

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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MUMBO-JUMBO is, to-day, everywhere. It fills the Press, the land, very particularly, the air. Both the aboriginal mumbo and, also, the imported brand. The latter is now centred around next June's Coronation and its imported witchcraft rite of god—or, in this case, goddess—making via the agency of the Holy Oil. Whilst the original African version, mumbo-jumbo, so to speak, in the original, shrieks at us from staring headlines under the sinister-sounding term "mau-mau." We are all mau-mau conscious, nowadays!

The grim political drama now being played out in Kenya lies, perhaps, a little outside the scope of this column; fundamentally, it forms part of that general reaction of the "coloured" races of Asia and Africa against the alien domination of the West; "the twilight of the white races" as, already a generation ago, a prophetic French publicist described the process which was, just then, commencing as he wrote: At present, everything appears to indicate that "The Revolt of Asia" in the first half of the 20th century is now to be followed by "The Revolt of Africa" in the second half of the self-same century. One can, we think, legitimately add that Dr. Malan and his "Herrenvolk" ("master race") doctrine are doing everything they can to hasten the process.

Where, in this primarily political process does "mau-mau" come upon the African scene? At present, the long-drawn-out trial of Jomo Kenyatta and his associates is seeking to find out what connection, if any, exists between the secret African ju-ju cult, esoterically described as "mau-mau," and the political nationalist movement in Kenya, of which Jomo Kenyatta is the acknowledged leader.

To comment here on this still undecided case would be technically, "contempt of court," and, as such, is out of order. However, we may be permitted here to add what appears to be a relevant comment. The present writer knew Mr. Kenyatta quite well when, a decade ago, he was resident in this country. As an educated man, and even something of an intellectual, Mr. Kenyatta is far above the intellectual level at which witchcraft appears natural and congruous with observed reality. In his own estimation the Kikuyu leader is an African Nationalist and the leader of a "Resistance Movement" against what he regards as the alien rule of white Imperialism. If—and upon this we cannot now comment, as his case is still "sub judice"—he really has intimate relations with "mau-mau," this can only be for reasons dictated by political opportunism. Equally certainly, Kenyatta does not subscribe to Christianity, the God of which creed, he is reported as saying, is regarded as an Englishman!

However, we are concerned not generally with the problem of African Nationalism but, more specifically with the secret society, or esoteric cult of mau-mau. What is the reason for its sudden appearance and startling vogue in present-day Kenya? This "leading question" is, in our submission, a sociological one, rather than one for the

student of comparative religion. It is as such that we now propose to consider it.

Students of the history of Imperialism, or "Colonialism," as it is sometimes described, will have no difficulty in recognising the type, or social genus. In many colonial lands, subject to a foreign rule that is too strong to be shaken off by open revolt, history testifies to the important political role played by such societies. In medieval Europe, there were the Anabaptists and their underground offshoots. In medieval Asia one finds the "Hashishin," the fanatical white-robed slayers of the "old man of the mountain," from whom our word "assassin" is derived.

Whilst in modern Europe we have the "Carbonari" ("charcoal-burners"), the "Illuminati," and our own "Luddite" machine-wreckers in the early Industrial Revolution.

All the above secret societies arose amongst nations and classes subject to a repressive rule which they were not strong enough to shake off by open revolt. All of them, too, had secret religious oaths and such-like rites celebrated exclusively by their initiates in secret. Incidentally, strange as it may sound, the still illegal early English Trade Unions were bound by such rites: the famous "Tolpuddle Martyrs" (1834) were prosecuted for membership of a secret society. It is surely a far cry from those distant pioneering days to the smug T.U.C. of our own prosaic day!

However, colonial history discloses even closer parallels to our contemporary mau-mau. In the early colonising days of New Zealand one had the similarly-named "Hau-Haus," like the modern African cult a combination of political conspiracy and religious superstition which again, like its African successor, represented a land-hungry nation of evicted peasants. In China, about the same time (mid-19th century), there was the formidable religious-political secret society of the Tai-pings, which but for that pious Christian General "Chinese" Gordon would probably have overturned the Manchu Dynasty, which Gordon's "ever-victorious army" propped up for another half-century. An even closer parallel with mau-mau occurred in the 19th century within sight of our own shores, the Irish Fenians, whose combination of land-hunger, anti-Imperialism and the cult of murder was remarkably similar to that now displayed in Kenya by mau-mau.

In view of the above examples, it is not very difficult to understand the present appearance and the current notoriety of mau-mau. A word may, however, be usefully added upon that aspect of the African secret society which is of special interest to students of comparative religion: its "magical" ceremonies and witchcraft cult. Since Christianity is the imported religion of the alien white rulers, the religious rites of mau-mau inevitably revert to paganism. Mau-mau, to-day, represents the last fling of mumbo-jumbo, the twilight of Africa's gods!

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The Twilight of Africa's Gods

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

What is the future of mau-mau, and how long will the future of jumbo last? That, again, is a sociological, and not a theological question. History reveals clearly that secret societies and political assassinations, alike, rarely survive the stormy adolescence of a nation. A just settlement of the Kenya question, recognising the claims to agrarian equity and to economic justice for the African

rares within its bounds, would soon mean the end of mau-mau, of its midnight stabbers, and of its ancestral gods. Mumbo-jumbo would slink back into the primeval jungle along with his primeval voodooos: the sunrise of a secular culture would soon begin to shine over the immemorially "Dark Continent."

Witch Hunting

By P. C. KING

A RADIO version of the play *The Witch*, by the Norwegian playwright, Wiers-Jenssen, was recently presented by the B.B.C. When this play was first presented on the English stage, Miss Lillah Macarthy took the part of Anne Pedersdotter. In the radio version this role was taken by Miss Claire Bloom. While Miss Bloom's performance was quite competent, my recollection of Miss Macarthy's transcends it; but it is perhaps unfair to compare a radio play with a stage performance, especially in a case such as this.

The theme of the play is a variation of the triangle drama. A young Lutheran pastor, returning from taking his degree at Wittenburg, finds his father has married again, this time to a young woman of his own age; the two young people fall passionately in love with one another, with tragic consequences. The interest for readers of *The Freethinker*, however, lies in its particular setting, that of witch hunting in the seventeenth century.

Witch hunting has formed a favourite pastime of God-fearing Christians throughout the religion's history, but it really reached its peak sometime after the close of the Middle Ages, namely, during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. (It was not, in fact, until 1876 that the laws against witches were repealed in this country!) The game of witch baiting was actually more vigorously and relentlessly pursued by the Protestants than by the Catholics, a fact which is noted, somewhat surprisingly, by the *Radio Times*. In its comments on its production of the play it says: "The tremendous schism in Christendom . . . is hardly a hundred years old, and Protestantism is not yet certain of survival. The enthusiasm of Lutherans must therefore be kept at fever-heat. Every word, every thought, must be bent on serving God and routing out his adversaries . . . these include witches."

Mr. Wiers-Jenssen's work is a noteworthy one and may justly be compared with the works of his great forerunner, Ibsen. The atmosphere of hysteria, of social uncertainty in that epoch, is vividly brought to the audience. The play opens with the pursuit and capture of a "witch," named Marte, one-time friend and companion of the late Mrs. Pedersdotter; Mrs. Pedersdotter was the mother of Anne, Pastor Absalom's youthful wife. The apprehended woman promptly confesses to traffic with the Devil, thus saving herself from torture, though not from death by burning. The screams of the woman, at the ensuing ceremony, are regarded by the devout as the enraged cries of the devil inside her at being forced to vacate his desirable residence, while burning her body in this world will save her soul from burning in the next.

Pastor Absalom and his son Martin are unable to enjoy the spectacle with the same gusto as their flock; they seem to labour under the impression that it is the woman herself who is screaming because she is in pain!

Alone with his wife and son that evening Absalom confesses how, five years before, he had spared Anne's mother, to his shame, and had taken her daughter to wife; for, he explained, not only was she also a witch, but a

bigger and better one than old Marte. Pedersdotter mere had been endowed with special powers by Satan, such as being able to command the presence of people or to destroy them merely by wishing them dead. The most dramatic moment of the play comes when Anne, her husband having revealed all this and then gone out to attend a dying parishioner, is left alone on the stage. "Martin," she whispers: and lo! the son and her lover comes down from his room to her! Later, when Absalom returns and, half conscious of the frustration of marriage to an elderly man on a young woman, asks her forgiveness for any wrong done her, she retorts bitterly: "Yes, I wish you were dead!" And Absalom dies. Mrs. Beyer, mother of Absalom and grandmother of Martin, and who has always resented the intrusion of this young girl into her family, denounces her at Absalom's funeral for a witch. Anne is called upon, by the attendant bishop, to rebut the accusation by making oath, while laying her hand on the head of her dead husband, that she is innocent of witchcraft. Under this ordeal she breaks down and confesses herself a witch and, we are left to conclude, is burnt alive for her sins.

The strength of the play lies in its plausibility, while bringing to us all the atmosphere of the witch-hunt hysteria and the superstitious credulity of that age and society. The doctor, for instance, has warned Absalom that his heart is weak and that a shock might take him off at any moment; and so it does. The powers of compulsion of Anne are nothing more than the impelling call of passionate love. As for Anne's collapse and confession, well, she was no less superstitious than the rest. We have seen enough, in these days, of confession to imaginary crimes under the compulsion of new creeds and new superstitions, for those of the seventeenth century hardly to cause the raising of an eyebrow. When we of this generation read that some deluded woman confessed at her trial to have floated on the sea in a sieve or flown through the air on a broomstick, we *know* she was lying, even if the whole court proclaimed her "voluntary confession" genuine. Perhaps future generations will lend as little credence to the "voluntary confessions" of this century.

Cor Cordium

Where chafes the heart Trelawny could not Burn?
An Atheist's heart, of self-sustaining fire,
In love with Love, a love that did aspire
Mankind to teach falsehood and hate to spurn.
Is it imprisoned in a marble urn
In Christian church, one founded on a Lie?
If so, it will burst forth: how can it die,
Until all men its living gospel learn?

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The Bentley Case

By C. H. NORMAN

NOTWITHSTANDING the brutality of the rule of the governing class of England—(see "A People's Conscience")—in the last 150 years, notwithstanding the indifference of large sections of the middle class, and notwithstanding the callous attitude of the working classes, there was, till the outbreak of the 1914 war, a slender stream of humanitarian feeling flowing in England which occasionally gathered sufficient strength to force such reforms as the abolition of the wholesale death sentence system, the abolition of flogging in the Army and Navy, and legislation for the protection of children, women and animals from their masters. After the war of 1914, it was noticeable that that stream had ceased to irrigate English social life in any marked respect. The Second World War worsened the position, which has been gradually becoming a matter of serious concern to those who watched the progress of events in Britain. The outburst of public feeling against the execution of Derek Bentley is a sign of the return of that long-suppressed humanitarian feeling. In that respect, the case is of public importance, small though the personal tragedy was compared with the futile slaughter of British soldiers in the idiotic Korean War, against which so little general protest has been made except by a small number of people.

Whether the protesters were influenced mainly by the peculiar application in Bentley's case of the law of common purpose in felony, or by the conduct of the Lord Chief Justice and of the Court of Criminal Appeal in their handling of the case, must be a matter for speculation. But the fact that the sentence has been carried out should not mean that the matter is closed, since, in the existing state of things, there may be other cases of the kind. For the community is facing a period when the war-time children of seven and nine years of age who lived in the bombed cities are now coming to maturity, or are passing through a period of deferred or accelerated adolescence, which sometimes takes the form of mild ex mania, known among young women as nymphomania, and without any special name in the case of young men; but is actually mild adolescent sexual insanity, often taking the form of violence against elderly people of both sexes.

It is worth considering in these circumstances whether justice, in the famous phrase, has not only been done in this case, but has appeared to be done. Could Bentley have been properly convicted of being a party to the felony which ended in the shooting of the police constable? It is clear that, as Bentley was under some kind of detention some time before the shooting took place, he could not properly have been convicted, as his detention would end the common purpose, *unless* he did some act or uttered some words which would revive it. This reviver is said to have arisen from the words: "Chris, let him have it," deposited to by one constable and denied by Bentley himself. It was certainly a very convenient phrase from the police point of view as entangling Bentley in the larger felony of murder, compared with the smaller felony of breaking and entering a warehouse for which he was under detention. It was denied by Bentley.

The jury accepted the evidence of the police officer as against that of Bentley. But the Lord Chief Justice failed to direct the jury that they should be careful about acting on such an uncorroborated statement, which may not have been correctly heard by the police officer in the excitement and noise of the affray. This want of direction was upheld by the Court of Criminal Appeal, which was presided over by an experienced judge, Mr. Justice Croom-Johnson.

Nevertheless, one is entitled to comment that these judges have been often reversed by higher courts in the past on matters of less importance and probably will be reversed in the future. If this criticism be sound of the Lord Chief Justice's summing up and of the judgment of the Court of Criminal Appeal, it would be fatal to Bentley's conviction as a matter of law. It may have been one of the points which influenced the jury in making the recommendation to mercy, which was so singularly disregarded by the Home Secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, in his final decision. So much for the judicial aspect of the case.

One is entitled to wonder whether the minority in the House were well-advised in their tactics. The general expectation was that the Home Secretary would reprieve Bentley; hence, the adverse decision announced on Monday morning caught the critics somewhat unprepared. The rule on which the Speaker relied might have been evaded had a Member put down on Monday by urgent private Notice a question asking the Home Secretary why he had disregarded the recommendation to mercy by the jury. On receiving an answer to that question (which does not directly affect the prerogative), the requisite number of Members could have risen in their places to ask for the adjournment of the House to discuss the Home Secretary's answer. Supplemental to this, sympathetic peers could have claimed constitutionally a personal audience with the Queen, whose prerogative was in question. The position of the occupant of the throne on this subject is in a constitutional muddle.

Queen Victoria objected at a certain stage of her reign to signing death warrants in capital cases, so this task was transferred to the Home Secretary as her constitutional adviser. But this theory received a bad jolt from George V, in the Brighton murder case. There more than one person was involved and certainly two were sentenced to death. The then Home Secretary (Sir W. Joynson-Hicks) refused a reprieve. On the night before the execution, King George V sent for him. After a prolonged discussion the King directed the Home Secretary from Buckingham Palace at about six o'clock of the morning of execution to send a reprieve to the prison, and the men were not executed. On this precedent it would seem that the monarch (now Queen Elizabeth) still has the right constitutionally to exercise the prerogative of mercy even against the advice of the Minister, which would warrant her peers claiming a personal audience. No one mentioned this precedent, but it is obvious that the strict ruling of the Speaker does not fit in with this example.

There one must leave the case for the present, with the final query as to why the Home Secretary was so little influenced by the recommendation to mercy by the jury, which is the tribunal of fact, and so much influenced by the views of the Lord Chief Justice, the tribunal of law, when the circumstances justifying the exercise of the prerogative of mercy must be fact and not law. Free-thinkers will have noticed without surprise the complete silence of the leaders of all the Christian Churches, from the Church of England down to the Quakers, in this peculiarly distressing and anxious case, which, one would have thought, offered a splendid opportunity for invoking the doctrine of charity and mercy in which these gentlemen profess to believe so profoundly!

This Believing World

The terrible tragedy, the human misery and havoc caused by the floods here in England and Holland and Belgium follow, it is curious to relate, not the acceptance of the Bill put before Parliament to humanise our Christian Sunday, but its *rejection*. We shudder to think of the religious invective which would have been yelled from most pulpits, and particularly from the Lord's Day Observance Society and kindred bodies, if the Bill had passed Parliament. The floods would have been God Almighty's answer to the fearful blasphemy of trying to do away with God's Sabbath Day. As it is, "God doeth all things well."

The latest example of trying to save religion at all costs is provided by the German theologian, Bultmann, whose lecture on "demythologising" was recently given over the air. Bultmann does not deny the Bible is packed with myths and legends. He thinks, however, it is time to stop "mythologising" God's word, for even if its various stories are now known to be quite untrue, they have still some value as "ethics"—so we must at all costs save the Bible and "demythologise" it. The Biblical writers were trying to teach men to be good and kind and just so, for heaven's sake, stick to the Bible.

On the other hand, the Principal of Western College, Bristol, Mr. H. L. Cocks, made an impassioned school broadcast on the "Biblical Revelation," maintaining that the Bible is genuine history from cover to cover. While he did not always agree with the Old Testament "morality," the Bible was still a thoroughly Christian work, though everything could only be "fulfilled" in Christ Jesus, God's only Son. As far as it was possible to understand Mr. Cocks, he insisted that, as the Bible was God's Revelation (though the Old Testament writers made a weeny mistake now and then), we must believe every word—nay, every comma in it.

It would prove interesting to have Messrs. Bultmann and Cocks both broadcasting to schools. Bultmann could assure the children that the Bible is packed with myths and legends but had to be "demythologised" to be believed; Cocks could tell them that the Bible is literal history—not a myth in it, and therefore can be believed without "demythologising" it. What a merry game this religious "blither-blather" is!

Somebody has lighted a big bonfire of infidelity in Jersey, for that delightful seaside seems aghast at the theory of Evolution which appears to have reached it only recently. It looks as if the name of Darwin has hitherto been unknown in the Channel Islands. The Jersey *Evening Post* has published long letters from true Christians who have extinguished the one (or two) Evolutionists in them with texts from Genesis. If the Bible says that man was made from the dust of the earth, like a child making mud pies, then it must be true; God says so and that settles it.

One eminent Christian is amazed that anybody should find in such "a filthy creature" as an ape the remote ancestor of man. Well, the Lord—according to His Revealed Word—also created apes and crocodiles and tape worms and fleas and bugs. We often irreverently think that a plague of all these, in the chaste domains of Heaven, would wake up the Angels not a little; and what God Almighty would feel if one of the fleas jumped from an Angel on to His Sacred Person will hardly bear thinking about!

A course of lantern lectures on Evolution, in Jersey would, no doubt whatever, awake that city to the fact that the Bible in scientific and intellectual circles all over the world is completely discredited. Who believes that Elijah flew to heaven in a chariot, or that Jesus Christ flew above Jerusalem clinging to a live Devil these days? The clergy in Jersey? What a catastrophe!

Secular State and Religious Rituals

ON the 30th November, was enacted at Sanchi the ceremony of the installation of the relics of Sariputta and Moggallana, two of Buddha's disciples. There were glowing accounts in the press of a colourful ceremony accompanied by the ringing of the bells and blowing of conches and the prostration of hundreds of Buddhist monks in saffron and yellow robes. The golden casket containing the relics was carried in ceremonial procession with priests and nuns chanting prayers to the accompaniment of gongs from China and Tibet. It was an important occasion for the Buddhist religious world. The Prime Ministers of Burma and of Ceylon took leading parts in the ceremony.

The Prime Minister of India, who has an eye for the propaganda value of such occasions, played a very prominent role and delivered an oration which as usual meant exactly nothing. We wonder what would have happened on that occasion if those ancient bones of Sariputta and Moggallana took the prayers seriously and came back to life, and the originators of the Buddhist protest against Hindu obscurantism faced in flesh and blood the very distinguished audience consisting of a strange mixture of blind worshippers and clever traducers. Buddha's disciples would be shocked at the sight of people who having forgotten the inwardness of the message and having driven the spirit of Buddhism out of India, were now attempting to worship dry bones to which neither Buddha nor any of his disciples paid any importance. Buddha's disciples were rationalists and atheists and would be shocked at the ceremony and the speeches made at Sanchi.

A few days later there occurred another opportunity for the Prime Minister and other high functionaries of the Government of India to propagate religion. There was the celebration in Delhi of the nineteenth centenary of the arrival of St. Thomas in India. This time the pillars of the Secular State fraternised with the Jesuit Fathers and spoke eloquent words about the all-embracing character of the culture of India which they represent and which could accommodate with comfort every superstition under the sun.

We do not object to these religious celebrations and demonstrations by those professing the particular faiths concerned. A Secular State should afford freedom to the religions to demonstrate and propagate their faith. But where is the need for others who have nothing to do with Buddhism to participate in the installation of Buddhist relics, and what have non-Catholics to do with Catholic rituals unless they want to hoodwink the Buddhists and the Catholics as the case may be? Anyway, why should leaders of a Secular State involve themselves in these celebrations with such ostentation? How long is this violation of the constitution of India to go on?

The Indian Rationalist.

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THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

MISS E. BELLCHAMBERS asks us to state that her recent article on the Amsterdam Humanist Congress was originally sent as a personal description, with no intention of publication.

BISSET LOVELOCK.—Thank you for article. We are always pleased to hear from you.

A. R. WILLIAMS. — Your contribution received. Hope to use it shortly.

JACK GORDON.—Thank you for letter. We hope to hear again from you soon.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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

Lecture Notices should reach the Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

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, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every week-day, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: 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).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: E. V. TEMPEST, "British and Soviet Freedom."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, February 17, 7 p.m.: Dr. J. NEEDHAM, F.R.S., "Bacterial Warfare."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Dr. C. A. SMITH, "How much Freedom for Traitors?"

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Onward Hall, 207, Deansgate).—Tuesday, February 17, 7-30 p.m.: M. BARNES, "Christianity and Social Progress."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: VICTOR P. MORRIS (Gen. Sec., N.S.S.), "The Consolations of Irreligion."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Left Tradition."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: W. CARLTON, a Lecture.

NOTES AND NEWS

The editor of *The Freethinker* is, he hopes, a normally broadminded man whom an unusually varied experience of life has taught to be tolerant of the eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of his fellow-men. However, we must record here that we wish correspondents would not occasionally try our patience by writing what can only be accurately described as stark and utter nonsense. The most recent example of this fatuous conduct was a letter which actually stated that because we made the obvious statement that the present Russian regime is anti-Zionist, we were "an agent of Wall Street and of the Vatican" (sic)—of all places in the world!

Out of our post-Christian charity we withhold the name of the writer of this egregious epistle, who apparently considers that to express any criticism of the current Communist regime automatically enrols one in the ranks of Catholicism and of the blackest reaction. Is this supposed to be *Free* thought? Actually, as anyone acquainted with the history of either Marxism or Zionism

"The Freethinker" Fund

Previously acknowledged, £55 7s.; E. W. Shaw, 10s. 6d.; Edith Quinn, U.S.A., £2; R. Stewart, 1s. 6d.; J. H. Bridle, 6s.; A. Hancock (10th), 1s.; C. Ellis, Leeds, 10s. Total, £58 16s.

knows perfectly well. Marxism and Bolshevism have always been opposed to Zionism and to the State of Israel which is its logical outcome.

This attitude may be right or wrong, and upon that subject we leave their respective protagonists to argue the matter out; but the *fact* is indisputable. We would remind our correspondent, and his fellow fanatics, of the timely adjuration of Oliver Cromwell: "Bethink ye, bethink ye, that ye may be mistaken." *Verb sap!*

The Reverend Charles Mansfield, vicar of a Barnstaple church, Devonshire, wants to see civil funerals for families who do not believe in God. He also thinks that a civil ceremony instead of a church christening should be arranged for children whose parents do not believe in religion.

He points out that it would be a logical extension to register-office weddings. He writes:—

"Some men all their working lives have consistently and continually made a mock of their mates who have attempted in any way to be Christians. Such men when they die are given precisely the same service as a man who has all his life striven to be a Christian against all odds."

We heartily endorse the recommendation of the Vicar though for a different reason. We deem it beneath the dignity of the rationalist way of life that ignorant people be allowed to perform rituals to their Mumbo Jumbo over the dead body of a rationalist.

Last Fence

We've Bibles in stacks, for our Holy attacks,
Cathedrals and Churches in scores;
Bishops and vicars, and sacrament liquors,
(Our Holy War armament stores).
Plans of campaign, that region shall reign,
With help from the old and the mild;
(Though they melt in amaze, for they're set in their ways);
So we're now going after the child.
There are shows in the streets, and Sunday School treats,
And cute cards with Jesus upon 'em;
Trips to the sea, with wild, wanton glee,
And nighties (if choir boys will don 'em).
We wait on the word (mainly getting The Bird).
We know that the world won't forget us;
And soon we'll begin to rope young Billy in,
If only young Billy will let us.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

THE CASE FOR "SUNDAY FREEDOM"

Public Meeting organised by the National Secular Society at 7-30 p.m., Wednesday, February 25,

Conway Small Hall, Red Lion Square,

London, W.C. 1. Doors open 7 p.m.

Speakers:

L. EBURY F. A. RIDLEY G. H. TAYLOR

Chairman: P. VICTOR MORRIS

Questions and Discussion

Admission Free

Roman Festivals in Scotland

BY J. HUMPHREY

STANDS Scotland where it did? Hardly, we think. As the result of religious propaganda, political pressure, B.B.C. bondage and T.V.-itis, the country is suffering from an epidemic of Anglomania. It is only a matter of time until the old Scots customs are replaced by those of the Sassenach. The Presbyterian Scots, who formerly frowned on all Roman festivals, are now commemorating many of them. During last Christmas week, tokens of the nativity of Jesus were much more in evidence than ever before. old Sandy McClaus, alias Father Christmas, and his daughter, Mary Christmas, being well represented; whilst mistletoe, holly and, for the first time in heathen Scotland, Christmas trees, some complete with coloured lights, were displayed in a large number of shops and houses. Newsagents were the only shops to remain open on Christmas Day, as, thank God, newspapers are still published in Scotland on that day, a fact which seems to be unknown to the B.B.C. In a world-wide broadcast it was announced that no newspapers are printed in Great Britain on Christmas Day. Maybe the announcer is under the impression that Great Britain ends at the Tweed. But, according to the Press, more Christmas cards are printed in the city of Glasgow than anywhere else in Great Britain. So much for the veracity of the B.B.C.

Another "holy day" that appears to have had a revival is "Saint Valentine's Day." For a period well in advance of the date, February 14, *the day when birds are supposed to begin to mate*, a considerable array of amatory, satirical and most unsaintly Valentines made their appearance, as if by magic, in the shops. Long ago it was customary to exchange such gifts as ornaments, trinkets and the like, but nowadays the pictorial Valentine seems to be mostly favoured.

The custom of choosing Valentines had its origin in the phallic rites associated with the worship of Lupercus, an ancient pastoral god, identified with the Arcadian Pan, and the goddess Hera, goddess of marriage and pregnancy, identical with the Roman goddess Juno. The festival took place at the Lupercal (a grotto in the Palatine Hill) when goats were sacrificed and youths were arrayed in the skins. With thongs in their hands they paraded the

streets striking everyone they met, especially women, who believed that to receive a blow prevented sterility. On page 19 of that rare volume, "Phallic Worship," by George Ryley Scott, it is stated: "At the Lupercalia of Rome . . . the girls and women, in a state of nudity, were whipped by the men as they marched in procession." At the love feast on the eve of the festival, young people of both sexes met and drew, by lot, one of a number of names of the opposite sex, whereby each youth got a maid and each maid got a young man as a "valentine," i.e., a binding. This meant that the males were bound to their valentine for a year.

According to "Christian historians," however, "Saint Valentine" was a Roman priest, renowned for affection and benevolence, and was supposed to have been beheaded by the Romans for preaching Christianity. Most of them differ as to the date of the alleged martyrdom, such as "in the second century; about 270 A.D.; in the year 290; in the third century; in the year 306 A.D." Ya pays yer money and ya takes yer choice. Our old friend Whately states that "He was a man of most admirable parts, and so famous for his love and charity that the custom of choosing valentines upon his festival took its rise from thence." Such a profound explanation should convince the sceptics that Saint Valentine, the martyred, did actually exist.

There have been several holy Romans by the name of Valentine. There were the Valentinians, for instance, a sect of the second century, adherents of Valentine, a priest who deserted his faith and proclaimed a doctrine in which gods and goddesses were substituted for the Trinity. There was also Valentinus, the Gnostic, whose disciples were known as Valentinians, and many others; but the martyred one cannot be traced. Assuming the Christian story to be true, where is the connection between a murdered priest and the "unsaintly" valentines that are fashionable to-day? It looks as if the Christian missionaries, always keen to transform pagan rites to their own sorry system, looked at the young folk's reciprocal love-making, gave these rites a hallowed inflection and, with a sentimental halo, hooked the whole abracadabra on to a mythical martyr.

Birth Control Propaganda

"GOD is not an external despot, or a Sultan in disguise," said Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Vice-President of India, scholar, philosopher, and revered spiritual leader, in his opening speech to the Third International Planned Parenthood Conference held in Bombay in November. He dismissed as spurious the argument that birth control interfered with nature or opposed the will of God. "What is civilisation? Is it not progressive control of nature? To combat disease, pestilence . . . prolong the span of life, all these mean a fight against the drift of nature. Abstinence is in essence a defiance of the edict of nature. Children that might have been normally born or unborn because of one's abstinence. Intelligence is a divine gift, and it is up to us to use it in furtherance of social happiness and individual development." His words were underlined by the plain-spoken Dr. Kan Majima, President of the Japan Birth Control League, who said, "in a country like Japan where there are but very limited natural resources and the area is also limited, the people cannot afford to spend life idly fooling with old taboos, muddling with useless customs and traditions and with misplaced sentimentalism."

Dr. Yoshio Koya, Director, Institute of Public Health, Tokyo, said that it is a tragic fact that there are more than a million abortions a year registered in Japan.

In this real but truly spiritual atmosphere it is not surprising that the Conference, attended by five hundred delegates from fourteen nations, was an enormous success and ended its deliberation by bringing to birth the first full-scale organisation for spreading the freedom of choice of birth control to the human family everywhere. The provisional International Committee on Planned Parenthood now gives way to The International Planned Parenthood Federation, which will have as its first joint presidents, Lady Rama Rau, and Mrs. Margaret Sanger, of the U.S.A. It will have three regional offices: one for Asia will be in India, for Europe in London and for North America in New York. It is planned to establish other regional Offices at the appropriate moment in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Western Pacific and Latin America. The objectives of the new organisation will cover research and dissemination of information, agitation for inclusion of family planning institutes in the national health pro-

grammes of all countries. The Conference aims to see every country imparting birth control information to 80 per cent. of its women in the next ten years.

Readiness of Rural People for Birth Control

The widely held idea that illiterate villagers are uninterested in birth control, and would not take the trouble to practise it, was one of the myths evaporated at this Conference. The director of the United Nations Office for Population Studies in New Delhi reported that 60 per cent. of the urban population and 40 per cent. of rural dwellers

interviewed were interested in birth control in Mysore and in other areas the percentage rose as high as 70. A social worker in a village in Mysore reported that two peasant men walked eighty miles to consult her on how to limit their families. Pathetic stories were told by workers in India's 200 birth control clinics of the desperation of impoverished Indian mothers and fathers to seek information. The Japanese delegates reported the same verified facts about the eagerness of their peasant population for the same help.—Bulletin of International Planned Parenthood Committee.

A. A. Bogdanov (1873—1928)

By AKIBA

STALIN'S latest collection of articles and letters published under the title "Economic Problems of U.S.S.R." for the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, has one interest, which is not political. In Stalin's second letter in his latest work, "Concerning the Errors of Comrade L. D. Yaroshenko," he makes reference to a certain Bogdanov, whose views it appears are not in accord with Stalin's interpretation of Marxism.

Who was Bogdanov, and what place does he take in the history of sociology and philosophy? Why are his views considered to be anti-Marxist?

These questions and many others are raised by Stalin's insistent remarks on the dangers of Bogdanov's ideas and concepts.

Alexander Alexey Bogdanov was born in 1873. His real name was Malinovsky, and he used the name Bogdanov when writing for the illegal socialist press in the days of tsarism.

Nearly half a century ago, Bogdanov, a young Marxist, was engaged in a study of the works of Ernest Mach (1838-1916) and Richard Avenarius, both of whom were greatly influenced in their philosophies by the discoveries of science in the last half of the nineteenth century. Mach and Avenarius rejected both idealism and materialism. For Mach, the distinction hitherto made by the idealist and materialist schools between physical and psychical phenomena was invalid. The physical and the psychical can be resolved into common elements, he argued. The only difference between them consists in their relationships (external) to other phenomena. The phenomenon of colour, for instance, is physical in relation to its luminous source; it is psychical in relation to the experience of sensing it; but in itself it is neither physical nor psychical. Of course, Mach and Avenarius were the forerunners of the present-day school of logical positivism.

Bogdanov himself was not satisfied with Mach's interpretation of phenomena, however. His own Marxist training adapted what he considered an incomplete analysis of real phenomena, as given by the Machists. In a series of books he unfolded his new hybrid theory of Marxism and Machism. Most of the books he wrote had forbidding or awkward titles such as *Basic Elements of the Historical Outlook on Nature, Epistemology from the Historical Standpoint, Empirio-Monism* (in three volumes), *Tectology* (or *The Universal Organisational Science*), and *Science of Social Consciousness*. Our only knowledge of these prolific writings come from his many opponents, who did their best in the grand polemical style of the early Russian Marxists, to bring to light Bogdanov's "concealed idealist" tendencies.

The few quotations we have from Bogdanov come from Lenin's massive work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, first published in Moscow in the spring of 1909. Despite

the difficulties that are involved in stringing together some semblance of continuity of ideas, Bogdanov's main contentions are quite clear. Bogdanov's "empirio-monism" was achieved by substituting for the classical psychophysical parallelism (of the old idealist and materialist schools) the notion that the difference between "psychic" and "physical" is not real but due merely to a different mode of organising experience; psychic is individually organised, while physical is socially harmonised experience.

Bogdanov contested both Marx's and Lenin's thesis that there was such a thing as objective truth independently of social experience. "The objective character of the physical world consists in that it exists not for me personally but for all; it has, in my opinion, the same significance for everybody as it has for myself," he wrote in his *Empirio-Monism*. In the same book he makes himself even more explicit: "In general, the physical world is that which is socially agreed upon, socially harmonised, in a word, is that which is *socially organised* experience."

Lenin, a rigid materialist, vigorously attacked this apparent concession to idealism. For Lenin, the objective world, the physical, real, material world existed independently and despite men. Bogdanov rejected this view in these words: "Discard the 'social practice' of measurements, the establishment of standards of measure and calculation, etc., and there will remain nothing of the law of gravitation. Therefore, when we say that the law was valid prior to the existence of men, it is not the same as saying *independent* of men."

As with all bold thinkers who project new theories and philosophies, Bogdanov's works remain unread and uninvestigated. The fact that Mach and Avenarius contributed to the contemporary vogue in philosophy, logical positivism is an indication that once a philosophical system is widely translated and "pushed" in the right circles it can wield some considerable influence. Where, however, an unholy alliance of old-fashioned idealists and materialists (scientific or dialectical) takes upon itself the right to publicise (or otherwise) new paths in scientific and sociological thinking, the world loses the product of originality. Perhaps many years from now Bogdanov's works will be re-published and translated. Perhaps as with Spinoza's "forgotten" works, their appearance will make as profound an impact in the world of philosophy. Who can tell?

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Correspondence

CHRIST AND FREETHOUGHT

SIR,—In your issue of February 1 there appears in the correspondence columns a remarkable assertion by Mr. A. Yates which simply cannot go unchallenged.

Commenting on the problem of the historicity of Jesus, he says: "It is only on the Christian belief in his existence that Freethought subsists. That there was such a person is the very *raison d'être* of the Freethinker. If it could be finally and unequivocally disproved, he would (as such) have nothing left to oppose. . . ." (End of quote.)

I submit that nothing could be further from the truth. Mr. Yates has rendered Freethought a signal disservice by equating that philosophy with mere anti-religion. The fundamental principles underlying Freethought are of such broad scope and application that, properly understood, they furnish the key to an understanding of every phase of human life. To claim that this great edifice is dependent upon, and would have no further existence apart from, the belief in the historicity of some obscure personage alleged to be the founder of an ancient religion, is just about the most fantastic utterance I have ever heard from any man who claims to be a Freethinker. If it is ever proved that Jesus Christ never lived, it would knock the bottom out of Christianity, but Freethought would be unaffected. There are hundreds of other religions and scores of semi-religious cults as steeped in supernaturalistic nonsense as Christianity. And if these are not enough for Mr. Yates, there are the fields of politics and sociology. There one will find scope for the application of Freethinking ideas such as would please the most militant of Freethinkers!

No, the disappearance of Christianity would not leave Freethought with nothing to do, as Mr. Yates so strangely supposes. Rather would it mark another stage in the age-old struggle between Naturalism and Supernaturalism.—Yours, etc., JACK GORDON.

REPUBLICANISM IN BRITAIN

SIR,—For several months now the Press and the cinema have been preparing us for the Coronation. We have been given details of Abbey alterations, routes to be taken, robes and regalia to be worn, close-ups of the Crown Jewels and those who are to wear them, etc. Indeed, no opportunity has been missed to make the public "Coronation-conscious," and there have been few voices raised in protest.

Is republicanism dead in Britain, or are republicans apathetic? Whichever be the case, the N.S.S. and *The Freethinker* should do all they can to combat monarchism. I suggest a series of articles in the paper dealing briefly with the history of British monarchy. I know the Editor is well fitted to tackle the subject.—Yours, etc., C. McCALL.

NEW YEAR "HONOURS"

SIR,—Your reference to the proposal to confer a knighthood upon an alleged Anarchist raises the question whether there are any Anarchists left, and if there are, should they accept the offer of a knighthood? Unless the meaning of the word has changed, Anarchy means a state of society in which there is in fact or in effect no governing power.

In view of the many hundreds of O.B.E.s and M.B.E.s thrown about recently, it would be useful if a statement of the principles (if any) followed in awarding peerages, knighthoods, etc., was issued by the Government, so that we could have some idea of the criterion of value of public services.

For example, Mr. Leveson-Gower is to be made a knight for his services to cricket! Upon this basis, why not peerages, or at least knighthoods, for Messrs. Hobbs, Hammond and Hutton who have rendered valuable services to the same sport?

In this democratic age the creation of titles and the conferment of honours are out of place and should be dropped. The men and women not so recognised may be just as worthy as those picked out for the doubtful prestige.—Yours, etc., ALFRED D. CORRICK.

UNITY

SIR,—I have read with interest your article in *The Freethinker* of January 4, 1953, with reference to young people and Freethought.

Would it not be possible to create an upheaval in thought by the formation of a general committee of all forward Movements to discuss the present serious situation of misery, want and war, and to show how a united attack could be launched to demand from those in authority a solution of the problem of the cause concealed with its disastrous effects which we all deplore?

It is imperative to point out the ambiguity of the word "Religion." It is imperative to point out the misery which exists in the presence of such a vast profit-making system, and the obvious

irrationality of armed force as any solution to any problem while the scientific method of solving problems is wholly ignored.

The acceptance of such a state of affairs as we are in is tragic when so many are aware of the nature of the cause concealed.

An answer to this question in your columns would be appreciated.—Yours, etc., W. SMITH.

Theatre

"Intimacy at Eight." New Lindsey Theatre.

The various small theatre clubs away from Central London produce a variety of plays and revues every year. Their work goes on ceaselessly year after year, and a large proportion of it is mediocre judged by West End standards. Some of it is hopeless judged by any standards. Therefore, little is it to be wondered at if the critics, after giving a certain amount of attention to every change of management, fail to give these theatres the attention they should have.

Because I consider that true art is almost as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp, and that you never know where you are likely to find it, I have never neglected these smaller people. However, their plays often do not run for more than a couple of weeks, and a write-up in our paper would nearly always reach you too late.

"Intimacy at Eight" is a startling new revue, with lyrics written mainly by Peter Myers, Alec Grahame and David Climie, and most of the music by John Pritchett and Ronald Cass. There are eight versatile and capable artists who work hard for well over two hours: they are Leslie Crowther, Peter Felgate, Ron Moody, Charles Ross, Eunice Gayson, Dilys Lay, Vilma Ann Leslie and Joan Sims.

The lyrics are clever for their satire and wit; the music—though not outstanding—is of good standard, and the production—thanks to John Regan, is kept at a good pace and certainly goes over with a punch. I can think of only one revue of recent years that might compare with it.

Because this is first-rate entertainment of its kind, it is worth paying the small membership subscription of 2s. 6d. to enable you to see this show. You may, of course, have further opportunities should it eventually come to a West End theatre, as it deserves.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

N.S.S. Executive Committee Meeting, 3rd February

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Messrs. Ebury, Johnson, Hornbrook, Shaw, Tiley, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Barker, Taylor and the Secretary.

Eleven new members were admitted to the Parent, Glasgow, Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester branches. A letter was read from the Holborn Sponsoring Committee of the People's Congress for Peace, thanking the Society for its message in support of sincere peace efforts for submission to the Vienna Congress held in December. It invited the President and Secretary to attend a meeting at which delegates to the Congress would report on the proceedings. The Secretary had replied accepting this invitation, which action the Committee endorsed.

The report of recommendations by the Branches Sub-Committee was accepted. It suggested the grouping of Parent Branch members geographically, so that those interested could be put into touch with each other, the selection of large towns for special propaganda to get new branches going, the holding of meetings in places with facilities for community activities, and other methods of stimulating local work for the Society. Platform personnel for a public meeting at the Conway Hall to present "The Case for Sunday Freedom" were appointed. A discussion of the question of the annual subscription resulted in a decision to leave it open for branches to submit proposals at the next Conference.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.