

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

RECENTLY that admirable humanitarian organisation, the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports, addressed what lawyers might term a leading question to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The League asked His Grace to define the official attitude of the Church of England to the ethics of hunting. The question was a pertinent one; perhaps from the point of view of the Archbishop and his episcopal colleagues an impertinent one? At any rate, His Grace declined to commit himself. He stated in reply, no doubt accurately, that the Established Church has never issued any pronouncement on the Christian, and specifically Anglican, attitude towards the hunting of animals for sport. The League

expressed its regret at the Primate's inability to satisfy them on the point. Yet, we may relevantly comment, their attitude does more credit to their humanitarianism than to their historical knowledge. Anyone who knows anything about the social activities of the Anglican clergy, particularly in the English countryside during past centuries, could hardly expect His Grace to issue any direct condemnation of hunting as such. Had he done so, innumerable hunting parsons of the past would assuredly have turned in their graves in innumerable quiet country churchyards!

## "God Bless the Squire and his Relations"

We live in an age of social transition during which the feudal landowning system which dominated the English countryside from the Reformation to within living memory, is in full decay. Surtax, death duties, not to mention wars and social upheavals, have nearly wiped out the old gentry who for so long dominated the scene. As a child in a remote Wiltshire village the present writer can dimly recall that now distant scene where squire and vicar between them ruled the local villagers with an almost despotic sway; and when aged villagers born and bred under the system touched their caps respectfully at the appearance in public of the squire or the vicar. Then — and perhaps in some remote rural districts now — the effective motto of the countryside was "God bless the Squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper stations". Democracy is a plant of very recent growth in English country life!

## Huntin', Shootin' and Fishin'

In this now almost vanished state of society blood sports formed an essential ingredient. The English "gentry" made fox-hunting almost into a religious rite with a solemn and meticulously observed social ritual. To shoot a fox represented a barbaric solecism of which only a cad or a benighted continental could be guilty. This is amusingly caricatured in a famous story, *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* by the late Sir A. Conan Doyle. In country society fox-hunting was virtually an obligatory social — almost religious — rite, nor were other forms of hunting, shooting and fishing much less sacrosanct. Some of the archaic rites traditionally associated with fox-hunting sound more at

home in their contemporary Africa than in a supposedly civilised Europe. One of the most disgusting sights personally witnessed by the present writer when very young, and consequently very impressionable, was the solemn "sprinkling" over a girl hardly in her teens of the blood of a newly slain fox. The officiating priest at this gruesome "sacrament", the Master of the Hunt, blew his horn joyously while a band of atavistic red-coated savages hallooed lustily to celebrate this ceremonial blooding of a new, now fully fledged, member of the Hunt. This social savagery is still legal and still habitually practised by our decadent aristocracy; it was immortalised by Oscar Wilde's epigram: fox-hunting represented "the unspeakable chasing the uneatable".

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## The Ethics of Hunting

By F. A. RIDLEY

### The Tory Party at Prayer

Such was the Tory Squirearchy who were, simultaneously, the upholders of fox-hunting and the pillars of the Church of England by law established and the Church was actually described as the Tory Party at prayer. It was also the fox-hunting Church, if one inspects the faded pages of innumerable sermons of the time; one is never likely to come across a sermon *against* fox-hunting. Had the Anglican clergy *then* been asked for their views on the ethics of blood sports their answer would have been overwhelmingly in the affirmative. Nor was their approval merely academic! The pages of the sporting novelists of the period are full of "sporting" parsons who "rode to hounds" and watched the unfortunate animals torn to pieces with the same sadistic joy as their lay colleagues in the Hunt; their ethical level was, perhaps, on a par with that of their contemporary "blood-brothers", the witch doctors of darkest Africa. One can, perhaps, feel a sneaking sympathy for the unfortunate Archbishop who is now asked, in effect, to declare that he presides over what has been for centuries an immoral institution. Dr. Fisher, who, like so many of his predecessors in the See of Canterbury, is an astute ecclesiastical politician mastering the difficult art of sitting simultaneously on both sides of the fence, obviously does not intend to do anything of the sort. In any case the issue is not merely an academic one. Most of the "upper classes" still approve of such aristocratic "sports" as fox-hunting, deer stalking and grouse shooting, and they are still the richest Christians of the Anglican persuasion. So "mum's the word" for the leaders of the still largely "genteel" Church!

### Evolution and the Ethics of Hunting

There have always been, of course, individual Christians who, in this as in other matters, were better than their creed, for example the late Dr. W. R. Inge, that eminent Rationalist so incongruously clad in an ecclesiastical cassock. In a brilliant essay devoted to the question of evolution and ethics, he remarked that "if the animals were



capable of inventing a system of theology, they would certainly imagine man as the Devil". Schopenhauer expressed the same thought even more trenchantly when he said "The animals live in a Hell, of which Man is the Devil". Inge makes the point, with which all Freethinkers will agree, that it is impossible for an ethically minded person who really believes in evolution to take pleasure in killing for sport our distant cousins in fur and feathers. It is one of the points on which evolutionary ethics differs sharply from the theological. Inge himself quotes Roman Catholic Moral (!) Theologians on this point: "The animals were made for our use. We have no duties towards them". One can in fact say that the ethics of hunting represent one of those questions in which Christian ethics are as outmoded as Christian theology. Birth control and divorce are analogous instances. From the standpoint of evolutionary ethics all blood sports must be held immoral and

ethically indefensible. If an animal, like a human being, is noxious, it may be necessary to destroy it in self-defence, but never for pleasure, for so-called sport. This may apply to foxes as predatory creatures, but, none the less, the atavistic ritual of the Hunt is a survival of savagery, and the sooner it is made illegal in England, as it was recently in Germany, the better. Not that fox-hunting is the worst of the blood sports; by all account, hare coursing and deer stalking are even worse, and I am assured that the shriek of a hare finally cornered by the dogs is one of the most terrible in Nature. Ever since its now distant formation in an era when blood sports were "the thing" among "our betters", the National Secular Society has stood for their abolition. We repeat this demand in 1956, as in 1866, and are solidly behind the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports. But we shall be very surprised if they get any satisfaction from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

## The Margaret Knight-Ashley Sampson Letters

### III

BUCKSBURN,

November 24th, 1946.

Dear Ashley,

Sunday again! And many thanks for your card and letter. I'm awfully sorry if my remarks at the end sounded offensive — they weren't meant to be. As you're a bit of a psychologist yourself, you'd surely agree that the *origin* of most of our more "exciting" beliefs is emotional. But a belief to which we're originally attracted on emotional grounds can be brought before the bar of reason later.

Now do you mind if I quote from my lecture notes? Not that they say much that I haven't said, or implied, already — but they sum things up briefly, and the fact that they were composed without reference to this controversy may make them sound less provocative. Anyway, here goes.

#### *Reasoning and Rationalisation*

Defs.: Reasoning — examining evidence in order to form a belief or decision.

Rationalisation — hunting for arguments to justify a belief or decision already formed.

The beliefs of the average man on politics, morality, etc., are not based on dispassionate examination of the evidence. They are held because they are emotionally satisfying, because they are taken for granted in the individual's social circle, etc. If the beliefs are challenged, reasons are produced; but these reasons, whether good or bad, were not the actual *cause* of the beliefs' arising. . . . Many of our beliefs are held on purely rational grounds, but these are not usually the beliefs about which we feel most strongly. Cf. e.g., attitude towards beliefs, "Peterhead is 35 miles from Aberdeen", and "The Scots are superior to the English". . . .

Non-rational beliefs change, when they do change, mainly on non-rational grounds. Until a change of emotional attitude has been secured, it is of very little use to attack an emotional belief by reasoning. . . . It must not be supposed, however, that by showing a belief to be emotional in origin, we have necessarily shown it to be false. True beliefs, as well as false ones, may be adopted on emotional grounds, and a belief that was originally held on emotional grounds may later be verified by reasoning.

I wasn't saying that your beliefs were false because they were emotional. But I was saying that because they were emotional they were unlikely to be affected by logical

onslaught—which was not meant as an accusation of dishonesty, but just as a melancholy psychological generalisation!

Now for the other points in your letter. You accuse me once again of thinking that reason is all that matters. I don't think that for a moment — but I do think that one shouldn't hold any belief that violates reason. Of course, no belief, religious or otherwise, can satisfy the reason completely, in the sense of providing a complete explanation of all the problems in the Universe. But it is one thing to leave certain questions unanswered, and another to insist on the truth of wholly improbable answers — which is what dogmatic theology does. You say that twice two is five — I insist that it isn't — and you say indignantly that I seem to think that mathematics is all that matters.

As for Christianity "working" — all but one of the examples you give relate to Christian *ethics*. And I have never denied that they "work" excellently. But the value of Christian ethics proves nothing about the truth of Christian dogma. (I seem to remember a parallel about Greek ethics and the gods of Olympus.)

The only one of your examples that does not relate to ethics relates to prayer. Well, of course, prayer is bound to work by your criterion. For if you get what you pray for you conclude that your prayer has been granted, and if you don't, you convince yourself that either (a) you didn't pray hard enough, or (b) you are better without it. ("Since our prayers for fine weather for the harvest were not granted, we can conclude that God in his infinite wisdom . . . etc.") It is "heads I win, tails you lose" for God on this principle!

Prayer on purely personal matters, since it's a potent form of auto-suggestion, no doubt produces "real" results sometimes. But so does the witch-doctor's magic; and you wouldn't regard that as proving the truth of his views.

With best wishes.

(To be continued)

Yours ever, MARGARET

—NEXT WEEK—

HORROR COMIC WITH A DIFFERENCE

By COLIN McCALL



# The Vandals of Christ

By JOHN TODD

PICTURE to yourself an empire extending from the forests and moors of Scotland to the sun-baked plains of Persia, from the Danube to the deserts of the Sahara.

Over this vast territory, comprising large portions of three continents and containing almost every nation and genetic group in the then known world, stretched 350,000 miles of paved road. One could travel from Amiens or Paris in Gaul to Jerusalem or Alexandria in perfect security. The Empire contained over 100,000,000 inhabitants and had thousands of walled towns, each having amphitheatres, museums, libraries and valuable works of art. The wealth of this empire was unprecedented in history, and indeed was not rivalled until nearly our own day. Beautiful villas dotted the shores of the Mediterranean. All nations had been brought into the Roman fold and Rome was without a rival in the world. Under the Pax Romana, the beginnings of science had been transported from Ionia, Greece and Alexandria and the foundation laid for the scientific method and era. Rationalism, in morals, politics, philosophy and social systems, reigned unchecked. The Era of Man had dawned after four thousand years of historical Asiatic political despotism and religious mysticism.

The citizen of this empire was nearer to us in his outlook on life and the universe than were our own ancestors of four centuries ago. The world had been civilised and Reason sat enthroned. It must have seemed to a man of the second century A.D. that this system was eternal and invincible and would continue to the end of history, and that no force on earth could destroy it. To him, it would go on for ever. And so it might, except for the Vandals of Christ.

In two more centuries the Empire lay in ruins. Hordes of barbarians ravaged the provinces and even Italy itself. Law and order had ceased to exist. Reason and rationalism had disappeared. Science was gone, not to return for ten centuries. In their place sat Irrationalism, all the petty Oriental mysticisms, which, like termites, had gnawed at the foundations of the Empire and laid it low. In the West, the Bishop of Rome could, by fraud and forgery, erect his power on the ruins of the old world.

Of the great treasures of art and literature, very little has survived the holocaust. Perhaps one-tenth of the whole would be a generous estimate. What little we have demonstrates the greatness of the ancient world and the pettiness of Christianity.

The only extant Greek epic is Homer. The others are gone. We have only a tenth of the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Of three hundred Greek tragedians, only the fragments of these three have come down to us.

Only school anthologies of the mass of Greek lyric poetry are extant. Of Aristophanes we have only seven comedies. Of the other surviving comedian, Menander, we have fragments. The writings of the historians, Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon, survived only in Byzantine libraries. The fragments of Aristotle surviving the chaos were spared because they were thought useful for the stereotyped "educational" purposes of the Church. Plato got through to us because of his writings supporting idealism, immortality and spiritism.

Of the Greek naturalists, Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Democritus, Empedocles, Pythagoras and Protagoras were destroyed. The works of Archimedes, the great intellect of the ancient world, met the same fate. Epicurus wrote

hundreds of books, but we have fragments of only a few.

By the time of Julius Caesar the Library of Alexandria (greatest in antiquity) contained over a million volumes. In the fourth century this went up in smoke while monks danced around the flames.

Most of the works of the minor Latin poets perished. Of the 142 books of Livy's *History of Rome*, 35 are left. Only portions of Ennius survive. Varro wrote from six to seven hundred volumes, of which less than one is extant. Of Caesar's works, the *Commentaries* remain. No Latin historian has completely survived. Tacitus's account of the conquest of Dacia perished. Of the Latin tragedians, only Seneca got through.

The colossal gold and ivory statue of Athena in the Parthenon was smashed to bits. Another masterpiece of Phidias, the forty-foot chryselephantine statue of Zeus at Olympia with hair and garments of solid gold, met the same fate. The Mausoleum of Halicarnaccus was finer than Hadrian's extant tomb in Rome, surpassing the Taj Mahal at Agra in India, today considered one of the world's artistic masterpieces.

Prior to the reign of the Christian Emperor Theodosius there were hundreds of ancient and beautiful temples in Egypt. There were thousands of Greek temples throughout the Empire. Those few surviving the Christian vandalism were turned into churches. The temple of Artemis at Ephesus was 425 by 220 feet and had 127 columns 60 feet high.

We must place the painters, Polygnotus, Apelles, Zeuxis, etc., with the greatest of the moderns. None of the great paintings of antiquity survive. All we have are late, mediocre Pompeian imitations and copies.

Art, science and literature were incompatible with "Christ and Him Crucified". Salvation and the kingdom of Heaven were of primary importance. What were mere statues and temples, paintings and books compared to this?

Christianity was not the creator but the destroyer of civilisation.

[Reprinted from THE TRUTH SEEKER, U.S.A.]

## LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Just after Christmas, a Brussels hairdresser (staunch Catholic, good reputation in the neighbourhood, etc.) found himself hard-pressed for money. His shop was bringing in about 10,000 Belgian francs per month—or about eight hundred and fifty a year, but with prices so high in Belgium, this did not suffice for entertaining the mistresses he was afterwards proved to have.

One of his customers was a retired Army general. He tried a loan, but was refused. Letting some weeks pass, he went to the general's house, hoping not to be recognised—"probably with the idea of frightening them", he said. Unfortunately, the female servant recognised him at the door. Taking a spanner out of his pocket, he literally beat her head to pulp. Upstairs, the general's wife was telephoning the police, but, before she could give details correctly, the hairdresser dragged her into the salon and bound her. He then did the same to the general himself (both were over 80). Then, quite calmly, he strangled both of them to death with a cord and ruler, and made off with 50,000 francs (about £350).

His wife noticed nothing abnormal, and that afternoon they went, with their little daughter aged 13 to a fête, and he bought her expensive sweets.

At the funeral of his victims, he was present as mourner, walked in the procession, and, as is the custom, handed in his visiting card, on which he had written "Mes Condoléances Emues" ("My deepest sympathy")!

R.R. (Belgium).

Science has never sought to ally herself to civil power... She has never subjected anyone to mental torment, physical torture, least of all to death, for the purpose of upholding or promoting her ideas. She presents herself unstained by cruelties and crimes.

—DRAPER.



## This Believing World

The Dead Sea Scrolls are still news and the latest pæan of adulation comes from the *Daily Mail*. One of the "extensions" of Genesis found in the Scrolls goes into rapturous details about the extraordinary beauty of Sarah, the wife of Abraham—a beauty compared with Helen, Cleopatra, Mme. Pompadour, but strangely enough not with that glamorous pin-up, Marilyn Munroe. The one point emerging from all this is, however, the fact that her story in Genesis is literally true. Everything related of her took place exactly as narrated, including the birth of Isaac, which was the event of her ninetieth year. The capacity for swallowing the most credulous nonsense is as much in evidence in 1956 A.D. as it was in 1956 B.C.

★

One writer in the "Daily Mail" insisted that the story of Sarah's beauty had been "handed down" for close upon 2000 years! In the whole of that time, it had never been forgotten. It would of course, be quite useless to point out that the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is purely mythical. They are just the heroes of a book of "Divine" fairy tales. Genesis was in all probability not put into writing before about 350 B.C., and Sarah is merely a relash of the stories then current of a Universal Mother. She belongs to the same brand as Astarte or Ashtoreth or Esther or Easter. And the Dead Sea Scroll about her merely adds another myth.

★

"Woman's Sunday Mirror" almost with horror recently declared that "more than half of all women never go to church", and more than a quarter of all women "do not belong to any organised religion". It calls this "remarkable", but, if it is true, it is more than remarkable. It's a matter of congratulation, all the more so again because the *W.S.M.'s* enquiry showed that "fewer than half of the women who claim to be churchgoers take any notice of the sermons they hear". The good old days of Victorian Protestantism, alas, have really disappeared.

★

But when it comes to praying there is quite another story. Over 85% of women say their prayers, and these claim that they *mean* what they pray. All the same, many even of these admit that praying "is a habit". Moreover, most women wanted or want to be married in church. When it came to the Bible, only 10% declared it was "untrue"; most of the others were quite certain it was all true. One lady confessed, "I believed every word", until her young son told her about Evolution as taught in his grammar school. "So now", she admitted, "I am bewildered and puzzled". She would soon be neither if we could get her to subscribe to THE FREETHINKER.

★

The same journal has a lot to say also about women and contraception. One of their most pathetic prayers is, "Oh, God, please don't let it be another baby". And it is most instructive to note that that most determined enemy of birth control, the Roman Church, has not been able to stop Catholic women using "forbidden means" to prevent pregnancy, and thus "deliberately going against the teachings of their Church". In fact, eight women out of nine practise contraception. All this is really entertaining, and proves that at last even the great stronghold of the Churches, woman, is beginning to find them out.

★

Spiritualism isn't always news these days but the papers recently were full of the story of a girl "possessed" by a poltergeist. Whenever she walks about, there is either con-

stant "tapping", or "flying pokers" accompany her. She was even "levitated" by the naughty spirit in her bed-clothes. One of the reporters who interviewed her was so struck by her story that he wasn't even surprised when her wrist watch fell to the floor. If that did not prove how true were the shameless tricks of this horrid poltergeist, what else could?

★

The religious followers of Mr. Alistair Cooke's interesting "Letter from America" on the radio every week must have had the usual shock when the BBC allows a reference to Atheism or Agnosticism on the air. This time it was a splendid tribute to the late H. L. Mencken—one of the greatest literary personalities of the century—a keen and devastating critic of shams, particularly religious shams, in the U.S.A., and a splendid essayist and lexicographer in his own right. Mr. Cooke said he was "an Atheist or Agnostic". Of course, we at least are not surprised.

★

Now that religion is compulsory in all schools, it is most instructive to judge some of the results. According to the Rev. F. P. Copland Simmons, this year's Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, there is a "moral landslide" among teenagers—that is, all who have had the benefit of a thorough religious education. There is "divorce, shop-lifting, pilfering, and drunkenness" among these pious youngsters. But Mr. Simmons is very hopeful that "the tide has turned at last". People are now going back to church in increasing numbers. Somehow, we have heard all this before, and we shall hear it again—and again. And we shall also hear, just as often, about the great "moral landslide".

### AFTERTHOUGHTS

To hang, or not to hang, that is the question;  
 Whether 'tis easier in the mind to suffer  
 The pricks and stings of outraged public conscience,  
 Or take revenge against convicted murderers,  
 And duly hanging, end them. To hang; to kill,  
 No more, and by a killing say we end  
 The heart-ache, and the thousand sickening crimes  
 That Man is heir to; 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wish'd, to hang, to kill;  
 To kill; perchance in vain; aye, there's the rub;  
 For after this, what future crimes may come  
 When we have taken vengeance in the present case,  
 Should give us pause; there's the respect  
 That makes futility of legal judgments:  
 For who would wish the fuss and pomp of trials,  
 The wigs and trappings, the law's delay,  
 The costly speeches, and the hatred,  
 Sonorous sententiousness in theatre courts  
 When he himself, in his own mind,  
 Knows all is useless? Who would minutes write,  
 Scribbling and scrabbling tome by tome,  
 A never-ending book since more's to come  
 But that the dread of rational thought, that undeveloped country  
 In whose bourn no pious myths find place, puzzles their minds  
 And makes them rather judge the crimes they have  
 Than forestall others that they know not of.  
 Thus usage doth make fools of them all  
 And thus the pristine tint of innovation  
 Is tinged yet deeper with red misty hate  
 And other issues of far greater worth and import  
 On this account their objects turn confused  
 And lose the name of reason.

R. READER,

At this juncture a fellow priest put into my hands a production whose very existence I was ignorant of—a copy of THE FREETHINKER. I devoured its pages, and in reading them I experienced an altogether new sensation. I seemed for the first time in my life to be walking on terra firma. Now my footing was firm, every statement was frank and straightforward; no conventionalism, no sitting on the fence, no fear of letting out the secrets, but fearless speech and above board from start to finish.

—F. BONTE. From Fiction to Fact.



# 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.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

- Central London Branch N.S.S. (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 1 p.m.: Speakers — J. M. ALEXANDER and others.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.
- 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 A. 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 Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, March 11th, 7 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "Educational Reformers from Luther to Dewey".
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—March 11th, 6.45 p.m.: Open Discussion.
- Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 13th, 7.15 p.m.: JOSEPH REEVES, M.P., "Can we have 'National Security' within 'World Authority'?"
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 11th, 6.30 p.m.: 75th Anniversary—Musical Items, and TOM MOSLEY.
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, March 11th, 2.30 p.m.: F. W. LEEHAN, "A Trip to East Germany".
- Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant, High Street).—Sunday, March 11th, 7 p.m.: JOSEPH REEVES, M.P., "Humanism and World Government".
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 11th, 11 a.m.: DR. W. E. SWINTON, "17th and 18th Century Evolutionists".
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, March 11th, 7.15 p.m.: J. G. DOWLING, "Religion and the Spanish Revolt".

Sir, though I would persuade, I'll not constrain:  
Each man's opinion freely is his own  
Concerning anything, or any body.

—PHILLIP MASSINGER (1583-1645).

For Your Bookshelf

Bound Complete

THE FREETHINKER, 1955

Volume 75

Green Cloth, Gold Lettered. Price 25/-, including postage

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £1,074 9s. 7d.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1; Miss L. Pye, 5s.; A. S. G. Hamlyn, 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s.—Total to date, £1,075 18s. 1d.

Donations should be made to "The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund" and cheques made out accordingly.

## Cohen—McCabe Memorial Meeting

A WELL-ATTENDED meeting—graced by the presence of Mrs. Chapman Cohen—in tribute to the work of Chapman Cohen and Joseph McCabe, was held at Holborn Hall on Thursday, March 1st. Mr. S. Salter, the Chairman, introduced the speakers, and Mr. J. M. Alexander, who organised the event as secretary of the Central London Branch of the N.S.S., stressed the need for such a meeting which would recharge our energies in the struggle for human freedom. Mr. S. Silverman, M.P., spoke on the abolition of capital punishment, a cause with which he has been closely associated. Though not himself a member of the N.S.S., he said, "He would be a poor student of human affairs who did not recognise what an important force the N.S.S. had been, and could be, for the rational understanding of human problems". In 1866, when the N.S.S. was formed, there had existed a World Commission on Capital Punishment, consisting of 12 members, of whom five had declared outright for abolition. He paid tribute to the support of many religious people, such as the Rev. Donald Soper, for the cause of abolition.

The chairman read messages of support from the Manchester Branch of the N.S.S., and Mr. L. Ebury, Vice-President, N.S.S., who was prevented by illness from attending.

Mr. Hector Hawton paid an interesting and factual tribute to the work of Joseph McCabe and deplored the later rupture of good relations between McCabe and the R.P.A. Both Cohen and McCabe, said the speaker, achieved simplicity in their writings. As an editor, Mr. Hawton could testify to the difficulty of achieving simplicity; it was so easy to become obscure out of sheer laziness. Though McCabe was at home with a number of languages, he was too big a man to "show off" with foreign words and phrases: this was the mark of the genuine scholar. When McCabe came out of the Church he was well on the road to material prosperity as a member of it: a lesser man would have swallowed his doubts and stayed where he was. McCabe had delivered some 2,000 learned lectures, written over 200 books and undertaken seven tours. He was "dedicated" to his work, and, the speaker concluded, "Really, when I see how the world has treated such men I wonder if we deserve them!"

Mr. Avro Manhattan, whom many heard for the first time, took the theme on which he is an acknowledged expert, the political designs of Roman Catholicism, which had no less an ambition than the creation of a totally Catholic World.

Mr. Colin McCall, General Secretary of the N.S.S., concluded with tributes to both Chapman Cohen and Joseph McCabe. He described the former as "almost an intellectual climate in himself" and was proud to have been brought up in that climate. "Supernaturalism", he said, "remains the great enemy of clear thinking, and hence of all progress". It had often been said we owed such men as Cohen and McCabe a debt we could never repay. The best way to repay it—the best way to *deserve* them—was to go on working for the causes to which they gave their lives.

G.H.T.



# On Morality

By R. READER

MORALITY, in terms of the tangible, is general choice of action in situations which jeopardise personal interest, and anyone who applies this definition to humanity will discern the following groups:

1. *The amoral*—those who pursue and enact desire and passion with no regard whatever for the moral directives of the society in which they live. Such people, if of poor mental calibre, inevitably bump against the law and join prison populations. If intelligent and energetic, however, they rise to occupy important positions in science, art, industry and commerce, the services they render commanding the instinctive respect and tolerance of their associates. This, to some extent, protects them from opposition or frustration which would certainly earn them the same fate as the less-endowed members of their group.

2. *The suggestible*—those who unquestioningly and uncritically accept any moral directives, providing the latter emanate from sufficiently prominent and authoritative loud-speakers. When coupled with inferior mental capacity, this suggestibility yields the non-assertive, non-exertive, non-productive parasite, so outstanding in contemporary civilisation; the God-Jack-come-and-help-me-don't-let-anyone-know consumer, whose unique function is to act as carrier and resonator for the morality that has brought him into being.

On the other hand, suggestibility allied to greater ability and abundant vitality produces the crusaders, inquisitors, reformers, fascists, nazis and communists, the benefactors and the scourges; all who have persecuted, tortured, and murdered, or have been persecuted, tortured or murdered; all who have lived or died for a Cause. These people are marvellous propagandists, but poor reasoners, and work with equal gusto for mankind's advancement or its perdition.

3. *The hypocrites*—those who pay unrestricted lip service to current morality, but who observe it only when themselves under observation, and only in so far as it is in their interest to do so: the politicians who preached (and are still preaching) resistance, and who practised (and are still practising) collaboration; the multitude of semi-literate, sophisticated smart-alecs whose faces leer and smirk from the popular press; that vast army of suave bookkeepers, cute in noticing immediate personal advantages from today's credit entry, and too monstrously imbecile to foresee collective (and therefore also personal) disaster. These creatures, forming the majority of mankind, often manage to live lives of completely successful dissimulation. Sometimes, however, the less able slip up and fall by the wayside, to become the objects of general scorn and contempt—particularly the scorn and contempt of their own kind. Whether they are esteemed, or reviled, in fact, depends entirely on their innate cunning, as in the case of the amoral.

4. *The rationalists*—those whose material experience and thought processes lead them to conclude that current dogma and morality are not the perfect, infallible, self-contained wholes they are represented to be: that superstition, redundancies, anomalies, and injustices abound, and that humanity would do better to concentrate on rectifying these things than, as at present, indulging in wild dreams of immortality and future bliss. This rational attitude is sometimes a queer mixture. Often it remains a purely intellectual appreciation, untranslated into action, or even speech (more people are rationalists on this count than care to admit it) but whatever its form, it cannot be

eradicated, and frequently germinates in a surprising fashion.

The interesting question may now be asked: in which group are the believers? And the interesting answer is that they are in every group.

1. *The amoral religious* include those mystical degenerates who use dogmas, beliefs, hopes, fears, ambitions, weaknesses—the whole gamut of human emotions—in the same way as a carpenter uses the tools of his tool chest—not, however, to construct an enduring public edifice, but to prop up an intensely personal cauldron of smouldering ignorance, inferiority, jealousy and spite; those whose only morality (if morality it can be called) is a neurotic flight from the obvious evidence of their own insignificance in the scheme of things by a deification of the "I". Dogmas, to such people, are of use only in so far as they serve a purpose.

2. *The suggestible religious*—the creeping sidesman and plate bearer, those lulled into trances by sermons; and the more energetic who jump at the chance of hearing their own voices reading a lesson.

3. *The hypocrites*—those (and they are many) who find sermons particularly stimulating and convenient for thinking out plots.

4. *The rational religious*—those who have long since ceased to believe in the dogmas they preach, but who, unable to find other remunerative employment, are condemned to live by reinforcing the very morality that has forced them into such an unhappy and unenviable position.

The believers are indeed a heterogeneous collection, but they are held together by the iron band of religious neurosis. The rationalists, also, are a mixed bag, but at least they have the excuse of being in disagreement with certain existing dogmas. They have the odds against them. Whereas the believers have the odds entirely in their favour. In favour of what? Surely, if words mean anything, in favour of their living lives modelled on that of the master they venerate. Why, then, does not the believer travel from town to town on foot, begging food, cursing those who give none, cursing trees bearing no fruit, cursing the wind, cursing those who refuse to believe his message, and lashing about with a whip during church collections, or among the lunchtime instrumentalists on the steps of St. Paul's? Can it be that, before nightfall, such a believer would find himself, not on a cross but in the observation ward of the psychiatric hospital?

## THE BIBLE

A little less than a century and a half ago there were no less than 120 men and women in English prisons at the same time, the crime of selling Paine's *Age of Reason*, which is a criticism of the Bible that is now endorsed, in the main, by leading Christians. The Bible is still in use in our courts; it is in all our schools, and a teacher who criticised it would lose his position. Nor is there in the whole of the country a single newspaper that would dare print a straightforward attack on the Bible. The Bible is so well guarded that it seems superfluous for Freethinkers to say much in its defence, and if they say less than they might, it is because what they say will certainly be used by Christians to perpetuate a view of the Bible that every sane Freethinker should be fighting.

—CHAPMAN CONWAY

## PROOF

He knows he's superior—man to the brute.  
The Lord made him so, and the unctious will linger;  
He proves it is so by the Service salute—  
Or some similar twist of forearm or finger.

A.E.C.



## The "Revival" of Religion

By J. GORDON

FROM time to time one hears of a revival of religion. Hardly a year has gone by during the present century without some bishop or religious writer assuring the world that a great religious revival is in the offing. The majority are easily fooled where religion is concerned and the clergy can be counted upon to maintain the fiction that they are disinterested observers of a religion the maintenance of which is a matter of life and death for the churches which pay them.

One seldom hears talk of the revival of science or art. Both science and art are vital essentials of civilisation; with religion things are different. Only the chronically sick need constant reviving, and all attempts at religious "revivals" are but an indication of the decay of genuine religious belief and a signpost to its eventual extinction from civilised life. Another book on revival, *Protestant—Catholic—Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, by Will Herberg, is reviewed by D. W. Brogan in *The Manchester Guardian* (January 6th). We are told that most of those taking part in this "revival" are seeking "peace of mind"—and that a vague theism expressed in a crude anthropomorphic form is the mark of a good American. The assimilation of Catholics and Jews from Europe with American-born Protestants and others and their acceptance by America as true American organisations is the major theme of the book, according to Mr. Brogan. This assimilation and equalization, so far as it goes, of competing sects into the larger social body is a desirable thing in the long run. Anything which helps to break down the mutual antagonism and separation of competing sects and fosters the feeling of belonging to a larger community with common interests, helps to lay the foundations of a truly democratic society.

Yet, one may be permitted to question how far these changes can legitimately be interpreted as a revival of religion. It is typical of the crude identification of religion with whatever happens to be the most socially desirable object of the moment, that "peace of mind" should be taken to stand for religious aspiration, as if peace of mind were a mental state inseparably tied to the possession of religious convictions.

If words mean anything, religious aspirations mean feelings connected with God and a future life, and if these feelings are stated to be gaining in strength, the statement is a demonstrable untruth. There can be no question that there are more people who disbelieve in both God and a future life than ever before. The contention that religion is stronger because there is a widespread desire for peace of mind is so much "hokum", as they say in America. Peace of mind is not peculiar to religion, nor is religion in the least concerned with peace of mind as such. *The chief concern of religion lies solely with our being convinced of the truth of specific doctrines.*

Apart from one or two notable exceptions like Mrs. Margaret Knight, our scientific men and women do not tell the people that this identification of Christianity with moral and intellectual virtues is so much humbug or attempt to enlist support for Christianity by pretending it is something which it is not.

As we move further and further away from the conditions which gave religion its origin, it is seen that life itself is against religion, and in the struggle to survive, the churches know it. That is why the unceasing fight against Secularism is ultimately a contest for the control and direction of civilisation itself.

## Hanging

WE HAVE rightly been rebuked for our premature celebration of the passing of the hangman. Yes, we slipped up! We committed the elementary error of not allowing for political "double talk". We treated the words of the Government spokesmen at their face value. In mitigation, we can point out that experienced Parliamentarians like Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Morrison (to mention only two) made the same mistake. When Sir Anthony Eden announced that the Government would not introduce a Bill to abolish the death penalty, the Leader of the Opposition told him: "Your statement is really not in accordance with what not only the House but the public generally took to be the meaning of your statement after the recent debate".

Mr. Morrison took Mr. R. A. Butler to task. The latter had also made a statement after the free vote had gone in favour of abolition. His words then were: "I would say at once when we have a free vote we naturally expect to base our action after further deliberations on the decision of the House". And the decision of the House was clear and straightforward. It called upon the Government "to introduce forthwith legislation" for abolition or suspension. We agree with Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Morrison that the Government should have done this.

Even then, of course, the House of Lords might have proved awkward, but that august body must be fully aware that it is only tolerated as (in some eyes) a picturesque relic of the past. Lord Chief Justice Goddard would, no doubt, have marshalled his forces in defence of breaking the necks of those convicted of murder (not always synonymous with "murderers"!) but the House of Commons had been thwarted once before on this issue and might be less tolerant a second time. However, as a result of those "further deliberations" which Mr. Butler foresaw, the House must vote on Mr. Sydney Silverman's private Bill.

We agree with one of our correspondents, Mr. D. Shipper, of Cardiff, that "we cannot afford to be complacent, our object is not yet achieved". We therefore call upon all N.S.S. members and FREETHINKER readers to increase their efforts on behalf of abolition. Let our voice be heard, louder than ever, demanding the end of "this obscene futility".

C. McC.

### DECREES OF POPES AND GENERAL COUNCILS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY

#### COUNCILS

Council of Orleans in middle of 6th century decrees the perpetuity of slavery as an institution.

597—Council of Toledo threatened with damnation any bishop who dared to liberate a slave belonging to the Church without compensating the Church.

517—Council of Epaona prohibited abbots from emancipating the slaves of their monasteries.

Council of Gangra (4th century) pronounced its anathema on anyone who should teach a slave to despise his master on account of religion. (This decree was reaffirmed by Pope Hadrian 1st in 773.)

"When the Papal Church granted a slave to a monastery, the dread anathema, involving eternal perdition, was pronounced against anyone daring to interfere with the gift; and those who were appointed to take charge of the lands and farms of the Church were specially instructed that it was part of their duty to pursue and recapture fugitive bondsmen".—c.f. H. C. Lea: *Studies of Early Church History* (p. 565).



## PAPAL DECREES

In 1452, Pope Nicholas V empowered the King of Portugal to despoil and sell into slavery all Muslims, heathens, and other foes of Christ.

A hundred Moorish slaves were sent to Pope Innocent VIII by King Ferdinand "the Catholic" in 1488, and were distributed by this Pope amongst his cardinals.

In 1376, Pope Gregory XI excommunicated the (Christian) Florentines, ordering their enslavement wherever found.

Under the Borgia Pope, Alexander VI, women were sold cheap in Rome in 1501, after the capture of Capua by the Papal army. (The women were Catholics.)

Pope Julius II, in 1510, authorised the kidnapping of African negroes and their subsequent export as slaves into the recently discovered West Indian colonies of Spain, in order to take the place of the dying "Indian" populations.

In a Papal Encyclical in May 1880, Pope Leo XIII summarised the traditional attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards slavery: "She (i.e. the Church) has deprecated any precipitate action in securing the manumission and liberation of slaves, because that would have entailed tumults and provoked injury. She taught the slaves to feel that by the virtue of the light of Holy Faith they enjoyed a dignity which placed them above their heathen lords, but they were bound the more strictly by the Author and Founder of their Faith Himself never to set themselves against these, or even to be wanting in the reverence and obedience due to them".

Authorities: Prof. J. E. Caines, *The Slave Power*; Chapman Cohen, *Christianity and Slavery*; *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (American) article — "Slavery". F.A.R.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### RATIONALISTS

I am writing to you to object to what I consider to be a serious sapping of the strength of the Freethought and Rationalist movements. My target at the moment is Mr. H. Cutner.

In his own field Mr. Cutner is supreme. He can make the Rev. Billy look sillier than anyone else. I do not approve of Mr. Cutner's attacks on "reverent rationalists", as he calls them. They combat a different type of Christian from Mr. Cutner, and I consider internal squabbles detrimental to the organisation(s). Mr. Cutner may disagree with such people as Mr. Howell Smith — he is entitled to — but THE FREETHINKER will do more good attacking our enemies than our allies.

Bronowski and Hector Hawton would not last long on the BBC with too militant an outlook, but they are at least there and doing some good, as is Mr. Cutner in THE FREETHINKER combating the more crude forms of Christianity. J. DOWDING.

### POPULATION AND SUBSISTENCE

The essence of the Malthusian doctrine is that population tends to increase faster than the power of providing food.

The question is not in what stage of population is most subsistence produced, but in what stage of population is there exhibited the greatest power of producing wealth. It takes on the average as much labour to produce a diamond as it does to produce so many barrels of flour. If we load our women with diamonds it is as much an exertion of subsistence-producing power as if we had devoted so much food to purposes of ostentation. The keeping of a regiment of soldiers or of a warship and her crew is the diversion to unproductive uses of labour that would produce subsistence.

Even if increase of population does reduce the power of the natural factor by compelling resort to poorer soils, etc., it so vastly increases the human factor as to more than compensate. Denser population means subdivision of labour and greater economies of production. We have seen many communities advance in population. Have they not at the same time advanced even more rapidly in wealth? We see many communities advancing still in population. Are they not also increasing their wealth still faster?

Whatever may be the cause of want or misery, it surely cannot be traced to increase of population when we see great accumulation of wealth and even food being used as fuel. It is not a problem of production, but of distribution. G. J. DICKINSON.

### OVERPOPULATION

In his letter (Feb. 10) Mr. Clark rightly called attention to Eastern birthrates and the methods of Communist dictatorship. But if we wish to save England from these abominations, we must drastically reduce our present population. The Russian leaders have for some years realised that the surest way to overcome the West is to produce extensive landslides in its economic system, and this can most easily be done by provoking a population race. But fifty million extra coolies in an economy where standards are wretchedly low anyway is one thing: five million extra babies in a highly complex society living on importations is quite another. Those babies cannot fight for us before 1975, and will have brought about complete economic collapse long before that date. And economic collapse is the first stride to military defeat.

In other words, those people in England who encourage production — either socially or politically — are working for the Communists. They should take up chess — a game at which many Russians excel. They will soon appreciate that straightforward obvious reactions and moves are often most ill-advised, and that some things, including power politics, subtlety is all-important. R. READER

### ARROGANCE?

Your correspondent Seabury Edwards dislikes the arrogance of Atheism. Where is it, Seabury? In your mind, I think. Says the Oxford Dictionary: "Atheism: disbelief in the existence of a God or godlessness". Just a matter of belief and not any claim to esoteric knowledge at all. No arrogance. There's no law against holding a belief! I disbelieve in, say, the Christian's God because, as described, he is quite incredible on reasonable and factual grounds, and I'm sure that reason is man's only reliable guide, God being just another Santa Claus to anyone who can think straight. The Atheist can hardly be called arrogant. But gods never have been offered as other than objects of faith, so why kick at some of us not believing? JIM KIRKHAM

### THE BOOK OF JOB

I hasten to assure Mr. Ridley that I did read his article on "Biblical Sceptics" before criticising his statements about the Book of Job. This is why my criticism was confined to his remarks on the traditional, Biblical Job. Not having read Dr. Dillon's translation of, or comments on, the "original" Job, I am, of course, in no position to comment on it. Nor did I do so. I was, and am concerned only with Mr. Ridley's statement that the orthodox "Job" portrays God as "a figure of fun". I described this statement as "sheer nonsense", and I stand by this opinion.

The "Book of Job", as it appears in the translations in orthodox use, is the work of a sensitive and sincerely religious poet who is filled with an overwhelming sense of the pettiness and insignificance of the human intelligence compared with the gigantic problems that confront it. The poet seeks to provide some sort of answer to the enigmas that torment Job; it is the same answer that is provided by the prophets and the psalmists. Job himself anticipates the answer when, in the midst of his perplexity and frustration, he exclaims, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!" God's arguments are certainly "satirical", but I cannot agree that they are "irrelevant".

The satire consists in the fact that Job, who has taken it upon himself to criticise the arrangement of the Universe, is asked whether he, a being of finite intelligence and understanding, can hope to see enough of the game of life to "justify his attempt to declare the rules to be unjust.

Mr. Ridley says that Job's answer to this argument is "ironical". Perhaps Mr. Ridley will say why. S. W. BROOKS

### IMPOSTORS

As I am not a member of any political party or group, Mr. McNair's insinuations that as chairman at the meeting in question I displayed "political leanings" or did "hog the Society's platform for political propaganda" fall rather flat. I assert it is within the scope of worthwhile Freethought propaganda to indict impostors whether in the political or philosophical spheres.

This minor witch-hunt on behalf of the Labour Party is evidence of political preference and unworthy of the Freethought tradition. J. BARROWMAN

### POINT FROM LETTER

FROM my observations of Muslims in my own community, I find they are most strict in observing the many queer injunctions, rituals, customs and ceremonies of their faith, including forced circumcision, fasting for one month every year, having to pray five times daily, repeat many ritual washings, attend mosque on Fridays, undertake a long and expensive trip to the dreary and dusty city called Mecca, and so on.—LEONARD MARTIN (S. Africa).

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