

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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THE Amsterdam congress of next year has chosen as its subject *The Message of Freethought to the Modern World*. The present time appears opportune for glancing at some of the world problems which confront the international Free-thought movement at the present juncture. As we have indicated before, the world problems of international Free-thought are varied and complex, and are by no means identical with those at present urgent in this country. The present area is one in which a world civilization is coming into existence, and in which, consequently, vast areas of the earth, immemorably given over to superstition, are beginning to be affected by modern knowledge and by the critical outlook which it engenders.

It is still not generally recognised in this country what a tremendous effect the Hitler regime had on the advanced movements of Europe. This state of things applied, of course, principally in Germany, where, it is hardly too much to state, critical thought came to an abrupt stop for twelve years, the duration of the Nazi regime. The effect of this totalitarian reaction was itself total. Not only all independent political activity but *all* independent thinking all "Free" thought not dictated by the Nazi state was completely suppressed, including, of course, the professedly free-thinking movements. Actually the only anti-Christian movement tolerated in Germany during this era was the new pagan movement of Frau Ludendorf and Herr Rosenberg a retreat from Christianity to even more primitive paganism. In the annals of German culture 1933-45 virtually represents a complete blank, so much so, that, it is, in fact, almost impossible for us here to realize it.

## The "new order" in Europe

During the war years, during which the Nazi "new order" was extended over the greater part of Europe a similar state of things existed in the "occupied" lands. Here, again, all critical thinking was suppressed in favour of the puerile dogmas of the aryan Third Reich. Along with other advanced organizations, the free-thinking bodies were suppressed wherever the empire of the "aryan" Swastika extended; the "leader principle" is not compatible with any critical faculty; between 1940 and 1944, the *only* lands in Europe where free-thinking of any kind was legally permitted were Sweden and Switzerland, since the Iberian peninsula, though not directly occupied by the Nazis, was also subject to the equally totalitarian regime of the Vatican. Not only were the free-thinking organizations completely suppressed, but many of the leading spirits perished in the grip of the Gestapo. The present writer has not actually heard of any European Freethinker who was killed by the Nazis *qua* freethinker, but many, perhaps most, European freethinkers took part in local "resistance movements" against the Nazis, and were executed in consequence of their anti-Nazi activities. In any case continuity of European Freethought was completely broken, and the

European movements had to begin all over again after the war.

## European Freethought since the war

Since 1945 the main preoccupation of the European movements has been to replenish their depleted ranks. Whilst confronted with this, in itself difficult enough task, our European comrades have had to face the full fury of what the present writer has elsewhere described as the Catholic counter reformation of the 20th century. The Vatican is, today, launching an all-out totalitarian offensive on a world scale, and in Europe, naturally, the brunt of this offensive is felt. The Adenauer regime in Germany, the recent Brussels riots in Belgium, the insidious campaign against the secular constitution of the French State and educational system, the invocation of pro-clerical Fascist-made

laws in Italy, the current campaign for the re-admission of the Jesuits in Sweden and Switzerland, are all high water-marks of this current campaign. The high water-mark of this clerical all-out offensive is to be found in the recent (August, 1953) concordat between Rome and Madrid, by which the Roman Catholic Church in Spain has now been restored to a position of power which it has not enjoyed since the days of Torquemada and the "most Catholic" kings. Where Spain is today, Europe will be tomorrow, if the Vatican gets its way!

## European Freethought on the defensive

The Vatican counter-offensive takes place at a time when the ranks of organized freethought have been thinned and disorganized by the Hitler regime. Here the Fuhrer actually acted, involuntarily, as the "bailiff's broker" of the Catholic church; none the less, though reduced, numerically, to a shadow of their former strength, the European Freethinkers are putting up a stubborn defensive battle, and are slowly recruiting fresh members. The German section, for example, of the *World Union of Freethinkers* reported at Brussels a substantial increase in members. French Free-thought carries on a stubborn battle against the clerical attacks on secular education, the intellectual bulwark of the French republican system ever since the French revolution. In Luxemburg the campaign for the legalization of cremation is energetically pursued by Mr. Gremling and his colleagues in the small but very remarkable Luxemburg movement.

## World problems

Beyond the European horizon loom up many urgent contemporary problems. Later we hope to return to them in more detail. Here we merely note their existence. The most important are represented by such questions as the clerical, again chiefly Catholic, offensive in the U.S.A., the highly controversial problem of the possibility of the "co-existence" of Freethought in a monolithic one-party communist state, the heroic stand being made in India at

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## Freethought and International Problems

By F. A. RIDLEY



present, by the youthful Indian rationalist movement against the immemorial superstitions current in that god-ridden land. The future of Freethought in the vast Islamic world where hitherto a "Chinese Wall" of fanaticism has entirely prevented the entry of the critical spirit, all these, and many similar problems confront international Freethought movements in the second half of the 20th century.

#### Freethought in the atomic age

Beyond these gigantic problems, loom up others still more gigantic. To mention only the most important of all, from the present chaos, the still dim outlines of a world civilization are slowly emerging. It is a matter of vital importance for the future of our species that such a world culture, as and when it develops, shall do so with its critical reason unfettered by the "dead hand" of the churches, or by the paralyzing grip of the religious dogmas of a bygone pre-atomic, "prehistoric" age. If one may hold, a trifle optimistically, perhaps, but with some degree of confidence, that the present come back of religion represents its last fling, we are faced with the ultimate perspective of a post religious world. The rest is a new chapter in human history, including the history of freethought!

### Ask At Your Library

[Without Fear or Favour, by F. A. Hornibrook: published November, 1955, by the Cresset Press, 11 Fitzroy Square, London, W.1; 15/- net; 172 pp.]

A chuckle of delight precedes the reading of this book. It is occasioned by a caricature of the author by Vicky on the cover. A delicious likeness, Vicky's Hornibrook is even more like Hornibrook than Hornibrook is. An appropriate caption might be "Now somebody is for it!"

And so it turns out. Down go the Puritans and the Wowsers, the hypocrites and the humbugs, the new-style Labourites and old-style Blimps, the militarists and the Methodists; the prophets and priests; Buchmanites and bureaucrats; Mussolinis and McCarthys; and dealers in deceit of every description.

The author has done many things in a long life full of incident and adventure, but one thing he will never do: he will never write a stodgy treatise. And though many of the subjects he deals with have, in other hands, been subjected to heavier treatment, such methods are successfully short-circuited by our author. As his friend, the late Chapman Cohen, said, solemnity should not be taken for profundity. Mr. Hornibrook's latest book, then, is serious in substance, humorous in method.

The deadly earnestness, the indignation and the anger are all there, but the humour is always coming along in the next few lines.

For this is not just Hornibrook writing; it is Hornibrook talking. And while many talkers are given to writing, it is not every writer who can succeed in talking to his readers. There is a spontaneity and freshness in *Without Fear or Favour* which is so sustained that, once begun, it is very difficult to lay the book down. I can see pipes going out and meals going cold over the reading of it. Anecdotes, experiences, opinions, facts, comments, judgments, yarns (modified from indigo originals) are reeled off palatably and effectively for twelve chapters in a characteristically forthright attack on shams, repressions and injustices. At no point is the discussion introverted on the writer himself. The extrorse quality of his previous books is maintained in this one; the author is, as the Freudians might say, pure "extrovert."

The two great occupations in Mr. Hornibrook's life have been his professional work and his Freethought activity. A

physiotherapist and authority on health, his *Culture of the Abdomen* has been translated into several European languages and is in its 18th English edition. But he has served the cause of health not only as a writer but as a lecturer. During the first World War, for instance, he served with the New Zealand Medical Corps and lectured to thousands of N.Z. troops on venereal disease, with the result that the rate of infection fell rapidly until the puritans got busy. We should *make the Puritan defend himself*, says our author, instead of allowing him to attack our liberties. We should show that he is a pestilence and that his very presence poisons the atmosphere. If Heaven is the puritans' home "why don't they hurry up and go there instead of getting themselves elected on Councils?"

In an informative chapter, with facts and figures, on venereal disease, the distinction is pointedly drawn between religious influences on the one hand, and education and treatment on the other.

The author has also much of interest to say on the problem of industrial fatigue, and also on recreation, pointing out that games played under great stress of mind and body may actually do more harm than good. He recalls a picture of two American women tennis finalists coming off after the match looking like the survivors of a shipwreck.

The world problems of malnutrition and population also claim his attention. Today, he says, the vast majority of the world's population are suffering from malnutrition: "It is therefore no virtue to bring children in unlimited numbers into a world in which we cannot adequately feed those we already have."

The reader will also find reminiscences of some of the people the author has met and had dealings with, including H. G. Wells (who greatly valued Mr. Hornibrook's previous book on these lines, *Without Reserve*); Sir Arbuthnot Lane; Jack McLaren (the Australian Robinson Crusoe); Marconi; Chapman Cohen; Low the cartoonist; Jack London; H. B. Irving the actor; and Dr. George Cathcart (the laryngologist who launched the "Proms" in 1894 with Henry Wood).

It may be mentioned that H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett were among his patients, the latter writing an appreciation of Mr. Hornibrook's effective treatment in a pamphlet entitled *How are You?*

The author's verdicts are emphatically, in fact vigorously, his own, and he has never stood in awe before the pronouncements of alleged "experts"; he pillories, for example, the unfulfilled prophecies of military and other "experts" during the last war, German as well as British.

Among the varied subjects dealt with in equally interesting fashion are the censorship of literature in Eire; sex equality; anti-Semitism; colour bar; political parties and their Whips; the French Resistance Movement; and Capt. Cook. For the two latter he expresses almost unqualified admiration. And there is some debunking of military "heroes." As for Mussolini, we heard how he made the Italian trains punctual but "no mention of how he stopped the clock of human progress."

On the whole, the author *does* see progress in social well-being, but is impatient at its slow rate.

His message is conveyed, whatever he touches, but there is always the light relief:

"Is it true that you slept with this woman on the night of

March the twenty-second?"

"Not a wink, sir."

The outstanding general impression one gets from reading *Without Fear or Favour* is that the author sees his fellow beings as individuals, and not as mobs.

G. H. TAYLOR.



## Jesus on Television

By the late JOSEPH McCABE

(This article, from *Progressive World*, U.S.A., was written a few months before the author's death.—ED.)

IT is announced that the education authorities of the University of Illinois have purchased the literary remains of my friend the late H. G. Wells. We may congratulate them on their good taste as well as their boldness, for his works were the finest educational tonic—far finer than the works of G. B. Shaw—in the English literature of the present century. But we wonder whether a correct account of the development of his ideas will now be put before the American public. Like most "best sellers" he, during most of his literary career, avoided or temporised on the religious issue. Even in his fine manual of universal history he was too lenient to Christianity, but he began a few years later to break loose from the restraint he had imposed upon himself.

He dismissed the feeble and (in most cases) false label "Agnostic" and described himself as an "Atheist;" and this, according to the highest authority in the English language, the great Oxford Dictionary, is the correct description of his views and those of the great majority of the Freethinkers who call themselves Agnostics. He began about 1942, at my request, to be my literary colleague in the caustic columns of Haldeman-Julius' *American Freeman*, and for a time the Catholic authorities coupled his name with mine in the ban which they persuaded the F.B.I. to impose upon the importation of the works of these British writers who were adulterating the purity of American life by attacking its great Church. And the development culminated in his *Crux Ansata* (1943), in which he described the Roman Church as one of the most evil forces in the world and recommended me to his readers as "one of the most able and interesting and learned of all anti-Catholic writers" and "the most capable critic the papal system has ever had."

He drew closer to me and I saw a great deal of him in those years. He told me that what chiefly moved him to describe Rome in such violent terms was the way in which it was poisoning public life by its use of the Catholic vote to paralyse democracy and the stranglehold it was securing on the press and the writing and distributing of books. At the beginning of this century we thought that the free press and general education would bring about the death of the bunch of mediaeval superstitions which the Catholic creed is. After the first World War we saw the Church, by threatening a loss of readers and paying advertisers, get such influence over the press that a prominent New York journalist, Heywood Brown, publicly stated that there was not an editor in that city who did not dread its demands. It went on to hold its rod over publishers, libraries, and booksellers. When radio was developed it was promptly enlisted in the Catholic suppression of truth and dissemination of lies. Then T.V. appeared, and we wondered what it would do about this. We already have the answer.

I do not know what is happening in America, but the Catholic authorities there will hardly be described as more modest or timid than their "poor relations" in Britain. Well, a few weeks ago these induced the public television service to televise that most sacred of all their performances, the Solemn High Mass. In the papers next day there were "stills" of a few stages in the performance, and one showed the priest holding above his head the cracker-shaped wafer which the Catholic calls "the consecrated bread" the "host," or the "Eucharist."

Even the Catholic congregation must not look at this sacred object. At this culmination of the ceremony they must all bow deeply down in prayer. And it is surely the boldest thing the Church has done in our age that it should invite the frivolous and hostile general public in its tens of millions to stare at what it calls the most solemn moment in its whole ritual, on the coloured screen or in the cold grey of the newspaper, almost in the company of Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell, who happened to be advertised on the same day, and a dozen semi-nude photographs of skaters, women athletes, advertisements of scanties, etc.

For it is one of the most rigid dogmas of the Catholic Church, its proudest claim of superiority to Protestant bodies, that this "sacrament" is *not* a piece of bread but, in its own words, "the living body of Jesus Christ, whole and entire" (heart lungs, etc., down to the toenails); that this same body takes the place of the bread in the million Catholic Churches when the priest mutters over it "*Hoc est corpus meum*" (which the Reformers' ribaldry changed to *Hocus Pocus*); and that if you broke this wafer into a hundred fragments the entire body of Christ would be present in each fragment. What would the general newspaper-reading public say to that if an explanation of the belief in the Church's own words were to accompany the picture? But the Church knows that there is not now a single paper in Britain or America that dare give the explanation.

Those ornamental converts and literary men of whom the Church boasts so much do not, in most cases, believe that; though they know, if they know their creed at all, that you are a heretic if you doubt a single one of the fundamental dogmas of the Church; and this is one of the most fundamental. Hilaire Belloc said to me one day when I was lunching with him, "I don't care what you say, McCabe, but the beauty of my Church is the liberty it allows you." "Yes," I said, "if you will not tell anybody what you do think." A friend of mine who was intimate with Belloc and the two Chestertons (G.K. and Cecil), of whom the British Catholics were so proud, assured me that they did not literally accept such grotesque dogmas as this. They just felt that the highly coloured ritual of the Church made it the best antidote to the "drab materialism" which is supposed to threaten the world.

That is a common attitude of educated Catholics; whose culture is rarely more than literary, and that does not equip a man to look below the surface of such problems. There are two forms of this "Mass," in which a priest, who is very frequently a hypocrite or skeptic, turns bread and wine into "the body and blood of Christ"—literally, not symbolically. There is a simple or Low Mass, without singing, the ceremony for the workers and children, in which one priest mumbles the Latin ritual at breakneck speed while the people, who cannot even hear, much less understand, a word he says, shuffle and fidget on their knees in anticipation of the end.

(to be concluded)

He who fights with priests may make up his mind to have his poor good name torn and befouled by the most infamous lies and the most cutting slanders.—Heine.

—NEXT WEEK—

FREETHINKERS AND THE MONARCHY

By E. G. MACFARLANE



## This Believing World

The most thrilling news of the past few weeks is not the Jack Spot case, or the fact that a book by a "gangster" has been published, or the hatred Egypt shows for having been licked by Israel a few years ago, but the vision of Christ himself vouchsafed to the Pope. Hitherto, it was rather the Virgin Mary who appeared to little girls, while Jesus seemed to hold back from earthly visitations. But times have changed and, after all, the Virgin's appearances are now getting rather stale and cause no astonishment. So "our Lord" has had to take a hand in keeping together the faithful, and to whom could he better appear than to the Pope?

Moreover, it was his second visit to the Pope, and this time he came in answer to a prayer—in Latin, a language Jesus obviously learnt in Jerusalem (or was it Galilee?) as a small boy. At the first visit in 1950, the sun began to rotate, it sank down to the horizon, and then shot back again. Ignorant sceptics who report that astronomers do not appear to have noticed the sun's convolutions should realise that, in honour of a visit of the Son of Almighty God, some heavenly fireworks were needed, and what could be more appropriate than a whirling sun? Ask any Catholic convert?

The Ministry of Education's compulsory religious teaching in all schools looks as if it had completely misfired. According to the Bishop of Portsmouth who has been investigating youths of the National Service age, the "picture is pretty grim." In fact, "religious instruction appears to have been seriously neglected in the life of most recruits. Ignorance and apathy are prevalent even among the most intelligent." We just love the word "even" in this connection. It would be more true to say that just because some recruits are intelligent, they have either thrown overboard the out-of-date nonsense of Christianity, or are too bored to consider it worth discussing.

The Bishop put a lot of blame on not getting the right sort of teachers. But what about himself? How would he fare as a teacher explaining to "intelligent" youths the Virgin Birth, the aerial adventures of Jesus with a Devil, the miracles of stopping a storm, walking on water, raising the dead, and feeding thousands of people with a few loaves and fishes? The fact is our clever bishops always blame somebody else for their complete failure in "putting across" a mass of Oriental rubbish gathered in a book called "God's Precious Word" which in these days of the B.B.C., T.V., and I.T.V., few people ever read or want to read. And a very good thing too.

How easily are the mighty forgotten—or at least some of the mighty! Billy Graham's John the Baptist, his forerunner so to speak, was another Billy, the Rev. William Sunday, more familiarly known as Billy Sunday who earlier this century, also drew his thousands of followers by preaching Jesus Christ, Sin, and Hell-fire. This Billy's biography has just been published, and the most vital thing in it is the fact that Billy Sunday made over £600,000 during his successful evangelistic career. What a right Royal Mint has been the story of a God who had nowhere to lay his head.

In this connection we must mention another new "Life" of the Saviour, just published. It is a translation from the French of Daniel Rops, a fervent, all-believing

Catholic, and the enthusiastic reviewer of the work in the "Times Literary Supplement" says that any sceptic who still is uncertain about the truth of the Resurrection should read the chapter dealing with it. This proves that there are always people who actually imagine that the Resurrection can be "proved" by reason! There is surely no sillier or more unconvincing story in "history" than the story of the Resurrection—a story which the "witnesses" at the time, the Jews, know literally nothing about. Still there is always a market for a new "Life" of Jesus, and Mr. Rops will no doubt be munificently rewarded, especially in cash.

## Lecture Report

Manchester's indoor lectures commenced on Sunday, October 30th when Mr. Taylor addressed a large audience on "The Freethought Parties and the Future." Advocating co-operation of the closest possible nature with Rationalists and Ethicists (or, as they now prefer to be called, Humanists), for the specific main purpose of gaining access to a larger public through the B.B.C., Mr. Taylor said that as Secularists were "left" and the others "right," it was necessary and important to understand their outlook before collaboration. The Secularists were the pioneers of militant propaganda; the Rationalists had reached a large public in the past through the written word, and particularly through the Thinker's Library; and the Humanists were concerned, not primarily with making converts but with drawing together into social groups those already converted. There were more ways than one of catching fish and each had a part to play. Nevertheless, while not wishing to discourage social activity in any way, people won over by music and concerts could be lost just as easily by the same method. There was even a danger in secularists huddling together in social groups; their place was with the Christians, their policy one of permeation rather than segregation.

Social amenities, he said, should not be used to achieve sympathy where argument cannot carry conviction. They should follow, not precede, intellectual conviction, and for the Secularists, who were unrepentant proselytisers, they should be used to crystallize intellectual sympathy into active militant help. The musician and the stage-manager must be the handmaids of the propagandist, not his substitute. We should take a lesson from the experience of many churches where "church life" was based on ping-pong and picnics. Then count the congregation! The secularist would continue to give priority to the intellectual approach.

The lecturer gave information about the constitution of the two world organizations, the World Union of Freethinkers and the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and also exhibited to the audience many Freethought journals of the world, published by their affiliated bodies, describing *The Freethinker* as the second oldest freethought paper in the world, and the oldest appearing weekly.

Mr. Taylor thought the term "Scientific Humanism," as used by Mrs. Knight, was suitable as a comprehensive label for a combination of the Freethought parties in Britain, and had got off to a good start in the way of publicity. Once the "sound barrier" was permanently broken there was the Open Sesame to the advocacy of all Freethought and other advanced ideas, and he said he would like to see, if possible under the presidency of Margaret Knight, a combined conference of the three Freethought parties, apart from their own separate conferences, with a view to presenting a stronger body of opinion before the B.B.C. H.M.R.



# THE FREETHINKER

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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. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

## To Correspondents

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

- F. HILTON L. STEIN, ROGER WITCOMB.—Received and noted.
- G. W. CLARK.—Lord Hailsham has declared that nothing but unhappiness comes from homosexuality. But is not much of that unhappiness due to the public attitude towards it?
- SAMUEL PICK.—You will "pay us £1 if we can prove the Bible untrue." We can certainly do that, but can you prove you will pay us the money when we do???
- Hy. DEAN.—The Piltdown error was corrected by scientists, not by clergymen. Ecclesiastical errors are covered most shamelessly in Christian history; it usually takes freethinking researchers and scientists to find them out.
- M. REX.—All your points have been dealt with in these pages during the year. Why not buy the bound volume of *The Freethinker* for 1955?
- R. McKEOWN.—Why do we harp on Christ if he never existed? Obviously because many people still think he did, and the belief is a social and economic nuisance.
- J. JOURNEL (France).—Thanks for suggestion: Dr. Schweitzer has been a severe critic of the New Testament.
- L. B. WELLS (Mrs.).—We agree that the child's well-being is an important factor. You appear to think that is argument against divorce. But surely an unhappy union militates against the child's well-being.
- M. MASON.—Thanks for your warm praise of *The Freethinker*. The General Secretary of the N.S.S. will write you on the matter of secular funerals.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, WHARRAD, NEWTON, SHEPPARD and MURPHY.
- Central London Branch N.S.S. (Lincolns Inn Fields, Kingsway, W.C.1.)—Every Tuesday, 1 p.m.; (Tower Hill) Every Thursday, 1 p.m. Speakers: J. M. Alexander, W. Carlton, and others.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1.0 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and CORSAIR. Every Sunday: 8 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, CAVANAGH and others.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday and Sunday at 8 p.m. Messrs. PARRY, THOMPSON, and other speakers.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.
- West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

### INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, December 4, 7 p.m.: Roy Sear, "The Treatment of Jewish People and Minorities."
- Bradford N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, December 4, 6.45 p.m.: I. F. DENNY, "Reform of the House of Lords."

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £1,022 4s. 7d.; S. Jones, 5s.; T. M. Mosley, 6s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; J. Bell, 16s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £2. Total to date, £1,025 12s. 7d.

- Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Tuesday, December 6, 7 p.m.: A Lecture, "Uranium Diplomacy."
- Glasgow Secular Society, N.S.S. Branch (Central Halls, Bath Street).—Sunday, December 4, 7 p.m.: Selection of Polish Films with English commentary.
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 4, 6.30 p.m.: R. BARNES, "Formative Influences in Soviet Politics."
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12, Shaw, Liverpool, 6.).—Sunday, December 4, 7.30 p.m.: C. T. SALISBURY, "The Non-divine Origin of Christianity."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, December 4, 2.30 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Savagery to Space-ships."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, December 4, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D., "The Origin of Christmas."
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1.).—Sunday, December 4, 7.15 p.m.: G. SCHAFFER, "The Atom, Menace and Promise."

## Notes and News

Arrangements for the Margaret Knight meetings at Birmingham and Manchester on December 10 and 11, respectively, are now at an advanced stage, and full local information can be had from the N.S.S. Branch Secretaries concerned: Mr. T. G. Millington, 95 Wentworth Road, Birmingham 17; and Mrs. H. M. Rogals, 25 Derby Road, Withington, Manchester 20.

A new branch of the N.S.S. called the Central Branch has been formed and all interested, especially those living around the Kings Cross district, are cordially invited to join. Every effort will be made to promote keen discussion on live subjects for all supporting the aims and objects of the N.S.S. It is hoped to arrange meetings on Tower Hill during the lunch hour. The Secretary is Mr. J. M. Alexander, 249 Caledonian Road, London, N.1, who will be pleased to answer all enquiries.

The recent *Lancet* article suggesting the possibility of human virgin births (as an extreme rarity) has been challenged by the Director of the Department of Embryology at the Carnegie Institution (Dr. George Corner), in Washington. This expert on human reproduction said that it appeared to happen in fowls and some animals, but he had no knowledge of it happening in humans. The Roman Catholic "explanation" of rival virgin births is, of course, obvious. The latter are effected by an entirely different method. The affair of the Holy Mary was a distinctly ghostly business.

Three Winnipeg subscribers send warm appreciation of *The Freethinker* along with their subscriptions, etc. One writes, "I'd sure feel like an outcast without my weekly issue of *The Freethinker*. Superstition does not relax in this latitude."



## A Stranger in Parliament

By COLIN McCALL

ON November 15 the N.S.S. President, Mr. Ridley, and myself were present at the House of Commons, having gone there specifically to hear the Prime Minister's reply to a question about the relation of the State and the Church of England. The occasion was significant, however, for another reason, Mr. Sydney S. Silverman, M.P. for Nelson and Colne, being given leave to introduce a bill for the abolition or suspension of the death penalty.

It was my first visit to the Palace of Westminster during sittings—as a provincial my trips to London had always been during holidays that coincided with recesses, or for special reasons which had taken me elsewhere. "Palace," I realised, is the correct appellation; "House" the wrong one. The "stranger" (for that is how the visiting elector is described) should be under no misapprehension; he is entering a privileged—almost sacred—edifice and he seems, in some indefinable way, to be admitted on sufferance: he is not there by right but as a favour. He must do this, but not that; he cannot begin to climb the winding stairs to the Strangers' Gallery until the absurd little procession of Sergeant-at-Arms, Speaker, Chaplain, and one or two other white-fronted, necklaced gentlemen has passed by on its way to the chamber. Even allowing for the more absurd two minutes of prayers, it is hardly possible for him to be in his seat (escorted by more white-fronts and necklaces) before the commencement of business. Certainly not without undue and unseemly haste.

There is unquestionably much that is impressive about the entrance halls and lobbies, even when one dislikes the pseudo-Gothic, as I do. I suppose the ceiling mosaics of the patron saints of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales are acceptable as symbols, despite the partition of Ireland; no doubt the gilded chandeliers are in keeping with the surroundings. But the atmosphere—outside the chambers—is far removed from all that the word "democracy" conveys to me. Assuredly this is a Palace and one should approach it with the requisite awe.

Once in the totally inadequate Gallery ("You mustn't sit there—those seats are reserved for guests of Commissioners!") you realise the truth of the description "exclusive club." Front-benchers lie back with their feet on the table; back-benchers call each other names and are reprimanded by the Speaker for language unbecoming the club. But "are you taking notes?" "That is not allowed." Scribes in the Press Gallery opposite may write for all they are worth, but "strangers" must not do it! At least one stranger *did*, however.

The question in which we, as secularists, were particularly interested was down on the order paper as follows:—

**Mr. Swingle:** To ask the Prime Minister, if he will recommend the appointment of a Royal Commission on the relations between the State and the Church of England, with a view to ascertaining how far the Church's present status accords with the ideals and desires of the majority of the English people.

Sir Anthony Eden refused, stating that no representations in favour of disestablishment had been received by "any responsible or representative body." He indicated what he meant by these adjectives when he continued: "The Church Assembly and the Free Church Federal Council in the last few years each appointed commissions on the relations between Church and State and both reports indicate that the separation of the Church from the State at the present juncture would be to the detriment of Church and

Nation." The statement was received with cheers.

Secularists would probably agree that disestablishment would be detrimental to the Church of England. To all intents and purposes this hopelessly decrepit institution is only artificially kept alive inside the oxygen tent of establishment. No longer does it represent the views of the majority of the English people. It is, indeed, the unrepresentative position of the established Church that provides the most effective basis for the argument for disestablishment and disendowment at the present time. If the greater portion of the public supported the Church—even in theory—there might be some plausibility in the Prime Minister's answer, though the dissenter would still have grounds for objecting to compulsory contribution towards its upkeep. As it is, there is no such plausibility. The Church Assembly is hardly likely to sign what would virtually be its own death warrant, though it is true that one parson recently declared that establishment was in some ways a handicap to the Church of England. A few minor retaliations like this are only to be expected after the Princess Margaret affair, but the Church leaders, in their wisdom, rightly regard them as eccentric. They know otherwise. Without its privileged part in State affairs, in the Services, in education, on radio and T.V.—in almost all walks of life; and without accumulated wealth, what would happen to the Church of England? It would nakedly be revealed as what, in fact, it is: a moribund institution.

From the "art" of keeping alive that which is dying, to what Mr. Charles Duff satirically termed the "fine art" of hanging (see his little masterpiece, *A Handbook on Hanging*). Mr. Sydney Silverman gave notice of a "Bill to abolish or for a period suspend the passing and execution of the death sentence on conviction of murder and to substitute an alternative penalty therefor." From my seat in the gallery, the white-haired Mr. Silverman looked impressive; his words were even more so. There was a simplicity and a sincerity about them that befitted the subject, and the House and the visitors recognised this. When the question was put to a great shout of "Aye" and there was no dissentient, cheers rang through the chamber. The Gallery was of necessity silent, but silent in admiration, I feel sure.

Mr. Silverman had said: "There has never been an occasion, all the twenty years I have been a member of this House and for some years before that, when the House, left to its free choice, has not gone on record as wishing to see this evil thing removed from our statute-book. If effect has not been given to that desire it has been due only to the obstinate and relentless opposition of the Home Office." "I do not know," he added later, "what dark, secret, noisome influence it is in the Home Office that seduces every Home Secretary in turn. . . . I know there is hardly a member in this House who does not in his heart believe that this reform must come, and must come quickly. I do not believe there is any member who, when the day comes when we have abolished this obscene futility, will not rejoice in his heart that we have done so."

This, I felt, was the voice of humanity, transcending the gilded splendour of the Palace of Westminster. I was genuinely moved, not by oratory, but by sincerity and sensitivity of speech. Mr. Silverman had been, most fittingly, the distinguished guest at the N.S.S. Annual Dinner of 1951. He was expounding one of our objects: a reform for which the N.S.S. has continuously worked. His able and dignified plea for the abolition of "this obscene futility" made my



first visit to the House of Commons a memorable one. If reason prevails and the bill becomes law, the occasion will have been momentous. Secularists everywhere should do all in their power to make it so.

## "Information Wanted"

By H. CUTNER

MR. MALCOLM CLARKE of S. Africa wants to know (1) Does the Established Church receive any direct revenue from taxes? (2) Who pays the salaries of the Archbishops, etc.? (3) Was the Spanish Inquisition originally set up to "convert" the Jews?

The Church of England's revenue from land and investments was for 1954-55 ten and a half million pounds. The Church is *not* financed by the State through "direct" taxation though, of course, where a parson or priest is given a public job (as in the army or the prisons) he is paid out of public funds. But as far as I have been able to gather, the Church as a Church does not pay income tax, a favour it shares with other religious bodies and charitable institutions.

The finances of the Church are administered by the Church Commissioners which was founded in 1948 when the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were merged with the Queen Anne's Bounty into one body. It is ruled by some of the most important men in the country, among them the Lord Chancellor, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Lord Mayor of London, and the Lord Chief Justice; and no doubt full accounts of their work have been published in Government papers. If Mr. Clarke wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, he would no doubt receive full particulars.

It is, of course, the Church Commissioners who pay all salaries and they are finding it by no means easy to make ends meet. Ordinary parsons get perhaps about £600 a year gross and though some of the higher clergy get bigger salaries, they generally have heavy expenses.

The Spanish Inquisition was certainly *not* originally set up "to convert" the Jews. The Inquisition probably was founded as a result of the massacre of the Albigensians in the 13th century, and soon passed into Spain and other countries to suppress heresy as far as possible. This "heresy" in Spain really meant the way in which both Jewish and Moorish "converts" to Christianity pretended to be Christians, but were not actually believers. Outwardly, they conformed of course, to the current religion, but in their own homes they practised the rites of their original beliefs; and the Inquisition moved heaven and earth to "smell" them out. Not perhaps until the Germans under Hitler "sought out" heretics against Nazism has anything so foul as the Roman Catholic Inquisition appeared in history, and Mr. Clarke will find either in Llorente's *History* or in H. C. Lea's *History of the Spanish Inquisition* full details. Nearly all, or all, the articles in our encyclopaedias (probably inspired by Catholic writers) do their best to minimise the monstrous torture and sadism of the Inquisition—and it is *not* yet abolished by the Roman Catholic Church; though, of course, it has no longer its former power.

The mother is the priest's proxy. She rears her children for the Church. She whispers of God with accents of awe, that fall solemnly on the little one's mind. She trains the knee to bend, the hands to meet in prayer, and the eyes to look upward. She wields the mighty spell of love, and peoples the air of life with phantoms. She moulds the child for the priest, who burnishes it with catechisms and stamps it with dogmas.

—G. W. Foote.

## The American "Religious Revival"

WASHINGTON, Nov. 3.—A big revival of religion in the United States is reported today in the 20 newspapers published by Scripps Howard, as part of a survey of the state of the Nation. Reporter Fred Sparks presented a mass of statistics and personal observations to back up this conclusion. Here are some of the figures he gives:

Nine thousand new congregations were created this year. Seven thousand million dollars will be spent on churches in the next decade. Church membership in the last 15 years has increased from 57 per cent. of the whole population to 64 per cent. There are now in the United States 57 million Protestants, 32 million Catholics, five million Jews and two million Eastern Orthodox members.

Sparks also points to the religious sentiments expressed in the currently most-popular songs: *I believe*, and *You'll never walk alone*. Among the best-selling books are *A man called Peter*, *The greatest story ever told*, and *The Nazarene*—all with religious emphasis. And the top radio and television shows include Catholic Bishop Fulton Sheen, *Lamp Unto My Feet*, and *The Eternal Light*—representing Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths on the air.

The reporter quotes a friend from abroad as saying after an extended United States tour: *This century in America will be best remembered, not for mechanical marvels or our countless creature comforts, but because in that time religion became part of everybody's life.*

The above notes were issued in the *Daily Wireless Bulletin* of the American Embassy, London.

America, land of the free and once renowned for its materialism is, so it seems, returning to the bosom of mother church, in one form or another. After the glory of Billy Graham, as demonstrated in this country some time ago, it is understandable that there should be a trend towards "God," provided he is promoted properly as a brand name, and blazoned in 3-D neon along the Great White Way. To a public sold on advertising it is not such a big jump to switch high pressure selling from breakfast cereal to a more intangible product.

With the spectre of the horror of the megaton H-bomb the time to strike fear for the future into the hearts of semi god-respecting citizens is now and it is evident that the sects have grabbed the opportunity to catch as many fish as possible before the shoal returns to the deep.

We have the consolation, at least, that from 160,000,000 Americans there are more than 66,000,000 not accounted for in these figures.

Perhaps over the past 15 years, church membership has increased by  $\frac{1}{2}$ % per annum. But the interesting thing about claims of this type is that none takes into consideration the very large number of *nominal* church members. I am quite sure that church *attendance* could double in the United States without any substantial change in membership being necessary. The same could apply in Britain or, for that matter, in most countries of the Western world.

Catholic, Protestant or Jew they may be called, but do they act as such?

I wonder!

PETER CROSS.

## Correspondence

IRELAND

There are one or two points in Mr. F. A. Hornibrook's excellent review of Paul Blanshard's book which I think call for some comment. The trouble which has torn Ireland to pieces for more than eight centuries has not been religion, although, as in other countries, this has played its part, but conquest and domination by a foreign power, intent on plunder; a power which has never failed to use religious or any other differences in its own interest, playing one side against the other in turn as its interest might be best served. The main energy in Ireland, as in all colonial countries, is the occupying power, which whether it be Catholic v. Protestant, Muslim v. Hindu or Jew v. Arab, always keeps the opposition pot boiling to serve its own ends. It should be remembered that while there is a large Catholic minority in the North



there is also a large Protestant minority in the so-called Free State, and that the best and most successful of Irish fighters for freedom have always endeavoured to promote unity of the factions against the aggressor. The best results were reached when this unity was maintained. Dean Johnson has not been so tenderly treated by the anti-Russian circles in his own country, even by his own Archbishop and fellow clergy, some of whom, with true Christian Charity, have openly advocated prison or the hangman's rope, but this would not deter him from supporting the Irish desire for national independence. And we should like to know more about the details of the Ulster decision. History tells some strange tales!

I am not wishing to underestimate the dangers of Catholic powers. I lived for many years in a Catholic country. I saw enough of the deliberate maintenance of ignorance and superstition for the sake of power to make me hate the Church with as bitter a hatred as Mr. Hornibrook's, but by firm belief is that, freed of foreign occupation and exploitation and really "her own," Ireland will, like India and other recently liberated countries, be in a position to deal with her internal enemies in her own way and that in the words of one of her greatest leaders—"The real rulers of Ireland will be the Irish people." And that is why the supporters of Irish nationalism oppose partition.

(Mrs.) G. MATSON.

### "THE MESSIAH JESUS"

I have just completed a reading of the late Dr. Robert Eisler's magnificent book *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*. I consider it a most lucid exposition of a very convincing explanation of the origins of Christianity.

Dr. Eisler makes use of the Slavonic version of Josephus to reinforce his arguments. However, independently of such more-or-less contemporary documents, his interpretation of the Gospels is magnificent in itself and, to my mind, irrefutable.

Dr. Eisler, refusing to isolate Jesus from his very turbulent historical setting, proves that he, Jesus, put himself forward as the Messiah of his people. A pacifist desiring to lead the Jews into the desert to escape from Roman rule, Jesus inevitably came into conflict with Roman law and Jewish orthodoxy. His more violent followers seeking to directly and immediately overthrow Roman rule, initiated reprisals which could only end in the execution of Jesus for provoking a rebellion against Rome.

I cannot possibly do justice to Dr. Eisler's theme. I can only hope that your readers will consider it worthwhile in seeking out Dr. Eisler's book. Enough interest could even get this most telling onslaught on Christian orthodoxy reprinted.

RICHARD KEAN.

[We dealt with Eisler some years ago, but perhaps Mr. Cutner will deal with him again.—Ed.]

### MALTHUS

I am interested to learn that we have in our midst an "out-and-out" Malthusianist, having studied this theory of population myself.

On what facts do present-day Malthusianists base their belief that population tends to increase faster than subsistence?

Would this tendency to reproduce show itself with the same force where population is sufficiently dense and wealth distributed with sufficient evenness to lift a whole community above the necessity of devoting their energies to a struggle for mere existence?

If we admit that the tendency to multiply must ultimately produce poverty, can we say that existing poverty is due to this cause? In view of the presence of social ignorance, rapacity, bad government, unjust laws and destructive warfare it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible to prove that vice and misery spring from an increase of the number of mouths over the power of the accompanying hands to feed them.

Shall we refer to India and its famines, or to Ireland? Burke and Macaulay have written essays on this subject, also Florence Nightingale (in "Nineteenth Century," August, 1878). In the case of Ireland we have Dean Swift. If your readers will read these accounts (available in reference libraries) they will then surely be left with little doubt as to the cause of misery and want. Similar accounts of the rapacity of man, of unjust laws and so on can be written today. In face of this can we still say that poverty is due to increase of population?

G. L. DICKINSON.

### HOMOSEXUALITY

Alex Talbert's semi-facetious reference to "queers" leads me to suspect that he has given no objective and scientifically impartial consideration to this problem of sexual deviation.

If he wishes to acquaint himself with the most recent discoveries in the field of sex, he cannot do better than consult *The Physiology of Sex*, by Kenneth Walker (Penguin Books). Kenneth Walker's

position and prestige in the medical profession is tolerably well known, and his words naturally carry weight.

A complete chapter in the above-mentioned work is devoted to "The Problem of Homosexuality."

S. W. BROOKS.

### MARRIAGE JUDGED BY CELIBATES

No Catholic priest, monk, or nun is allowed to take the final vows, binding for life, till after a long-searching, sometimes very unpleasant, novitiate has been survived. Even after the final vows should the vocation prove to be mistaken, release may be given (as in the case of Monica Baldwin).

The life-long vows of indissoluble Christian marriage are frequently taken, without any preparation whatever, without even a Health test, by people who have no idea what they are letting themselves in for.

An inexperienced girl cannot, in the very nature of things, know her own mind till after the sex act. Then it is too late. She is trapped for life.

Between the married and the unmarried an impassable gulf is fixed. Therefore these matters should be decided by married persons, not by inexperienced celibates.

MOLLY ROCHE.

### CHURCH REVENUES

Like Malcolm Clarke I should like to know the full extent of the Church's income from the state. I know, of course, that no rates are paid on churches but does this rate-free state extend to parsonages? I also know that, during the agricultural depression between the two wars, the Government paid the church £51,650,000 stock to redeem the iniquitous "Queen Anne's Bounty" which was pressing so heavily on farmers. Landowners are still paying off this colossal sum in the form of yearly annuities to the Government—and will be until 1996.

ANTI-CLERICUS.

[This subject will be dealt with again soon—Ed.]

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE REPORT

Meeting of the Executive Committee of the N.S.S. at 41 Gray's Inn Road, on 16th November, 1955. Present: The President (Chair), Messrs. Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Taylor and Tiley, Mrs. Grant and Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer and the Secretary. Apology from Maj. Draper. Mr. Shepherd attended on behalf of the Bradford branch without power to vote.

The position of Mrs. Grant and Mr. Gordon on the Executive Committee was clarified. Mr. McCall had taken up his duties as Secretary on 7th November.

Mr. Hornibrook and Mr. Shepherd agreed to investigate the position of the Blasphemy Laws in the West Indies for Fizabad branch; new members were admitted to Bradford, Manchester, West London and Parent branches. Permission was given to form the new Central London branch, particular reference being made to the proposal to hold lunchtime meetings on Tower Hill.

The President reported on meetings of the World Union of Freethinkers and the Secular Education League, and a visit to the House of Commons when Mr. S. Silverman had spoken for abolition of the death penalty. It was decided to send a letter of congratulation and support to Mr. Silverman.

A resolution from West London branch re Mr. Paul Robeson was endorsed for sending to the American Ambassador. Various correspondence was dealt with and help in propaganda was offered to Mr. Alonso at Swansea and to Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester branches.

A motion to increase the President's honorarium was passed. Next meeting: 14th December.

COLIN McCALL,  
(Gen. Secretary, N.S.S.)

### Special Book Offer

While stocks last we can offer the following parcel containing: *Lift Up Your Heads* (Kent) published 3s. 6d.; *Thomas Paine* (Chapman Cohen) published 1s.; *Marriage, Sacerdotal or Secular* (Du Cann) published 1s.; *Rome or Reason* (Ingersoll) published 1s.; *Age of Reason* (Paine) published 2s. 6d.; *What Is The Sabbath Day* (Cutner) published 1s. 3d. The whole parcel (valued 10s. 3d.) offered to readers of *The Freethinker* for 7s. 6d. post free. Cash with order. Strictly nett.

THE SECRETARY of N.S.S. still hopes for unfurnished accommodation for Mother and self in London area.—Reply to Colin McCall, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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