, "here is she who will first of all give the Virgin's kiss, and who afterwards will become the 'Mother of Sorrows.'" He pressed the controls of the invisible springs and the statue, which was in profile, turned slowly on its pedestal. When directly in front of the illustrious spectators, they were able to see that its eyes were hollow, that it had a small hole on the left side of the chest near the place of the heart, and that in these three cavities glistened points of steel. At the same time the arms moved, rising and falling, opening and shutting. Then, continuing to turn, the statue resumed its profile position in respect to the spectators. We can well imagine that such a performance was, especially for those days, astonishing enough. But this was nothing to that which was to follow.

A door opened and through the open doorway a woman was pushed. The men who had brought her there disappeared, and the door was closed behind her. The spectators beheld a pretty young woman, well made and nude except for the very short and low-cut *san benito* which had been fastened round her body with a cord. Her magnificent black hair flowed freely over her white shoulders. She was at first dazzled by the light. Then a monk approached her and, taking her by the hand, led her before the statue and said in a low voice: "Jeanne Boharques de Vargas, the hour of your supreme pardon has come. Give the kiss of reconciliation to the Virgin." "A kiss," thought the young woman, "on those iron lips? It is curious, but easy." And she had seen many curious things in the dungeons of Triana. Jeanne allowed herself to be placed in contact with the statue, and her lips, set for kissing, were just about to touch those of the statue when she was heard to utter a cry of terrified surprise. The arms of the statue had risen and opened, and then closed roughly, bruising her shoulders, and the iron hands stuck their nails of steel into her back. She howled with fear and pain and pressed her hands against the chest of the statue in the vain hope of escaping from the unexpected and diabolical embrace. What a sight! The great candles lit up the view of the young woman. Her convulsed face, her screaming mouth, her terrified eyes, and the contortions of her tortured body! This was allowed to continue as the spectators found delight in the victim's varied expressions and attitudes. Never before had they been

entertained with such a mixture of suffering and human beauty.

Then Valdès made a sign, and Pedro touched some other mechanism. The arms of the statue increased their pressure, and pressed close to its iron chest the tender chest of living flesh. Then came further cries, more acute and more sorrowful than the preceding. Slowly, from the eyes of the statue, appeared two points of steel; from its heart, also slowly, appeared another point of steel. Jeanne tried to recede from the point which pierced her chest, and from the two points which were moving towards her eyes. But, also slowly, the arms of the statue increased their pressure. The points of steel pierced her eyes and her chest. They then receded. But even this was not the end. An instant later the points of steel again advanced and made deeper impressions than before. And in this manner the agony was continued. Suddenly, the groans of agony faded. The body no longer trembled. The statue relaxed its arms; at its feet a trap opened and the bleeding and convulsed corpse of Jeanne Boharques passed out of sight.

HANNIBAL.

## THE MIRACLE OF THE ASSUMPTION

### I

IN *The Freethinker* of November 12, 1950, Mr. H. H. Preece has made an attack first of all on the logic, secondly on the scientific knowledge, and thirdly on the knowledge of Roman Catholic theology possessed by Mr. Ridley. It has been my pleasure to read an article in *The Freethinker* by Mr. Ridley every week in recent years, and I have been particularly impressed not only by Mr. Ridley's logic, but also by the vast fund of general knowledge and especially by the profound knowledge of Roman Catholic theology which he possesses. I am afraid that my admiration of Mr. Ridley in this respect does not extend to Mr. Preece, because I have read his article half a dozen times and I am bound to say that I am as yet unable to follow his method of thinking. Of course, that may be due to my stupidity in not grasping what seems to me to be a tortuous tangle of matters of theology, speculative science, miracles, metaphysics and general obscurity.

It would be impossible in the available space for me adequately to deal with all of Mr. Preece's arguments, or at any rate with those which I can more or less follow, but there are some matters with which I should like to deal.

First of all Mr. Preece seems to assume without any evidence whatever, that Mr. Ridley apparently in agreement with Thomas Aquinas, of all people, considers that the moral law is superior to the secular law. Of course it all depends on what is meant by the moral law, but here the moral law is obviously the moral law of the Roman Catholic theologians, and that moral law is what they call the divine law. That divine law is mainly composed of the law laid down by God the Father Almighty, otherwise called Jehovah, whose moral qualities have been so drastically criticised in the *Bible Handbook* (by Foote and Ball). The remainder purports to be laid down by His Son Jesus. Some of this is commendable, but the rest is a mixture of the fantastic and the positively wicked; for an example of the wicked is the exhortation to hate parents, wife and family (Luke XIV, 26). It follows that the secular law of most civilised countries is vastly superior to it.

We are most of us familiar with the reactionary law of the Roman Catholic theologians in respect of divorce, contraception and therapeutic abortion, but perhaps the following example of their moral law, directly founded as it is upon the authority of Thomas Aquinas, may not be so well known. In a work written by Joseph Rickaby, S.J., entitled *Moral Philosophy* (Longmans Green and Co., 1923) in Chapter 5, Section II, entitled "Of the so-called Rights of Animals" the author, after denying that animals have any rights, says at page 250 as follows: "But there is no shadow of evil resting on the practice of causing pain to brutes in sport, where the pain is not the sport itself, but an incidental concomitant of it. Much more in all that conduces to the sustenance of man may we give pain to brutes, as also in the pursuit of science. Nor are we bound to any anxious care to make this pain as little as may be. Brutes are as things in our regard." At the end of the chapter he refers the reader to the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas 2a, 2ae (which means the second part of Part 2) q. 25, art. 3.

Apparently, Mr. Preece accuses Mr. Ridley of being ignorant of Roman Catholic theology because he is supposed to have stated that the Roman Church is rational and then proceeded in recent articles to criticise the dogma of the assumption of the body of the Virgin Mary into Heaven. I have read three recent articles of Mr. Ridley in connection with these matters, namely, those of September 10, 24 and October 8, and in my humble opinion his treatment of them was, as is usual with all his writings, clear, logical and convincing. He does say in his article on September 24, that Roman Catholic dogma in its own estimation at least, represents an impregnable fortress of reason, but he almost directly afterwards says that modern biblical criticism has long since demolished the "infallible revelation" upon which such dogma is based.

I hope that Mr. Ridley will not mind if I add a few passages on my own to his very lucid account of the Roman Church's theology in this respect.

The logic upon which the Roman Church bases her claims is undoubtedly deductive logic as opposed to inductive logic, which latter form of logic is primarily dependent on observation and constitutes what is known as the scientific method. Deductive logic, on the other hand, assumes certain propositions called premises to be true without proving them to be true. Having done that, then by a valid process of reasoning for which rules are laid down, one arrives at a certain conclusion. On the basis that the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true, but the process of reasoning for arriving at the conclusion has nothing to do with the process of reasoning if any, which lies behind the assertion of those premises. Let me give a rather fantastic illustration, fantastic, no doubt, but nevertheless logically correct, that is to say from the point of view of deductive logic. Take the following syllogism:—

All pious Roman Catholics are benevolent.

Torquemada of the Spanish Inquisition was a pious Roman Catholic.

Therefore, Torquemada was benevolent.

Of course the principal of major premise is an absurdity, but having assumed its truth, it logically follows that the diabolical monster Torquemada was benevolent.

J. H. G. BULLER, LL.B.

## WHAT IS TRUTH?

AT a debate between the Mormans and the N.S.S. the other Sunday evening, the exponents of the Church of Latter Day Saints, as they call it, made much of their claim that, like Rationalists, they sought the Truth. This minor Christian sect has a nonconformist approach to religion—their special feature being Continuous Revelation. The greatest stain on their otherwise seemingly tolerant outlook is their practice of the colour bar. With the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa they share the unenviable distinction of excluding the negro from their ministry; no other Christian sect, even in the Southern States of the U.S.A., does that.

But it is not with the faith and morals of this minor Christian community that I want to deal but with this claim of identity of purpose with Rationalists in the pursuit of Truth, a claim which came in for a good deal of criticism from the floor of the meeting. For, of course, it is not true that there is any identity of view between these religious enthusiasts and Rationalists in their approach to Truth.

The Mormon, like others who are guided by what they describe as Divine Revelation, deal in two sorts of Truth—that served out to them by the Elders of their Church, and the material truths of human experience. From this dual standpoint they advance in the pursuit of further Truth. We need not doubt the sincerity of their conviction that they are being most objective about the business, but the simple fact is, of course, that their approach is *a priori* and not objective at all, heavily weighted as it is with preconceptions and unsupported religious dogmas. A man may stick rigidly to the straight and narrow path, but if he has started off in the wrong direction, he will merely succeed in getting farther and farther away from his objective.

Now the Rationalist has no beliefs in the sense that the religious have. He does not "believe" there is no god; he accepts as fundamental that where there is no evidence, there is no justification for assumptions. In criticising, therefore, the claims of "revealed" religion, he has to take care that he does not adopt the attitude of hurling dogma against dogma, anathema against anathema. Some of the critics of the other evening were inclined to slip into this error. Some, for instance, treated Evolution as dogmatic Truth. Evolution, however, is still but a theory, a working hypothesis; it is not an established fact, for it cannot be demonstrated.

Water is composed of two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen; the earth is round, revolves on its axis and is 93 million miles from the sun. These are facts, and anyone with the requisite technical knowledge and the tools can prove them by a practical demonstration. But no one can give a practical demonstration of the operation of evolution; he can only point to the accumulation of circumstantial evidence in support of the hypothesis. This evidence is so compelling, so logical, so without any rival scientific theory, as to justify us for ordinary purposes to treat it as fact, like H<sub>2</sub>O. But when challenging other people's theories and assumptions, it is as well to maintain a careful distinction between established fact and even the most accepted hypothesis.

The concepts of our objective material universe are being continually subjected to reassessment, as our scientists pursue their inquiries into ever new fields. We had hardly settled down to the contemplation of our world as composed of nice, solid little indestructible atoms, when we were told that these atoms are almost as empty of material as the heavens. As one popular physicist put

it, if the nucleus of a hydrogen atom were the size of an orange, its neutron would be the size of a pea two miles distant. I was often reminded in my youth of the lamentable emptiness of my cranium, but it is a little disturbing to realise that their rude gibes were, scientifically, an under-statement! And now our physicists of the quantum school come along to tell us that even the scattered particles, which is all the atomic physicists have left us, are not particles at all but merely waves. Then what is left of our material universe at all? For even to my untutored mind a wave is not material, even if one sweeps me off the deck, I know that it is the old H<sub>2</sub>O that is going to drown me, not any amount of waves. It was with some relief that I read an article by Einstein in the *Penguin Science News* in which he expressed disagreement with the wavy physicists. It was like the relief of the householder who has had burglars, when he finds that, though they have pinched the family plate, at least they didn't raid the tea caddy or lift the packet of cigarettes on the mantelpiece.

But if the wavy merchants should prove right after all and our material world dissolves into waves and lines like one of those abstract studies of Picasso, now on show, well, we Rationalists will just have to lump it. We cannot be dogmatic about it like some Latter Day Saint. As Rationalists our approach must be objective, not hedged in by preconceptions, whether those of divine revelation or some nineteenth century philosophy. We have to accept demonstrable experiments as facts and reasoned theories that fit the known data as our working hypotheses.

That is the difference between the true Rationalist and the dupes of religion. Both may be honest and sincere (for it is false intentions, not false conceptions that stamp the charlatan) in their conviction that they are pursuing the Truth; but if they mix fact with assumption their pursuit becomes no longer objective, whether they call themselves Theists or Atheists.

That is why the Freethinker, the *true* Freethinker—and not the brilliant exponent of some new panacea—standing fearlessly to accept come what may, prepared to revise, *ab initio* if need be, all his previous conceptions, is the real champion and harbinger of human progress.

P. C. KING.

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## PREDESTINATION

PREDESTINATION is a word which is used to describe one of the manifold blessings of our holy religion. When, however, we are speaking of other religions, we should not use this word, but rather the word *fatalism*. All right thinking people know that there is as much difference in the meanings of predestination and fatalism as there is in day and night.

With the Greeks it was the Moirai, Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, and with the Romans, the Parcae, Nona, Decuma, and Morta who were the apportioning goddesses who spun out the web of human destiny. Moira and Parca were also names of the goddess of destiny, Decuma, and Morta, who were the apportioning goddesses; and everyone might well hope to be <sup>this</sup> since it is apparent that whatever he gets or does in life depends as much on things other than himself as it depends on his will. So thoroughgoing were the ancients in their fatalism that some of them believed that not even the gods could change the decrees of fate.

Predestination is the religious form of fatalism and, as the act or series of acts of a tyrannous god who arbitrarily determines what man shall or shall not be, is, it seems to me, most strongly expressed in Semitic religions, notably, Judaism and Mohammedanism and in Christianity which derives its conceptions of predestination from Judaism. There is something of the poetic in the beliefs of the Greeks and Romans regarding the three Fates who according to Hesiod in the *Theogony* were born of the Night and were also described by him as having born of Zeus and Themis or Justice; but certainly there is nothing poetic about Jehovah and Allah, who are supposed to be the masters of human destiny. Here, as elsewhere, men have portrayed themselves in their gods; and the advantage is on the side of the Greeks and the Romans and not on that of the Semitic races and those who have adopted their religions.

There are in the Bible at least sixty-four passages concerning the doctrine of predestination. In none of these is the Jewish and Christian conception of the doctrine more clearly set forth than in Romans IX, 11-16:

"For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau I hated. What shall we say then? *Is there unrighteousness with God?* God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

This is a sublime example of the love and forbearance of the Lord; however, there immediately arises a question which the Christians have never answered satisfactorily and never will; and that is, In such a despotic scheme of religion of what avail is any morally good thought or act of man who is among either the elect or the damned according to the will of Jehovah? We have here a part of the famous Christian plan of salvation, which could just as correctly be called a plan of damnation, in which it is evident that neither faith nor works nor anything else human can save man, but only the grace of God. It is also evident that in the Christian plan the justice of God is a mystery or, better to say, a nonentity.

Not only has God predetermined everything that will happen to each man but he has recorded, or had his angels to record, the names of the elect in a book called the book of life from which the names of the damned are omitted. An expression of this is found in Revelation, XIII, 8:

"All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Mohammed borrowed the idea of a book of fate either from Christianity or from some other source, the idea being common in antiquity. Suras VII and XVII of the Koran contain specific mention of such a book. Two quotations from Suras LIV and LXXXVII, as translated by George Sale, are subjoined to illustrate the absolute predestination taught by the prophet of God:

"All things have we created *bound* by a fixed decree: and our command is no more than a single word, like the twinkling of an eye."

"Praise the name of thy Lord, the most high; who hath created and completely formed *his creatures*: and

who determineth *them to various ends*, and directeth *them to attain the same*; and who produceth the pasture for cattle, and afterwards rendereth the same dry stubble of a dusky hue."

WILLIAM RITTENOUR.

(To be concluded)

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## ART AND SCIENCE

The answer to our What? and When?  
Is just descriptive patter,  
But to reply to How? and Why?  
Is quite another matter.  
For your response to When? and What?  
Describes what is or was,  
But if you try to answer Why?  
You have to say, "Because . . ."  
Most hard it is to answer How?  
How anything will work:  
Unless of brains you have enow,  
This problem you must shirk.  
What happened in the past, and when,  
Our histories impart;  
But man's reply to How? and Why?  
Needs Science more than Art.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

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## ACID DROPS

The Pope is going to pardon the world in 1951, and it is to be hoped that the world will acknowledge such an unprecedented honour. It is done by extending the Holy Year Indulgence to everybody, not just limiting it to the people who visited Rome in 1950. Anyway, the Pope issued a Bull on December 23, and after that, whether it is wanted or not, the Holy Church will deem you pardoned. And this includes the Protestant Alliance and the Protestant Truth Society. Or does it?

If you have 8s. 6d. to spare—or even if you haven't—you can buy a holy brick to form part of the 3,000 Bricks to wall up the Holy Door in St. Peter's on Christmas Eve. Your name will be stamped on it, and in 1974, when the Holy Door will be opened again, you will have the Brick returned to you or your family, and you can treasure it at least till the Second Advent. This appears to us to be a delightful little wheeze to rope in £1,275, and we only wish the opening of a Freethought door would bring in an equal sum. Who thought of it in the first place?

In that stronghold of Protestantism, Ulster, the Belfast Corporation has decided to close down all play centres for children on Sundays, but naturally are not going to forbid adults from enjoying the parks on God's Day. Alderman McGlade strongly protested, but Councillor Cunningham pointed out that Ulster Protestants "had a different idea of the Sabbath to the people across the water." Why, if children were allowed to play on Sunday they would actually think that "Sunday was no different from other days"—the wicked imps! Councillor Cunningham would be a valuable addition to Mr. "Misery" Martin's righteous team.

Although many Israelites have managed to "return" to their own country, it should never be forgotten that all Christians look upon Palestine also as their Holy Land—

the Land which "our Lord" trod, and in which he died to save the world (though it is by no means clear what for or what from). Therefore, it is somewhat of a shock to find that churches, schools and convents, are closing down because there are too few Christians to support them. Perhaps the Christians who are still in Palestine are being converted to Judaism—why not?

**Ninety years after** the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, we get "teachers" terrified at what the teaching of Evolution is going to do to Christianity. At a meeting recently organised by the British Social Hygiene Council, there was an introductory lecture by Dr. Julian Huxley, and, according to *The Times* report, he said that "he thought that Darwin's theory had destroyed the argument for the existence of God from design." Needless to add, "there were murmers of dissent," and the murmerers said, "that, on the contrary, it had reinforced it!" Naturally, they did not explain why it was, if that is true, Churches showed almost a united front not only against Darwin but against Evolution. Even now they would yell the roof of their churches off with joy if Evolution could be shown to be untrue.

**But no meeting** of this kind would be complete if there was not someone who wanted Science and Christianity to fall on each other's necks and be the best of pals. In this case, it was Dr. Thorpe, a Cambridge University Zoologist, whose conclusion was that Science and the Christian Faith were "indispensable to each other and were both complementary revelations of the eternal." We do not know what Dr. Huxley thought of this illuminating twaddle, but if Dr. Thorpe read *The Freethinker*, he would know what we think of it.

**One of the delegates** to the Warsaw Peace Conference, a Mrs. Thompson, declared on her return that, though she was a grand-daughter of American Presbyterians, she found it difficult to find "the kind of Christians she knew in her younger days." However, she found that "there was a good deal of practical Christianity in Communism and a good deal of practical Communism in Christianity." This must be a dreadful smack in the eye to all who glibly talk about Atheistic Communism.

**Whatever "Existentialism"** actually means—we believe there are two kinds, one thoroughly Christian, and the other thoroughly Atheistic—it has been attacked by the Pope. "Even ecclesiastics have been affected by the disease," he laments. But the truth may well be that if the Pope is "agin" it, there may be something to be said in its favour.

**Religious Education** is still the subject most talked about in educational circles, but exactly what the "religious" part should be is not at all clear; nor are the religious teachers in accord. Professor Niblett, of the University of Leeds Institute of Education, claims that the "function of Religious Education (including worship) is the development of awareness of God and His ways." That is all he has to say about it in article three on "The Teacher's Job" in the *Schoolmaster*. It is not unfair to say that Prof. Niblett's own awareness of God is just as indefinable as that of a new-born babe. What is it that he is aware of?

**Methodists are not** very vociferous these days—most of them seem too cowed by the Roman Catholic opposition

to open their mouths. But they are adamant on Sunday misery for all. The *Methodist Recorder* recently pointed out that it was principally the Conservatives who opposed Fun Fairs on Sunday, but "when the free vote was applied, Labour members' consciences, uninhibited by Party loyalties, added their votes to the opposition with the result that Sunday opening of the fairground was rejected." And with a whoop of joy adds, "It was surprising, but all the more gratifying for that." Not even Mr. "Misery" Martin can complain of such a stunning victory for celestial unhappiness.

**The Assistant Director** of Religious Education, the Rev. E. A. Simpson, said for the thousandth time, that soon "we shall have to say for which camp we in England stand—Communism or Christianity." This gentleman knows perfectly well that there is something infinitely superior to both—and that is Freethought. Under Freethought, he would be allowed absolute freedom to practise his religion. Under "Atheistic Communism," both Freethought and Christianity would only be allowed on sufferance; they might well be totally suppressed.

**If ladies are not allowed yet**, except in rare instances, to be priests or pastors, at least they can write what they think about the wonders of Christianity. Here, for example, we have Mrs. W. F. Channon, President of the Baptist Women's League, filling some columns in the *Christian World* of enthusiastic adoration of the Bible. utterly unaware of, we need not say, the Freethought case against it, but also of the Christian case. "The Bible," she unctuously says, "being the secret of happy, healthy home life, became the secret of England's greatness." Yet—alas—it was Jesus who taught children to hate their parents in order to become His disciples. And also that members of the same household should quarrel—"The father against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, etc." What a happy home life there would be if Jesus were literally followed!

**In spite of** the God-like efforts of ministers and teachers, religious education often flops. A typical example comes from Caithness where one of the religious Councillors told an audience that he recently asked a schoolgirl, "What is man's chief end?" and she answered, "I don't know." This appalling ignorance staggered him, and he and others were in favour of ministers of religion entering any school and compelling the children to learn God's Word—or at least something like it, and there was only some faint-hearted opposition. What a travesty of genuine education is all this squabbling about religion. Is it actually worse in Scotland than in England?

**The Vicar of Thirsk** is ashamed at the way people make "Christmas an excuse for eating and drinking and being merry." He wants them to stop "this tomfoolery—unless we "are prepared to acknowledge the One whose festival it is." Unfortunately, we don't know who is the "One." It certainly was Mithra's long before Jesus' day, and there are many other claimants to the title of the "One." And while the outraged Vicar of Thirsk was angrily fuming, most people wallowed in huge mixtures of Christmas pudding, turkey and onion sauce, nuts and wine, and anything else they could afford; to say nothing of party games, opening presents, and all the other jollities that such a pagan festival can bring.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C. 1.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. F. VINEY.—Your letter betrays an almost unbelievable misunderstanding of the purpose of *The Freethinker*. It is not published to placate readers but is the organ of unpopular opinions, often not allowed expression in any other journal. Its contributors have the right to express their views and its readers to differ from them. The writer to whom you refer has only recently dealt with Dialectical Materialism from which he differs. But there are also other and more immediate problems to be dealt with. In any case, can you answer his arguments?

For *The Freethinker*.—Vernon H. Smith, 10s.; D. Finlayson, 3s.; Anon., 3s.

The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges £1 from W. J. Bennett for the N.S.S. Benevolent Fund.

R. MASON.—Thanks for cuttings.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, 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).

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

## SUGAR PLUMS

Members of The National Secular Society are reminded that subscriptions for 1951 are now due and Branch members should remit to their local secretaries. Although money has never been the chief consideration in membership, the Society can spend usefully all that comes into its coffers. The work carried out during the year largely depends upon available funds for propaganda purposes. Members of active Branches contribute a lot of voluntary work behind the scenes besides helping with their subscriptions.

A number of new readers of *The Freethinker* have testified to their pleasure and surprise in coming across the paper in, often, quite accidental circumstances. They had ideas concerning the truth or otherwise of Christianity, but had no idea that there was a paper expounding similar views. There are still a lot more would-be readers of *The Freethinker* if they knew of its existence. If you know of any send in the names and addresses to the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, with fourpence for postage, and a free copy will be sent for four weeks; or send 4s. 4d. for a quarter's subscription and the paper will be sent over that period, after which the new reader could continue at his own expense.

## "JOURNEY THROUGH UTOPIA"

I

THE ideal conception and, more rarely, the actual creation of sociological Utopias has been, throughout the ages, a recognised human pastime. From the days of the ancient Greeks, those universal inventors, down to the recent work of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell in the last few years, Utopian literature has formed a recognised literary sub-species, which can boast many famous names; the collective title, "Utopia," is, of course, taken from one of the most famous examples of this literary genre, the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More, published (in Latin) in 1516.

The essence of a "Utopia" would seem to be contrast; the contrast between the unpleasant realities of life as it is actually lived from age to age in this humdrum world, and life as idealists would have it, "remoulded nearer to the heart's desire" in the ideal society of Utopia. "Utopian" literature may, accordingly, be described as, in one sense at least, a branch of satire, since the portrayal of what might be, inevitably provokes a condemnation of what is; in the light of the ideal, the real presents an unsavoury appearance.

The value of the Utopian conception has been very variously estimated by critics of outstanding literary ability. The most famous eulogy of Utopias is still probably that of Oscar Wilde:—

"A map of the world which does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias."

Contrast with which the robust commonsense depreciation of that eminent Victorian philistine, Lord Macaulay, "An acre of Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia."

Both the above "value-judgments" are quoted in the latest history of Utopian literature, *Journey Through Utopia*, by Marie Louise Berneri (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 16s.). Her tragic death recently deprived the advanced movement in this country of one of its most attractive and colourful personalities. Miss Berneri was a well known speaker and writer in the small but active anarchist movement in this country. She was the author of several pamphlets, but this is, we think, her first large-scale book. Its posthumous publication indicates that the world is the poorer, not only by the loss of a vivid personality and courageous fighter for human progress and emancipation as she conceived it, but, also, by the loss of an historian and a sociologist of great talent and still greater promise.

In *Journey Through Utopia*, M. L. Berneri has given us a detailed critical history of literary Utopias throughout the ages; throughout, her survey is confined to literature and she does not describe the frequent successive attempts made by practical "Utopians" to translate their dreams into actual facts in their contemporary world. Her age-long survey is one of the most detailed and, also, one of the best of its kind that has appeared in modern literature. The survey undertaken is exhaustive and stretches from such ancient Greek thinkers as Plato and Zeno to our contemporaries, H. G. Wells and other 20th century voyagers to Utopia from the machine age.

Incidentally, the 'perennial recreation of the Utopian ideal is strikingly indicated by the fact that, in the last two years, too late even to be included in the present work, two new Utopias—in both cases Utopia in reverse

--have appeared; Aldous Huxley's grim *Ape and Essence*, that initial "shape of things to come" in the "atomic age," which, in our submission, must be held to rank very high amongst sociological fiction, and George Orwell's much trumpeted (though, in our opinion, rather over-rated) satire on totalitarian dictatorship, 1984. It is much to be hoped that the macabre Huxley nightmare of Californian Belial worshippers sacrificing their atomically-aborted off-spring to the Evil one, does not become the prophetic prototype of a new species of atomic "Utopias"!

In the course of her long "journey through Utopia," our author encounters many famous names. Who, for example, has not heard of Plato's *Republic* (more accurately rendered as *The State*), or More's own *Utopia*, which has given its name to an entire literature? Only a degree less famous is Campanella's *City of the Sun*, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Etienne Cabet's *Icaria* all dealt with lucidly and comprehensively by our historian. It is rather astonishing to note that the unimaginative English have created some of the most famous Utopias.

However, Miss Berneri hardly did justice to these, for she does not deal in any detail with either Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Samuel Butler's two *Erewhon* books, or Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, all of which contained strong Utopian elements. Rather surprisingly she deals with the Commonwealth "Digger," Winstanley, who was not a Utopian at all, at least in any recognised sense of the term. Moreover, she includes a long extract from Eugene Richter's *Pictures of the Socialistic Future*, which is an anti-socialist pamphlet written by a Liberal politician and, in no sense, a Utopia. As a leading exponent of Anarchist philosophy, Miss Berneri herself seems to regard William Morris's *News from Nowhere* as the most attractive of all the literary Utopias which she so learnedly describes. Many non-anarchists would, we imagine, subscribe to this estimate of William Morris's masterpiece. Her pronounced anti-statist philosophy may, perhaps, be held to have biased the author against such frankly state-socialistic Utopias as Cabet's *Icaria* and Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### THE REIGN OF LAW (1)

IN face of Catholic reiteration of the medieval idea of the reign of law, Ridley's rhetoric in the allegorical "Church of Rome and Church of Moscow" falls flat. Play upon the analogy of Rome and Moscow as centres of political intrigue only accentuates the distinctive differences. If the Vatican is the smallest, the U.S.S.R. is the greatest territorial State the world has known. Rome's army of black-coated priests has no arsenal or stock of lethal weapons, whereas Russia has the greatest military force known to history. The influence of the Soviet is mainly on its borders, while that of Rome reaches all over the world. The Church is, in fact, what the Comintern aimed at being, an international organisation.

The allegory is Church of Moscow not Kremlin of Rome. The Church is not a building, it involves the idea of an organised body and shows the power of the Vatican as ideological, not political. The idea of the Pope or Stalin as the head of an organised body with members; or of members of the Church or the Party; or even of members of a family; is metaphor that is as primitive as it is typically medieval; and political ideology with its party discipline and totalitarian solidarity; the idea of

a World State parallels that of a Universal or Catholic Church; and the idea of body and soul in the metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ gives the kick in Hitler's taunt that materialism is lacking in spirit. Such metaphor is typical of Catholic theology.

Interest in ecclesiastical history is not only political but also ideological. With tradition in beliefs and customs of the people it connects the ecclesia, the popular assembly or democratic mystery, with the law and the prophets, just as does the Platonic idea (Greek for vision) with the prophetic vision of Ezekiel. Plato, in his *Republic* and *Laws*, gave the classic argument against democracy, and his ideal is exemplified in the philosophic emperor or the philosopher king. But tyranny came within the framework of democracy which is here given as a form of government, and this only confuses the problem of democracy, for all forms of government have claimed to rule in the name of the people, and Plato's ideal of the Good only begs the question.

Accepting Plato's case, in terms of morality and government, it was Aristotle who coined the word, as well as giving the basic principles in his *Politics*; as the science of government. Study of militarism was necessary for defence against external enemies and for internal discipline within the State, together with study of reasons in ethics and rhetoric. The political genius is a master of metaphor and the State, the highest form of community, aims at the highest good; thus mystically including God and Reason in Plato's idea of the Good. Neither Plato nor Aristotle considered how the form of government was to be decided, accepting the status quo, and this dodges the question that is involved in the ecclesia, the democratic mystery or popular assembly.

Aristotle's method, with Roman militarism, appears in the philosophy of the Stoics, in its threefold study of physics, ethics and rhetoric. An example may be seen in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the philosophic emperor. Its social and psychological bankruptcy is usually praised as showing how heavy lies the head that wears a crown. There is much about duty and discipline as between members of a social body, of which he was the head; and references to the "God within me" are as theological as where he echoes Epictetus the slave, in feeling like "a little soul imprisoned in a corpse." It is not a cock-crow heralding a dawn. The apotheosis of the emperor, symbol of militaristic power, clashes with the vox populi vox dei of the popular assembly, as the collapse of the Empire heralded the Universal Church.

Stoic pantheism was a transition from pagan polytheism to Christian monotheism. With the failure of Greek ethics, the mild metaphor of Stoic rhetoric led on to declamation with vitriolic condemnation of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, against the World, the Flesh and the Devil. The exuberance of metaphor against immorality in the wildest and most fantastic allegory in apocalyptic vision is accompanied by intensity of feeling and passion in condemnation of evil motives. The emphasis changes from ethical good to theological evil, as the philosophic idea of Nature as a paradox, with neo-platonic mysticism, confirms personal feeling in popular superstitious prejudice and theological dialectic. Study of physics was outmoded by the popular cult of souls in the mysteries, of which there is more in the poets than in the philosophers. Science was discredited by divine gnosis.

The word "mystery" has come to be used as a synonym for ignorance, but the mysteries were social customs with cultivation of passionate zeal, divine inspiration or gnosis. With rhetorical metaphor, gnostic idiom in



popular appeal, was common in the mysteries, of which the ecclesia was one. The gnostic idea that members of a social body were united in spirit, and that this spirit speaks through the mouth of the elect combines the Greek ecclesia or popular assembly with the vision that spoke through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel. It involves the idea of election which was not considered by either Plato or Aristotle. If genius was master of metaphor, the allegory of the Church as the Body of Christ was gnostic idiom in the popular assembly. I speak in a mystery, said St. Paul, and the Pauline epistles abound in gnostic idiom, with superstitious appeal to popular prejudices.

If Christ came to fulfil the law it is also said Paul was the real founder of Christianity. Like Paul in the mystery, the Church is all things to all men, hence the mystical contradictions. From mystery cults came mystery religions and a clash between Christ and Mithra, with Christian communism against the fascism of the Cæsars, forshadowing the medieval Church and State with sacred ritual against militaristic pageantry. To Aristotle, politics was both legal and ethical, but the charge of immorality raises a question of personal concern, the sanctity of law. As Paul said, if law is man-made, might is right; the law makes the crime for without law there is no crime. With personal appeal in justification, the authority of the Church replaces the authority of the State.

In sheer desperation and intellectual frustration, the greatest ecclesiastic, with passionate eloquence, in his *Confessions*, found personal justification and righteous conviction in mystical conversion; and the triumph of Christianity was proclaimed, with rhetorical extravagance, in the logic of St. Augustine, as the Law of God, with the Will of God residing in the Church as the *City of God*.

This preliminary survey was necessary to consider the ignorance and personal prejudice concerning law in an age of moral and political decline, before going on to the theological implications in political ideology, with the Church as the Ghost of the Empire and law as a ghost of a god in the medieval reign of law. This will be seen in a further article.

H. H. PREECE.

### CORRUPTED LOVE FEAST

A STUMBLING-BLOCK when investigating secret rites of sacred mysteries, as Eleusian and Bacchic orgies, is the change in vocabulary, originally Egyptian, transformed to Greek which puts a lock on understanding and interpretation.

This study is useful as an aid to know something of modern societies, religious and secular, secret or public, some flourished, other were suppressed. Science, arts and economics with "mysteria" were involved in this code of knowledge, up to the 14th century, as recorded by "Cod. Theodos, lib. 9," and it is from ancient authorities that the modern research student can gain reliable details. Mystic festivals were usually celebrated during nocturnal meetings, conducted in forest-like seclusion, closely guarded by trusted officials, similar to the modern masonic tyler, and anyone divulging secrets of the ritual were put to death, according to initiated Cicero, who says, "De Leg. lib. II," that the mysteria rites were sexual.

Livy, in his "Roman History," Book 39, states that the enlightened brotherhood indulged in actions of a revolting character, and the Consuls made inquiries and

discovered orgies of debauch, including wine and feasts, preceding ceremonies conducted in gloomy groves and semi-darkness. Consul Postumias reported particularly of the Bacchanalian mysterie. His informers were Hispalia and Aebutius, whose protection against death for divulging information, was guaranteed by the State: Livy, Book 40.

Proclamations were issued throughout Italy, forbidding nocturnal assemblies; deemed to be ruinous to the nation; vide Gibbons' "Decline and Fall." The Curule Aediles (police), were empowered to arrest priests as instigators of gross irregularities, whose houses numbered thousands in Rome alone, and with these worshippers were many women of high class social standing.

Saint Augustine, "De Civitate Dei," lib. 7, gives details of these semi-religious orgies, and remarks that unless timely precautions are made, there is grave danger of revolt in the form of fanaticism.

The Eleusinian initiations were shocking and any member breaking the oath of secrecy, was suddenly put to death, as in the time of Gregory Nazian and "Horace"; Book III.

Philo, a witness, declaimed, "O, ye initiated of purification by lustration made in the holy mysteries, never to be revealed to the profane, regarding your partner, man or woman of purified fellowship."

Philo and other State witnesses giving evidences of Eleusinian and Bacchic orgies revealed time and place of meetings which were raided and many members arrested and punished.

Eleusis in Attica is the renowned birthplace of rites in honour of Ceres and Proserpina, 1356 B.C., and Paus, Book I, describes the form of worship in temples and processions afterwards in groves. A colossal statue of Ceres by Phidias, discovered among temple ruins, now stands in the Library of Cambridge University.

There were two degrees of initiation, the Omega, Greater; and the Mikra, Lesser; in which grief and seeking Ceres's lost daughter was "worked" in the Temple Lodges. Festivals to honour nature's productive elements, engaged sexes promiscuously as votaries, at the nightly "mustikos sekos," directed by the ritual law, named "Petrona," the book to be studied by "mustai" fraternity, similar to apprentices, men and women, in modern masonic lodges, where the password was "KOGX-OMPAX," approved by the hierophantes, revealers of sacred secrets. The persons showing their ceremonial garments, and nude also, while performing lustrations, are depicted in sculpture and engravings deposited in national museums.

Processional circambulations, were arranged by members walking in twos, dressed in black and white garments, ornamented with jewels to denote rank and office. Some carried "kalathion," baskets of holy things, emblematical of parts of the human anatomy, both sexes. Besides these physiological specimens were included: wool for wisdom; salt, incorruptible; serpent for craft; wheat, life substance; pomegranates, seminific; and torches, emblematical of learning, with other symbols referring to phallic worship.

The processionists arriving at the Temple Lodge stood in their proper places, after depositing their sacred emblems around the dais, in front of the Grand Lodge Master of Ceremonies. Then the Loving Cup was passed round, not sipped but a satisfying drink taken as each celebrant shouted "Xaipe," all hail!

From Greece, these religious institutions passed to Rome and flourished during Hadrian's reign, and

afterwards were abolished by Theodosius the Great, A.D. 395, condemned as undesirable institutions.

The Bacchanalian rites evolved from love intrigues between Jupiter and Semele, the parents of Bacchus, the god of wine and jollity, crowned with ivy, a ribald, paunch-bellied sot.

Ancient writers, some of whom had been initiated and studied the sacrificial feasts, have described these orgies in which lascivious goats had their part in disgusting acts with the women called Baachantes.

"The Letters of Alexander Macedon" reveal these sexual mysteries when controlled by Leo, the chief hierophant; and, St. Austin adds, that shame kept the adherents in subjection and priestly power meant political control. Candidates having bodily defects were not eligible for membership.

Lucian's "Dialogues," akin to Voltaire's ridicule, contain clever descriptions of the Eleusinian and Bacchic religious mysteries, introducing the noctes societies and coupling of human pairs, shouting "Dionissi," or "Io Bacché!"

Accompanying the nocturnal orgies, the priests conveyed the Holy Ark, the cista or chest containing the arcana of mystic symbols, all prolific emblems of life, the Teleiothta and the lid of the ark were covered with roses and palm branches.

A perusal of the secret doctrines discloses the workings called NIMROD, consecrated to Ceres, and the name ELEUSIN signifies The Son Shall Come.

Orpheus sings of Bacchus and his divine initiations on the summit of Mount Nyssa, a secluded place, to expose a huge priapus, as a fecundator, lord of the vine, all relating to Dionysus, another name for Bacchus.

Plutarch's "Moralia" asserts that much of the ceremonial mysteries is suppressed because it cannot be mentioned except in the presence of the THYRSI, the rod of Bacchus, to breathe rude words.

"Deluded visionaries, raise your eyes,  
Behold the truths from which all fables rise.  
These are realities of rational birth,  
And fools pursue dark imps on earth."

—PINDAR, 522 B.C.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

## SCIENCE, RELIGION AND MORALS

### XI—CHRISTIAN FAITH

(1) The aspect of Christianity which appears to follow a consideration of diversity of opinions is Christian Faith.

(2) This subject seems to be a source of considerable confusion in the minds of both the orthodox and heterodox.

(3) It is, therefore, desirable for the inquirer to obtain some clear ideas as to what this Faith really means.

(4) The word "Faith" is used, as many words often are, without real meaning or with varying meanings.

(5) Yet the importance of understanding the meaning of terms used has been stressed since Socrates.

(6) The expression is often used that one has faith in one's doctor, or one's banker or stockbroker, etc.

(7) This use of the term is better expressed by the word trust or reliance and its meaning is quite mundane.

(8) All that is meant, probably, is that one relies on the technical knowledge and experience of some person.

(9) It does not, nor is it intended to, indicate that these persons have any supra-mundane knowledge or power.

(10) It is evident, therefore, that the word "faith" thus used has a different meaning from that of religious faith.

(11) There is another similar use of this word which sometimes leads to confusion, even in erudite minds.

(12) It is said that all Science, indeed all life, is based on faith in the unverified statements of others.

(13) As pointed out previously this is a misleading use of the word since science is unlimitedly reverifiable.

(14) One may tentatively accept the statements of technical experts on this objective verifiable basis.

(15) One does not attribute to these statements any extra-natural knowledge beyond human capacity.

(16) Here the consideration is with a quite different form of "Faith" which is religious and Christian.

(17) Many great writers on Christianity have drawn a distinction between Natural and Revealed Theology.

(18) Though this separation has been greatly discarded in recent years it was, in many ways, convenient.

(19) Broadly speaking Natural Theology dealt with deductions from data which could be objectively verified.

(20) Natural Theology was a method simulating that of Science from which theological conclusions were drawn.

(21) Revealed theology was something beyond this, something transcending mundane experience or power.

(22) It is to this transcendent, extra-natural, sphere that the term "Christian Faith" is here applied.

(23) All that humans can learn objectively without supra-mundane aid is Science or personal experience, etc.

(24) It is that knowledge which cannot possibly be thus learned which is now under consideration.

(25) Christian Faith is the belief that the supra-mundane knowledge thus acquired is true.

(26) Here the definition is, "Christian Faith is belief in the truth of Revealed Religion, direct or indirect."

(27) It is to be noted that Revelation may be direct, i.e., to oneself, subjective; or to others, objective.

(28) Christian Mystics and others claim to experience the former; most Christians rely on the latter.

(29) In both cases, however, the believer considers that this special knowledge is an "inner light."

(30) This "Faith," by an "inner light," is a gift from God and presumably restricted to humans.

(31) It is sufficient for present purposes to refer to the famous discourse on Faith in Hebrews XI, etc.

(32) "Faith is the substance (or firm expectation) of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen."

(33) It seems definite that Christian Faith is subjective (unseen) and also teleological (hoped for).

(34) It has been stated thus, "Beneath, or behind, the things that are seen there is an Eternal Unseen."

(35) It appears to be knowledge which is neither instinctive nor innate, but a special gift of God.

(36) One enquires next, what is this "Faith" knowledge about; of what does it give Christians revelation?

(37) Presumably it gives them a belief in those extra-natural existences which is essentially religious.

(38) Further, a belief that there is a Teleological purpose in the Universe of which they are thus made aware.

(39) Still more important, that this purpose involves humans as the main objective in its completion.

(40) That, therefore, human immortality is true, i.e., "firm expectation of things to come" beyond this life.

(41) It is obvious that Faith, being subjective, is quite arbitrary and its validity cannot be disputed.

(42) Where and what is the authority for this special and exclusive knowledge given to human minds?

(43) If there is no objective method of testing this validity there is scope for endless variations.

(44) One church will maintain that this knowledge is "canalised" into an official medium.

(45) Others will assert that it is arbitrary and rests only upon each individual's personal interpretation.

(46) It is maintained that "Faith" is a simple "receptiveness" to the divine message of truth.

(47) This seems to be the advocacy of auto-suggestion for each individual resulting in chaotic diversities.

(48) Faith again is said to be obedience to the "Will of God" which is found in the "Word of God."

(49) This appears to be, both in theory and practice, the basis of the beliefs of most Christians.

(50) What is meant by the "Will of God" and the "Word of God" will be considered later under "Morals."

#### BOOKS RECOMMENDED AND REFERENCES

"Faith and its Psychology" by (Dean) W. R. Inge (Duckworth's Theological Series); an excellent summary.

W. EDWARD MEADS.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### TOTALITARIANISM

SIR,—Mr. Ashton's magnificent defence and championship of complete Totalitarianism prompts me to ask him a question. As he well knows, the stupid and ignorant British electors literally kicked out every Communist who put up at the last General Election, and it cost the Party £20,000 at least. When the glorious Revolution, foretold by the world's greatest man, Karl Marx, comes at last, what is going to be done to the impudent people here who still refuse the wonderful benefits of complete Totalitarianism? Will they be machine-gunned out of existence, exterminated by gas chambers, sent to slave or concentration camps, or merely starved out by being deprived of their ration cards?—Yours, etc.,

J. R.

SIR,—Re Communism (issue December 24, 1950), what does W. Ashton think *The Freethinker* stands for? Does he think that "Thus saith the Kremlin" is any better than "Thus saith the Lord"—or "Believe or be damned" worse than the slave camps of Russia for deviationists?

I have no doubt the Church would persecute if it had the power. That is the Devil we know, but the threat of Stalinism is with us now, not hereafter. First things first. Atheism is not enough—Freethought is more important.—Yours, etc.,

A. J. ASKEW.

#### ETHIOPIA

SIR,—As an Atheist Freethinker, I was grieved at your answer to my letter on Ethiopia, it is not a question of dealing with every subject, but the recognised duty of giving space to answer a charge that is printed in your columns. My letter was entirely a factual reply to the statement that Ethiopia is isolated and medieval. Please do reconsider this on its merits and if unable or unwilling to print my letter, at least state that a demur has been made to the published charge and give the address where information of that country to-day can be obtained.—Yours, etc.,

JAMES H. MATSON.

[The *Ethiopian News* is published at 3, Charteris Road, Woodford Green.]

#### MARXISM

SIR,—When Mr. T. D. Smith refers to "Freethinker" Marxists, he is, as every Freethinker who thinks freely knows, guilty of a contradiction in terms. He is irrelevant in his references to the descendants of the great Roman civilisation; the point now is that ancestors of the present Northern and Mongolian barbarian hordes again menace Western civilisation, and the National Communists are the same "fifth columns" as the Christians of that time, and as deadly. To all Marxists I earnestly commend Swartzchild's *The Red Prussian*, a work that includes much matter relating to Marx not previously known. It is hard to believe that any Freethinker could be a Marxist after a study of that work.—Yours, etc.,

M. BARNARD.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

AT the last Executive meeting of the N.S.S. the following resolution was passed:—

"That the Executive deprecates the appearance of a leading article by Mr. H. Cutner in *The Freethinker* of December 10, 1950, and the Executive entirely disassociates itself from that expressed in that article, particularly the reference to use of the atom bomb, as being in complete opposition to the Principles and Objects of the National Secular Society and of Freethinkers generally."

R. H. ROSETTI.

[Mr. H. Cutner comments: The above "disassociation" leaves me happily unperturbed. I wrote my article, not in any spirit of dogmatism, but as a kind of lead to Freethinkers at a time of a grave national crisis. I made it clear that I was bitterly opposed to war, and that, in this opposition, was prepared, if there was no other way, to use atom bombs on any nation launching an aggressive war. And I suggested that, if Freethought was to be preserved, Freethinkers should support the United Nations. Up to the time of writing this, not a single letter, except one, came to me or *The Freethinker* in opposition to these views, and the writer of the one exception later apologised.

From the President of the N.S.S. and its Executive there has been no word of leadership whatever. In the above, there is the usual sheltering behind the "Principles and Objects" of the N.S.S., but I challenge anyone to say whether we now know exactly where the N.S.S. stands. Is the Society in favour of war? If not, and there is grave danger of war, what should be the attitude of its members? Should the United Nations be supported or not? Is the N.S.S. definitely in favour of Western Democracy with its free elections, or Eastern Totalitarianism? Those of us who are just ordinary members (as I am) have a right to have clear answers on these points. I speak as a Freethinker, and I say as seriously as I can that if Eastern Totalitarianism were to prevail, there would be an end to Freethought.

Finally, may I ask whether most Freethinkers, under the present grave crisis, would rather be saved with the Executive of the N.S.S. or damned with Bertrand Russell, one of the world's greatest thinkers and a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and why?]

### LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

#### OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

#### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute, Science Room).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: E. V. TEMPEST, "Russia, Totalitarian or Democratic?"

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, January 9, 7 p.m.: M. L. BURNET, "How Political Policy is Made."

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. W. PARRY (Liverpool), "The Christian Sabbath—Some Facts."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: W. PAUL, "An Old, Old Tale."

South London Branch N.S.S. (The London and Brighton Hotel, 139, Queens Road, Peckham, S.E. 15).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: A Lecture.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "Hopes and Fears for 1951."

RETIRED CIVIL SERVANT (Freethinker) requires bed-sitting-room, or similar accommodation in quiet house. Anywhere within easy reach of London. F. K., c/o Freethinker Office, 41, Gray's Inn Road, W.C. 1.

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