

# The Freethinker

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A VERY able speech was made in the House of Commons on November 15, by Mr. Sidney Silverman in support of a private member's bill for abolishing the death penalty. The Executive of the N.S.S. next day expressed its support for the bill sponsored by Mr. Silverman. The abolition of the death penalty has been one of the aims and objects of the N.S.S. since its formation in 1866. As in so many other matters the point of view then advocated by the N.S.S. has now become a generally recognized objective of progressive public opinion. Mr. Silverman's present bill is, for example, a non-party measure, with joint Tory, Liberal and Labour parties. Such a state of things would have been incredible in the days of Mr. Silverman's illustrious predecessor and "the honourable member for Northampton," Mr. Bradlaugh. It represents a hopeful symptom both of moral and of political evolution.

## The Lex-talionis

The present state of English law is an uneasy compromise between primitive conceptions of revenge based ultimately upon the *Lex-talionis*, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," and modern humanitarian conceptions based upon modern sociological conceptions of crime in its social setting. Whilst, however, the death penalty is still inflicted for the crimes of treason and murder, one must admit that the *Lex-talionis*, the principle of revenge, constitutes the more important source of the criminal law in relation to these crimes, as far as English law is concerned. The comparatively recent abolition of flogging as a legal punishment for crimes of violence, represents a notable victory of reason and humanity over the time dishonoured principle of revenge.

## The Evolution of Capital Punishment

Capital punishment, in present-day legal practice is actually a very mild relic of capital punishment as originally inflicted in codes of primitive law. Then, it was not only the malefactor himself in person who suffered the extreme penalty, it was also his descendants down to "the third and fourth generation" or even his entire tribe, who perished on account of his original individual guilt. Primitive codes are full of such ferocious enactments, not least, the Holy Book of the Jews, our "Old Testament." Moreover, the "*Lex-talionis*" had a social as well as a legal connotation, the magnitude of the crime mounted as the social rank of its perpetrator declined! The punishment of commoners was always more ferocious and their final demise more painful than were those of the "upper" ranks of society, even the comparatively rational Roman Law prescribed one mode of execution, decapitation for citizens, and another and far more horrible one, crucifixion, for slaves. Nor was English law different in this respect. Down to quite recent times, "noblemen" were beheaded for treason, whilst "commoners" suffered the grisly and protracted penalty of "hanging, drawing, and quartering" for precisely the same crime. *Class "justice" with a vengeance!*

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## Capital Punishment

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

## The Evolution of English Law

The evolution of English law during the past century and a half has been marked by a remarkable expansion of national humanitarianism at the expense of its original savagery in which respect Mr. Silverman's bill would only carry a stage further the work of a long series of eminent predecessors. In the 18th century, the English criminal code was, perhaps, the most savage in the contemporary world. Literally hundreds of capital offences existed!

Theft of anything over a shilling constituted a capital offence! Moreover the law varied its penalties, not only between social classes, but also between the sexes. For certain offences men were hanged, but women were burned alive, actually the last woman to be burned under English law was about con-

temporary with the last victim, also a woman, to be burned by the Spanish Inquisition.

## Rationalism and Legal Reform

The major credit for reforming the criminal law came, not from the notoriously conservative legal profession, but from the modern rationalist movement. It was under the influence of Voltaire and his Italian pupil Beccaria, that torture and death by torture, were abolished in most European lands, and the number of capital offences reduced to a very few of the more serious crimes. In England, the work of Bentham and Romilly must be specially mentioned in this connection. Rationalist principles of public welfare succeeded to religious superstition and to naked class interest as the modulating force behind the infliction of punishment, in fact, one might perhaps say that Rationalism has been much more successful in abolishing legal, than religious superstitions. In this last respect the influence of the French Revolution was epoch-making; the code Napoleon abolished torture on an international scale. Whatever mistakes the French Revolution may have been guilty of in the political arena, its influence on the laws was profoundly humanitarian, even the barbaric English code of the period submitted to its influence.

## The Present Situation

Today, torture has been legally abolished in all lands the Nazi regime forming a barbarous exception! Similarly in all except a very few European lands, the death penalty has been abolished. The legal equality of all social classes in capital charges is now universally acknowledged in all countries claiming to be civilized. In England, the legal system must still be classed among the more conservative ones. Flogging was only recently abolished, long after most European countries. The death penalty is still in force. It must be added that legal reform has usually come from without, the judiciary opposed the abolition of flogging, which can still be given for certain offences committed in prison and show every sign of opposing the abolition of capital punishment. From the political angle, the oppon-

ents of the death penalty can be found in all parties. The Labour government—1945-51—has so far been the only one to make a half-hearted attempt, which they subsequently withdrew in deference to opposition in the House of Lords to "suspend" the death penalty for a period of years.

### The Case Against Capital Punishment

An American contemporary states the case against capital punishment in these terms.

"No method thus far tried has sensibly mitigated either the interest or the horror which the infliction of the death penalty excites in the public mind. Although it takes place within prison walls in the presence of only a handful of people, it is still, just as it was when performed in the public square, essentially and irrevocably a public spectacle. That it is a demoralizing spectacle cannot be doubted and it may well be believed that the millions who read of it in the public press, and who make it a matter of discussion, are less affected by the lesson it aims to teach than by emotions of sympathy or even of emulation of the tragic victim. There are many unstable, wavering, suggestible personalities in this vast invisible audience, and it is a matter of record that notorious execu-

tions have often been followed by what newspapers call an epidemic of murders. It is not unreasonable to believe that the total abolition of the death-penalty would be conducive to a greater respect for human life in the community at large. *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences Article—Capital Punishment.*

### Abolish the Death-Penalty.

These appear to be powerful arguments. They could, in fact, only be rebutted effectively if it could be demonstrated that the abolition of the death-penalty led to an actual increase in the statistics of crime, or, as an 18th century judge succulently phrased it: "You are not to be hanged for stealing horses but you are to be hanged so that horses shall not be stolen!" However, the actual available statistics in lands where capital punishment has been abolished, do not indicate any such increases—rather the contrary! We think accordingly, that the time has now come to take a yet further step in legal reform, to bring law into conformity with justice by declaring that that offspring of primitive superstition, the *Lex-talionis*, has no place in a civilized community. The National Secular Society wishes Mr. Silverman and his colleagues every success in their present undertaking.

## Catholicism and Crime in Australia

By GREGORY S. SMELTERS

The objective value of a religion lies in its social effects—S. A. Cook (*Introduction to the Bible*, p.205).

The Catholic families are the greatest and most prolific breeding grounds of criminals, according to the available jail statistics of three largest states of Australia.

In all the three states: South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, the Catholic prisoners surpass outrageously their percentages in total population of each state, reaching 2.3/4 times larger proportion of criminals in South Australia. The Catholic prisoners are also steadily increasing in numbers and in proportion in Victoria.

In striking contrast, the disbelievers who state no religion entering the prison have been either as steadily decreasing in numbers or even falling far below their percentages in total population of their state.

The fact of overwhelming moral importance, revealed by the South Australian prison statistics, is that the behaviour of the non-denominational (non-religious) section of population was far better than that of any of the five largest Christian denominations, giving to the prisons the least proportion of the total number of criminals: 4.35 per cent. (in 1952) as against their 12.34 per cent. in the total population of the State (in 1947). The respective figures for the five largest Christian denominations who supplied, in 1952, the bulk of criminals, in this order of growing proportion, were: Methodists 15.44 per cent. (being 26.39 per cent. of the 1947 population), Church of England 31.28 per cent. (29.12 per cent. of population), Lutherans 4.75 per cent. (4.45 per cent.), Presbyterians 4.60 per cent. (3.76 per cent.), Catholics 32.07 per cent. (12.54 per cent.).

Thus the S. Australian community will now go on the proud historical record as the first in Western Civilization to prove statistically that the modern non-denominational and non-religious man and woman can be, and are in fact, better behaved on the average than the Christians of the five commonest brands.

In Victoria the non-denominational (in 1951) proportion of prisoners: 8.99 per cent. (in popul.—10.75 per cent. in 1947) was equal proportionately to that of Anglicans—31.05 (in popul.—35.52 per cent. in 1947).

A further striking feature was the almost complete absence of women among the prisoners of no religion, whereas about 10 per cent. were women among the Catholic prisoners of Victoria (in 1951).

Thus the available statistics prove that the moral standard among the male and female population of no religion or no denomination is increasingly and incomparably better than among Catholics, the most religious denomination of Christian Churches: 63 per cent. of Catholics go to church regularly (on average 44 attendances a year), against 28 per cent. of Methodists, 22 per cent. of Presbyterians, 19 per cent. of Anglicans, according to the Gallup Poll of May 1955 for the whole of Australia.

That makes up the strongest possible case for "the general rejection of Christianity in the Australian Community" (as the Report of Newcastle, U.S.W., Anglican Diocesan Synod in 1951 candidly avowed it) in particular and for *Moral Education without Religion* in general (see *Crime and Religion* by J. McCabe, Rationalist Encyclopedia, p.120).

The figures are based on Religions of Prisoners as given in N.S.W. Statistical Register for 1949-50, Papers Presented to Victoria Parliament, 1947-48, 1951-52; and Proceedings of South Australia Parliament, 1953.

NOTE: There was no uniformity observable in itemizing their non-denominational prisoners by jail authorities of three states. While S.A. listed only "No Religion," and N.S.W. only "Not Stated," Victoria registered "No Religion" and "Religion Unknown." It may be then assumed that S.A. and N.S.W. listings each comprised both "No Religion" and "No Reply." Anyway, as far as the Christian Churches and other brands of organized religion are concerned, there is no difference in one's rejecting one's denomination either by "Not Stated" or "No Religion."

—NEXT WEEK—

THE TV RELIGIONS ENQUIRY

By G. H. TAYLOR

## Jesus on Television

By the late JOSEPH McCABE

(concluded from page 379)

You will read sometimes, even in one of those amiable sceptical writers who "look for the good in all religion," that it is an inspiring sight to see a thousand poor folk, after the week's worry and work, kneeling in silent awe for at least one half-hour a week. How these writers dupe themselves with their liberalism! The young man who is about to become a priest has, like an actor, for several weeks to practise and learn the words and gestures of this weird ceremony so that he can smoothly pack the whole of it within 25 minutes; which means that for 20 or 25 minutes he talks to the Almighty at a pace that would baffle the smartest stenographers. And the reason given to him is that if he does not keep within this limit he will have the great majority of his congregation shuffling and coughing in the last ten minutes, in their impatience to bring it to an end. Remember that I speak from experience. The great majority of them are there only because the penalty is hell if, unless they are ill, they fail to attend Mass on a single Sunday morning.

But the Mass of the middle class, of the literary and artistic converts, when you put a quarter in the offertory box instead of a nickel, is the solemn or "High" Mass. The attraction of this is the music or the choir (often in part of professional non-Catholic singers), the organ, or the orchestra. Even this is a poor show in the majority of churches, but in richer churches it is, as Claude Bernard, the famous French physiologist (counted a Catholic), said, "the opera of servant girls." The music is fine, inspiring—unless you happen to know that the majority of these composers of great Catholic music were not Catholics, and many of them were strongly anti-Catholic. They were Deists like Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert, or Atheists like Brahms, Rossini, and Cherubini. Only a small minority of the greater composers of sacred music were genuine Catholics. These Rationalist composers have been, and are, worth millions to the Church. Mozart's Mass of the Dead brought Mozart about \$50 and the Church tens of millions.

How superficial these ornamental converts are you easily gather from the way in which they shirk the most obvious question about this "consecrated bread" or swallow a "scientific" explanation which goes back to the days when everybody believed that the earth was flat or that the crocodile sheds tears before it eats a man. In fact it goes back to Aristotle. From circumstances which have never been fully understood, Aristotle turned aside from the very promising line of inquiry into Nature, upon which the Greeks had entered, and became violently anti-materialist, though not spiritualistic. He was scornful about evolution, the main lines of Greek materialism which, when the world recovered its sanity, became fundamental truths of modern science. Matter was composed, he said, not of atoms, which had certain features or qualities, but of "matter" (hidden like the kernel in a nut) and "form" (the shell of qualities). An apple—the substance of an apple—is something distinct from its "accidents" or qualities; its smell, shape, weight, colour and hardness. And this, revived by Aquinas and the famous Schoolmen of the Middle Ages, furnished them with a triumphant proof that transubstantiation, converting the bread (which ceases to exist) into the Body of Christ while the qualities or "accidents" of the bread remain, is perfectly reasonable. Aristotle's "accidents," not the substance, of a thing were what caught the eye. So by supernatural magic,

which is supposed to be completely natural and logical in an infinite power, the substance of the bread is annihilated while yet the colour, shape, taste, etc., of the wafer remain. Explain to the public that that is what the Church makes of its consecrated wafer and watch their expressions or listen to their smiles.

From the first reawakening of Europe at the end of the Dark Ages, the challenge of this doctrine of transubstantiation was one of the most persistent heresies. How did it come about? We have a fairly good picture of the Roman Christians, in their letter to the Corinthians, before the end of the first century. The only ritual they had was baptism (after John the Baptist) and a periodical supper commemorating the supposed Last Supper (which seems already to have got into the gospel story) of Jesus and his disciples. By the end of the second century it had become the mystic "Mass." What the word means is disputed, but the favourite theory is that, as the priest turns to face the people, at the end, to say, in Latin "Ite, missa est" ("you may go, the ceremony is over"), the French *messe* and the English *mass* are taken from this.

But the Catholic apologist is careful not to explain further. The well known truth is that the temple of the Persian religion Mithraism was on the Vatican Hill outside Rome, within a stone's throw of the Christian quarter, and Mithraism appealed to the Romans enormously more than the early Church did. And the Mithraists included a "mass" or communion in their very elaborate ritual of their Saviour-God. We still have bas-reliefs from the Mithraic temples showing the priests administering the "sacrament," as they called it, the consecrated bread and wine (or another drink in Persia itself), to the worshippers. So many features of the Mithraic and other cults were like ceremonies and beliefs in Christianity when it emerged from its primitive form that one of the simpler-minded of the early Fathers describes them at length—he is not popular in the Church today—and naively adds "So the devil also has his Christs." To the historians it is clear that the Christians borrowed these features to make their services more attractive to the Romans.

The Catholic doctrine that this was no mere pious commemoration of the Last Supper on earth but that Christ was "present" in the bread and wine, just as the Goddess Ceres had been present in the bread, and Dionysus in the wine, remained vague. In fact during five or six centuries few were sufficiently educated to speculate on it. Then, in the twelfth century, the Schoolmen, hard pressed by the learned Arabs of Spain, fell back upon this splendid rationalisation of Aristotle's "substance" and "accidents," and it became the chief dogma of the Church. Philosophers and scientists smile at the theory today. But Catholic theology sternly insists on it, and the millions of its members, often college-trained, a few of them supposed to be scientists, bow down today before "the living body of Christ, whole and entire" (even the theologian says it would still be there if a burglar, stealing the silver chalice, were to trample it underfoot) which is on a million altars, and now on the television screen or in the illustrated paper, gazed at in wonderment by the millions of the frivolous.

Belief in a personal God seems no longer possible. It is no longer the conscience of God but the conscience of Man that is a power making for righteousness.

## This Believing World

If the talk on Religion and Philosophy given for schools by Mr. J. T. Christie, the Principal of Jesus College, Oxford, had been advertised as one on "Humanism versus Christianity" with a more or less bias on Humanism, there would have been the usual hullabaloo in the press. Poor Mr. Christie would have had it—vulgarly speaking—in the neck and our bishops would have filled the newspapers with their angry denunciations. Mr. Christie—very justly, of course—praised up Scientific Humanism to such an extent that one wondered where exactly Christianity came in.

Naturally, it came in with the "person" of "our Lord," but it appeared as if Mr. Christie—who roundly told us he believed in neither the Resurrection nor the miracles—was hard put to bring him in at all. Whether the children for whom the lecture was given understood the difference between Christianity and Humanism is more than doubtful; and the more intelligent ones would have to be forgiven if the praise given to Humanism inclined them to reject Christianity. We hope Mr. Christie will be asked again to lecture in the same strain—and if not to children, dare the B.B.C. invite him for the Home Programme? We doubt it.

Once again the Rev. B. Graham has come and seen and conquered. He gave an address on Evangelism the other day before the Church Assembly (the parliament of the Church of England) and was received with loud and enthusiastic cries of "Hallelujah." There were 43 bishops and crowds of parsons to hear him, and even the Archbishop of Canterbury (we are told) "chatted some time with Mr. Graham"—though he did not wait to hear the usual panegyric of Jesus, Christ Jesus, the Bible, and Sin, which forms most part of the stock-in-trade of all evangelists in general, and the Rev. Billy in particular. Perhaps he was afraid it might convert him.

Convent life disclosures—ever since *Maria Monk* anyway—never seem to show how heavenly it must be to devote oneself to God Almighty; and nuns in general are not particularly happy examples of glamorous brides, that is, Brides of Christ. But though Sister Priscilla lost her case in a recent court action—she claimed she had been kept a prisoner by the good Sisters of Nazareth—she still wanted to remain a member of the Order. Unfortunately, the Pope has very politely (of course) told her to get out, and out she must go.

However, she gave to the aspirants of a life's religious devotion, the celebrated advice *Punch* gave to those about to marry—*don't!* "I am now sorry I became a nun," she sadly admits. All the same, she intends to pray every night for the good kind Sisters of Nazareth who (most impolitely) have kicked her out of their Order. There is nothing so Christ-like as giving the other cheek.

No doubt whatever there is a religious boom in the U.S.A. What with 57 million Protestants, 32 million Roman Catholics, over 5 million Jews, and millions of believers in offshoots of all kinds, the U.S.A. must hold the record for religion. But Dr. E. C. Blake, who is this year's President of the National Council of Churches, dolefully admits that "morality seems to be on the decline at the moment when there appears to be a religious boom." This is sad enough, but it also appears that most people

have joined a church (or Church) for "secular" or "mixed reasons."

In fact, rarely in their reasons for joining, or adhering to, a church was the reason given that it was due to Christ Jesus and Him Crucified. In spite of Billy Graham, most of these millions of religious believers and church-goers do not appear to have found either Jesus or God. The "secular" reasons are of course the same as those surrounding any social club. And this, after nearly 2000 years of incessant preaching of the Gospel!

It need hardly be added that of all the problems which the Churches face these days, that of "sex" in its various manifestations seems the most important—as indeed it nearly always was. Now the Church of England has issued a "frank" pamphlet—it always is "frank" when dealing with sex—in which is advocated a much more modern approach to all marriage problems; and the clergy must face the fact that the "traditional" theology on these and other sex problems is quite out of date. Poor Jesus—even on sex his celibate views can now be dispensed with.

## How We Got Christmas

No educated Christian scholar to-day can possibly maintain seriously that Jesus Christ was born on December 25th. In fact, the choice of this day gives the game away completely. It had been a Pagan festival centuries before Christianity was heard of. Many are the saviour gods of antiquity whose birthday was at the winter solstice, such as Horus, Mithra, Osiris, Adonis, Freyer and others. All these were supposed to have been born on or near December 25th. And so the Pagan festival became a Christian festival by the simple expedient of claiming it as Christ's birthday. It was finally in competition with the Feast of Saturnalia, one of the chief festivals of ancient Pagan Rome, that Christmas Day had its date fixed. The festivals of Rome were as numerous as plums in a pudding. The public holidays were so frequent that they became a nuisance, and the Roman Emperors, especially Marcus Aurelius, found it necessary to curtail them. It was to counteract the attractions that these Pagan holidays exercised that the astute leaders of the Christian Churches sanctioned and incorporated some of these feasts in the new religion of Christianity. Like all human institutions, the various contending Christian Churches and their feast day have had to fight for their survival.

Christmastide is, indeed, a salmagundi of Roman and other superstitions, a jumble of Paganism and Christianity, largely based on the old Roman Saturnalia, but also incorporating Druidic, Scandinavian and Teutonic features. The Roman occupation of Britain lasted for nearly five centuries, and one of the principal festivals had to be observed and maintained. The anniversary of Saturn was already ancient at the inception of Christian rituals, and the propensity of converts from Paganism to cling to their customs proved invincible. If they were to be retained within the fold of the new superstition it was advisable, even essential, that the new priesthood should incorporate the old popular festival under the cloak of the "new order."

### MIMNERMUS SECUNDUS.

All the orthodox churches are obstructions on the highway of progress. Every orthodox creed is a chain, a dungeon. Every believer in the "inspired book" is a slave who drives reason from her throne, and in her stead crowns fear.—*Ingersoll*.

To subject the vast majority to despotic regimentation by reason of the shortcomings of the few, is foolish tyranny.—*H. M. Hyndman*.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## 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.

W. MAY.—If virgin births were proved (as an extreme rarity) in humans, the only doctrine to suffer would be that of the Roman Catholics, whose historic (?) case would then fall into the natural category.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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.

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. (Cambridge Restaurant, rear of Hall of Memory).—Saturday, December 10, 7.0 p.m.: Mrs. MARGARET KNIGHT, "Morals Without Religion."

Bradford N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, December 11, 6.45 p.m.: M. MUSPLICY, "Mongrels, Puppies, Whelps and Hounds."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (121 Caledonian Road, N.1., 5 minutes from Kings Cross).—Tuesday, December 13, 8 p.m. F. A. RIDLEY, opens discussion on "The Future of the N.S.S."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Tuesday, December 13, 7.0 p.m.: G. FRANKL, "The Abolition of Warfare."

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 11, 6.30 p.m.: British Peace Committee; A Lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints).—Sunday, December 11, 7.0 p.m.: Mrs. MARGARET KNIGHT, "Morals Without Religion."

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (64 George Street).—Saturday, December 10, 3.0 p.m. Mrs. VENABLES, "Psychology and Religion."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, December 11, 2.30 p.m.: W. N. WARBEY, M.P., "New Standards of Living."

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant, High Street).—Sunday, December 11, 7.0 p.m. Annual General Meeting and Discussion on Humanism.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, December 11, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Dogma, Theory and Life."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1.).—Sunday, December 11, 7.15 p.m.: LEN EBURY "Secularism Today: A Reply to Archibald Robertson."

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £1,025 12s. 7d.; T. Benton, 7s. 0d.; A. Ineson, 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s. 0d.; S. C. Denning, 10s. 6d.; F. Ford, 5s. 0d. Total, £1,026 18s. 7d.

## Notes and News

MRS. MARGARET KNIGHT will be spending a busy weekend lecturing to N.S.S. branches: in Birmingham on Saturday and in Manchester on Sunday (see Lecture Notices for further details). For the officials of both branches, it will be the culmination of many weeks of hard work, arranging and publicising. There is every indication that their efforts will be well rewarded. Large audiences are assured and the Press will be strongly represented (when informed that Mrs. Knight was speaking, one newspaper spokesman said "You don't need to say any more—we'll be there!"). The latest news we have received before going to press is that all reserved seat tickets at Manchester have been sold, but there is unreserved accommodation and arrangements have been made for an overflow meeting. Needless to say, it will be necessary to come early to ensure a place.

A RECENT Gallup Poll survey in Canada, on the subject of people's knowledge of the Bible, revealed, among other things, the following:—

- Only 8 in 100 Canadians can name six of the Apostles.
- Twenty-one out of 100 could not name any of them.
- Twenty-one in 100 could only name three of them.
- Of those questioned, 56 per cent. did not know that Genesis was the first book of the Old Testament.
- The last book of the Old Testament (Malachi) was not known as such by 88 per cent.
- One third of those over the age of fifty could not answer any of the questions. Of those under the age of twenty, the proportion rose to half.

The President of the University of Toronto has recently deplored the trend towards secularising universities, and the resulting "lessening influence of religion in higher education." Education, said this relic of a bygone age, "must be the handmaid of religion, and religion must illuminate education."

### IN 1898

Certainly modern Europe is in a strange and perilous condition. Less than four hundred thousand soldiers, in the palmy days of the Roman empire, sufficed to keep the peace amongst a multitude of races, nationalities, and tribes, and to protect an enormous frontier from the incursions of the outer barbarians. Now the soldiers of Europe are counted by the million. Armies that singly outnumber by several times all the legions of Rome are grasping arms and glaring at each other across the map-lines which separate their respective territories. And the cost of warlike preparations is simply appalling. Europe spends two hundred millions every year on its armies and navies, and another two hundred millions in the shape of interest on its war debts. England alone has spent nearly six thousand millions in this way during the present century.

—G. W. Foote.

*The Bible Handbook* (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 3d.

## Freethinkers and the Monarchy

By E. G. MACFARLANE

THE recent conflagration in public discussion which was set alight by Princess Margaret's decision not to marry Group Captain Townsend has brought home to many people—as perhaps nothing else could do—just what is involved in having a State Church with the task of advising us how to guide our lives. Many people who have never really criticised the Church or its doctrines or the institution of Monarchy have suddenly been brought face to face with the reality of these things through this example of actual practice, and they have been shocked to find how they have been misinformed and misled by appeals to sentimentality and the spread of false notions concerning the place of the Monarchy in the community. At one stroke they have been shown the utter falsity of all the sentimental talk about our having “a Royal Family which is close to the people” and about their “wanting to be treated as human beings.” That sort of rubbish has been blown sky-high by the tough and hard doctrinaire attitude revealed by Churchmen, who have revealed themselves as hypocrites so far as the propaganda of “being human like the rest of us” is concerned—because they clearly accept standards of royal behaviour which are for show pieces only. They have treated the rules concerning divorced persons, which were arrived at by the secular authority, as if they were utterly contemptible and quite unsuitable for application to a person belonging to the Royal Family. Thereby I think, and indeed I hope, they have signed the death-warrant of the system whereby they all live and have their being. Plainly, these people consider royalty a clear cut above the “common clay” and thus they have proved the present and living force of their class snobbery and their antipathy to the ideas of a single class society which have been suggested so freely by apologists for the survival of the monarchy in our day and age.

The question I would like to ask is: “What should we Freethinkers do in the face of these revelations of the real nature of the central institutions of the present social order in Britain?”

We have here an opportunity to press our case for the disestablishment of the Church and the abolition of the Monarchy in favour of the setting up of a true single-class republic which will reform education and put it on a proper basis for the teaching of a scientific attitude to life. We should then be in a position to unite constitutionally with similar republics in other parts of the world and thus build towards a fully integrated world republican society in which all men will be citizens of the world and members of a single-class world order which will preserve the freedoms and equality of opportunity which are essential to freethinkers of every form of personal belief. We freethinkers have no agreed positive doctrine concerning the ultimate nature of our purpose in the world to batten on the minds of men in general. In accordance with our acceptance of the agnostic basis for scientific activity we are naturally tolerant of the expression of all forms of personal faith. We are therefore clearly more likely to preserve the rights of minorities to propagate their own distinctive ideas than the adherents of any established positive faith. Actually, I think that there are Christians and others who will be only too pleased to co-operate with us in establishing a social order in which all might be able to propagate their beliefs so long as no group or groups were accorded special privileges. This surely is the test for any faith—that we should be so sure of its reasonableness that we are willing to try

to propagate it under conditions of equality of opportunity with others of other faiths. Moreover this is the only practical possibility for reconciling the claims of old-established religions which have been quick to gain state establishment in various parts of the world. No religious group can have a reasonable grievance concerning privileges being given to other groups if there is no established religion and all possible steps are taken to see that the state authorities are strictly neutral in their attitude to conflicting religious claims. This, of course, is very far from being the case in Britain at the present time. Christians are privileged in their treatment in all schools and other state institutions of all kinds including the B.B.C. and I.T.A. as well as in the Press. Some of these privileges are, of course, a natural consequence of having widespread public support and Freethinkers may have to succeed in getting much more public support before they can force the issue of being heard regularly on the B.B.C., etc. However, this does not alter the fact that the Anglican Church has abused its privileged position in the State by hogging the time for broadcasting on both sound and vision and thus producing an undue and actually false impression in the minds of the public concerning their beliefs.

We who are willing to propagate our faiths in conditions of equality of opportunity will, of course, have to face the problem of undertaking political activity for our aims since we cannot hope to change these fundamental features of the British State without gaining the active support of a majority of the electorate. This, of course, means challenging the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Parties since all these parties uphold the establishment of the Churches and Monarchy.

It is a big question but I can see no practical alternative to this line of reforming our social order. Certainly I can see no hope along the line advocated by Mr. Emrys Hughes in a recent article in *Forward*—where he merely “hopes” that members of the Royal Family will “someday” defect from the system in which they have been raised. What he fails to recognise, or simply winks at, is the fact that if any individual member of the Royal Family shows signs of rejecting the advice or doctrines of the Established Church he, or she, will be quickly removed from the position of being members of the Royal Family altogether. In short, it is a case of “This Member of the Royal Family has been removed—Long Live the Royal Family.”

That is how the Church works with the lives of the Royal Family to its own advantage. They are held up “as a model” for the emulation of the “lower classes” and when, as in the case of Princess Margaret, the Church finds them responding “correctly” to Anglican doctrines, the Churchmen naturally rub their hands with glee as they have so obviously done in the present instance.

But if the people are duped by this display—as they will be if they accept the Church's evaluation of it—how much misery and obloquy may not be heaped upon divorcees who have satisfied the secular authority that they have a right to normal living but have outraged the religious doctrinaires who are foolishly tied to some ancient document which any sensible and up-to-date thinker would reject out of hand. Truly—and we rather than the Church are concerned with the living truth!—we have here seen a provocation and an outrage of commonsense which should stir the people of this land to wipe these hypocrites and false idols from their present position of domination of our society.

## Review

DARWIN REVALUED by Sir Arthur Keith. 294 pages. Watts & Co., 25s. Od. net.

BOOKS about Darwin are fast becoming "legion," and no doubt they will continue to be written. For indeed no scientist ever gave the world a more epoch-making theory than the great naturalist. Evolution in some form or other had been in the minds of many thinkers, as a glance at Edward Clodd's *Pioneers of Evolution* will prove. It is not read perhaps very much these days, but it is an invaluable record of the way in which a theory, crudely imagined at first, can, through the genius of one man, become accepted as a fact, in spite of the most formidable opposition any scientific theory had ever hitherto encountered.

Where Darwin scored was in the way he built up his theory from patient observation over many years; but one can go back to about 600 B.C. and later and find how acute were Thales, Anaximander, Pythagoras, Epicurus, Lucretius and other ancient thinkers in their speculations on the origin of mankind. They had not the scientific tools available to Darwin and his fellow Evolutionists, and without their scientific precision was nearly impossible. But their speculations on the probable origin of life and man were astonishingly brilliant.

What arrested their enquiries into fundamental problems was the blight of Christianity. Nothing henceforth mattered but "faith in Jesus." To be "saved" was the whole duty of man. And if any poor, erring sinner desired to know something about "creation," there it was in God's own "Precious Word"—the Bible. For something like 1000 years we had the Dark Ages in which, as far as possible, every attempt was made to smother any learning apart from the Bible.

Clodd's chapters on "the Arrest of Inquiry" should be read by all who want to learn a little how Christianity blocked the way to every advance in science and learning, apart from the naive nonsense and credulity packed in the Bible. It is a sorry story.

The Renaissance helped to break the power of the Church and, gradually, Europe awoke from its priest-ridden lethargy, and began to enquire again into the mysteries of the Universe. A big step in England was the founding of the Royal Society in 1645—though even here one of the first members insisted that "matters of theology" had to be excluded. But once set going, nothing again could arrest the restless spirit of man in his search for knowledge. It is impossible here to trace the history of that search in detail, but it is interesting to note that the grandfather of Charles Darwin, Dr. Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), and Lamarck (1744-1829), both came to a theory of evolution, a remarkable coincidence. Haeckel said of Lamarck that to him "will belong the immortal glory of having for the first time worked out the Theory of Descent as an independent scientific theory of the first order, and as the philosophical foundation of the whole science of biology." But of course he had as contemporaries men like the great Buffon, for example, and many others, all working for the advancement of science in their own way. Lamarck's uncompromising and contemptuous dismissal of the Biblical creation however led to his ostracism, and he died poor and neglected.

Both Alfred Russel Wallace and Darwin came to the same conclusion about the same time as to the "origin of species," Wallace retiring to allow Darwin's epoch-making work to be published (in 1859).

For the ordinary person who reads it these days it is difficult to understand the furor which the book caused, especially among the horror-stricken clergy. The theory

of Evolution now has been accepted by all scientists except of course by those who are still under the dominion of the Church—though even the Church of Rome is prepared to admit its truth if only the "evolution of the soul" is not part of the theory. People like Lunn and Dewar are dismissed by scientists as hopeless fossils from the Golden Age of the Church of the twelfth century.

The great populariser of Evolution was Professor T. H. Huxley here in England and Haeckel on the continent. Darwin himself was far too modest a man to indulge in heated controversy, and he left it to Huxley who was in his element when confronted with people like the late Bishop Wilberforce. And in the fray, the Church's "special Creation," as recounted in the Bible, has been knocked out for ever.

The great Darwinian since Huxley's death was the late Sir Arthur Keith whose last book *Darwin Revalued* will give readers a splendid idea of the place Darwin holds in modern thought. It is the fashion sometimes, especially by evolutionists who still give lip service to Christianity, to claim that the special theory with which Darwinism is associated—Natural Selection—is no longer held these days. They dare not say that the theory of Evolution as such is no longer held, but they still feel that Darwin must be wrong. It is this kind of thing which the die-hards in religion have got hold of when they attack "Darwinism" in their hatred of Evolution. But naturally no one could possibly expect that the intense study of the origins of living things which has been going on since Darwin would not have modified some of his conclusions. Science does not stand still.

All the same, Darwin was, as Keith noted, "adamant" on his theory of Natural Selection; though he would certainly have modified some ideas which he had taken from Lamarck, for example. But in how many other things would he have changed? Keith says:

It is now (1955) seventy three years since Darwin died, and many fundamental discoveries bearing on his main themes have been made in these years. Mendel's experiments have been accepted; a material basis for heredity has been found in the chromosomes of the fertilized ovum; the science of Genetics has arisen. The functions of the living body, the developmental process in the embryo, and the growth of the young, are now known to be controlled and instigated by many special substances (hormones). Darwin would have found little difficulty in fitting the results of these fundamental discoveries into his text, so well laid was the basis of his theory. It's power to last is due to several circumstances—to his accuracy of observation, to his sound judgment as to the reliability of observations and of facts, and his genius for drawing the right inference from his facts.

Here then, in this one book, the reader will find a particularly fine "condensation" not only of the known facts of the life of Darwin—as a husband, a lover, a man of business, and so on, but also a keen analysis and appreciation of his great books by a distinguished fellow scientist. Sir Arthur Keith has made a notable contribution to Darwinian literature—no dry-as-dust disquisition, but a very readable and enthusiastic book. The extracts from Darwin's letters are full of interest especially for those who shirk reading the letters of great men when printed in a huge volume.

Most strongly do I recommend *Darwin Revalued* to readers of this journal. Most of them could get it from their local free library if they ask for it. And I can fancy no better present for a budding Freethinker or one more calculated to help his education in our cause than Sir Arthur Keith's vividly written pages.

H. CUTNER.

To say that God, if he exists, is stupid, is blasphemy. To say that God, if he exists, is wise, is reverence. Thus the difference between blasphemy and reverence is the difference between flattery and intelligent criticism.—*Chapman Cohen*.

## The Freethinker

(Bound Volume)

THE 75th bound volume of *The Freethinker* (for 1955) will make its appearance some time early in the New Year, and advance orders at this stage would assist in estimating the number required.

The year has been full of incident from the freethought point of view and, while there are of course those collectors among our readers who annually add to their bound volumes, *The Freethinker* for 1955 will contain much of interest to the others and much that is new to those who have only made the acquaintance of the paper for the first time this year. The price is, as usual, 24/-, plus postage 1/-.

The year opened with the death of Joseph McCabe, that redoubtable warrior of Freethought, and many tributes to his memory appeared in these columns, besides his last article, "A Sick Man looks at Life."

The deaths of Sir Arthur Keith and Albert Einstein were also the subject of several articles.

A new champion of Freethought arose in 1955 in the person of Mrs. Margaret Knight, with whom *The Freethinker* has been in contact since her famous—or infamous, in Christian eyes—broadcasts in January.

The evangelist campaign of Billy Graham in Scotland has also received much attention. Among many other matters dealt with in these columns during the year have been various subjects of interest to freethinkers: space travel, the colour problem, religious life in the U.S.S.R., divorce law, the abortion problem, Secularism and the General Election, Peron, artificial insemination, Church revenues, speeches of Bertrand Russell, Julian Huxley and Lord Boyd-Orr, Catholic Action, Communism and Religion, the Whitman Centenary, homosexuality, Buddhism, Extra-Sensory Perception—these are but a few of the topics treated.

Four new contributors have made their entrance into our columns during the year; three from Scotland and one from Ireland, in the Rev. John L. Broom, M.A., E. G. Macfarlane, J. Gordon and Hibernicus. The astounding heresies of Mr. Broom have made readers gasp, and his attacks on Christian doctrine and practice have been one of our best-liked features.

Sundry science notes, facts for Freethinkers and information for newcomers have made up our lesser items.

We hope the bound volume for 1955 will be a worthy addition to the libraries of many of our readers. An advertisement will follow, but an order now would help in guidance.

G. H. TAYLOR.

## Correspondence

### HUMANISM

When reading the recent discussion on the term "Humanism," I was reminded of the late Sinclair Lewis's remarks during his Nobel Prize Address in 1930. Humanism, he said, "means so many things that it means nothing. It may infer anything from a belief that Greek and Latin are more inspiring than the dialect of contemporary peasants to a belief that any living peasant is more interesting than a dead Greek."

COLIN McCALL.

### THE CHURCH IS A CIRCUS

Word from a candid friend. You're all too serious and heavy to get recruits in quantity. Laboured discussion is not much fun for most of us. The church is a deal more of a circus. You flatter the believers by arguing their silly points. Who cares a hoot what Jesus said when he's only a myth? Come off it.

J. F. K., Canada

### FROM A NEW READER

Having read *The Freethinker* for six months I have been struck by the good sense displayed and the useful information contained, including a considerable amount of history which I would have missed and also some acute argument which may at any time be useful.

I have one criticism. I dislike the arrogant emphasis placed on the word Atheist. I am not an Atheist but an Agnostic. To assert that there is no God in the sense of Creator and Motivator is as intemperate and unreasonable as to assert that there is one. We have no data. Obviously no reasonable person will believe or assert that there is a Being looking like a venerable old Jew with a long white beard and a pile of account books by His side, judging souls and occasionally breaking off for a rest and relaxation in the form of stirring up an earthquake or a volcano and destroying a few thousand innocent people, but on the other hand I cannot claim such knowledge of the Universe as to be able to make assertions about it.

The world is better off for the possession of clear thinkers like Mrs. Knight and I wholly endorse the idea that children should not be filled up with myths and superstitions at an age when they cannot form a proper opinion for themselves.

SEABURY EDWARDS.

### A BOOK FOR CHILDREN ?

Although there are many books dealing with Secularism and Freethought, there seems to be little which might appeal to the younger generation, and to my mind this is a grave oversight.

Attractively coloured picture books of Bible stories, etc., are available for the smallest children, in every bookshop and Woolworth's store, and they have the whole field to themselves. Would it not be possible for the Pioneer Press to publish a book of Freethought Nursery Rhymes, and for the older children, an abridged copy of the Bible Handbook? For the time being at any rate. Perhaps other readers may have ideas in this direction.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY.

### "SACRED" AND "HOLY"

Surely it is quite wrong for your correspondent S. W. Brooks to say that an atheist cannot use the term "sacred" legitimately or with meaning. All kinds of things outside religion may be "sacred" to him—his love for his wife; an heirloom; a family grave; his own word of honour and many other things. There are, surely, many things that an atheist will not defile or pollute, and that he will keep as "sacred" or as "holy" as any religionist would.

Some atheists, unfortunately, do not respect—as I suggest they should—another man's religion, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Hebraism, or what you will. Why should they not? It is mere good sense, good manners and good taste to do so. (Atheists ask religionists to respect their right to irreligion and complain bitterly of religious intolerance—quite rightly!) But irreligious intolerance is just as bad and wrong as religious intolerance.

We can respect a fellow-man's prejudices, his feelings, his tastes and so forth. Then why should we not respect his religion—in which both his feelings and his reason are involved? The fact that we do not respect religion in itself, and may mock at it as such should not prevent us from paying a decent respect for its profession by an individual. I may be a Republican and disbelieve in Royalty, but when monarchists sing "God save the Queen" I rise from decency, complacency and good manners, though I am an Irish Republican myself. Similarly I am a "reverent rationalist" in Church. Why not?

J. GOREL.

### 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.

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