

# The Freethinker

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THE SUCCESSOR OF POPE PIUS XII has now been duly and canonically elected. Angelo Roncalli, former Patriarch of Venice, has now "suffered a sea-change" into Pope John XXIII, a Papal designation which, so to speak, harks back beyond the Reformation to the last of the many medieval Popes who bore that name in the 14th century. The present Pope is obviously a stop-gap, whose function is to keep the chair of St. Peter occupied until some younger and more eligible candidate arrives upon the scene. At seventy-six Pope John is unlikely to reign as long as either of his two immediate predecessors—Pius XI (17 years) or Pius XII (19 years). Unlike this pair, the new Pope is of modest social origin, which recalls Pius X, who also

was of peasant origin and was similarly Patriarch of Venice before his unexpected election in 1903. It is much to be hoped that Pope John will prove, at least, rather less obscurantist in his policy than that most reactionary of modern Popes, who is now a canonised saint in Heaven! While not much is known here about the new Pope, like Pacelli, he appears to be primarily a political Pope, and to have spent much of his working life in the Diplomatic Service of the Vatican. As a former Papal Nuncio in Paris after the liberation, he is reputed to be an expert in French affairs, as his predecessor was a German expert. Last, but by no means least, he is an Italian who, however, has spent most of his working life outside Italy, having been for many years attached to the Papal Diplomatic Service in the Near East, in Bulgaria and Turkey. The post-Reformation tradition, unbroken since 1523, by which an Italian is always elected to the Papacy, has managed to survive, even in a Conclave where two thirds of the Cardinals were non-Italians. The widespread publicity given to Stalin's fellow townsman, the Armenian Patriarch, Cardinal Agagianian, perhaps indicates this four-century monopoly is drawing to its close, and the Armenian Cardinal, according to the press, was actually saluted as Pope by the crowd when en route to the Conclave. However, as that peculiar Catholic, Mr. Bernard Wall, indicated with surprising frankness in *The Observer*, "the Vatican dislikes change like a cat dislikes water."

## The Papacy and the Future

The new Pope appears not only to be an expert in French affairs, but to have owed his election very largely to the active support of the French Cardinals. This connection, which had already been noted by Mr. Wall, has, perhaps, considerable significance for the future of the Papacy. For France is not only the most cultured and advanced land to be found still largely adhering to the Roman Catholic Church; it is equally the French Church which has always been the most critical of the ultramontane pretensions of the Vatican. It was the Gallic Church which opposed Papal Infallibility and autocracy most energetically, and which put up sharp opposition to the Decree of Papal Infallibility in 1870, as the contemporary eyewitness, Pomponio Leto, demonstrated at the time.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## Pope John

XXIII

By F. A. RIDLEY

More recently, since the last war, and during the period when Cardinal Roncalli was Papal Nuncio in Paris, there was a bitter clash between Pius XII and the French hierarchy, over the question of the daring ecclesiastical experiment sponsored by the French bishops, of sending priests as full-time workers into factories in order to combat the menace of "atheistic Communism" among the French industrial workers. I have in my possession all the relevant documents which passed between the Ecclesiastical Authorities, relating to this most significant sociological experiment. Eventually Pope Pius rode roughshod over the wishes of the French Catholic hierarchy in this matter, as drastic an example of Papal autocracy

and of outside interference in a domestic matter as any on record. It will be interesting to note the reactions of the new Pope towards any possible resumption of this most daring attempt to recapture the industrial workers for Christianity: an increasingly important objective of Catholic world strategy since Leo XIII first recognised the problem in his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (May 15th, 1891). On the still more important problem of somehow "liquidating" the legacy of an eventual atomic crusade against Communism—bequeathed by that peculiar "Prince of Peace," the late Pius Pacelli—we do not know enough about the new Pope to predict. But again it is perhaps significant that the French Church has been more prone to take a liberal—and at times even a pseudo-radical—line than any other. This may signify some modification of the virulently pro-Fascist and anti-Communist line which Pius XII inherited from his equally reactionary predecessor and which he himself certainly lived up to! That the problem is nowadays recognised at Rome was clearly indicated in the sermon preached to the Cardinals before the Conclave, emphasising the pressing need for a reconciliation with even the enemies of the Church. Pope John, like his predecessor, is a politician and not a theologian; we hope that he will be less prone to encouraging fresh superstitions than was Pius XII. We do not know whether he is likewise interested in schemes for space travel, but, if so, we hope they will not include any further pioneer voyages by the Virgin Mary, either from, or to, our planet!

## Is England Still a Protestant Country?

In the light of what can only be described as an orgy of lachrymose sentiment shed over the passing of the old, and the arrival of the new, Pope, the above question seems relevant. As the National Secular Society remarked in a letter to the BBC (already printed in this journal) there have been occasions since the last Pope's death, when anyone might have been excused for assuming that this was an officially Catholic land. Since then the election of John has been given priority in BBC news bulletins over the opening of Parliament by the "Defender of the (Protestant) Faith." Never, surely, since the Reformation, has there been anything like it? The shades of the Marian

Martyrs, still commemorated where they suffered at Smithfield and Oxford, must be turning in their graves. To those who regard the Reformation as one of the great historic landmarks opening the road to further progress, the present trends are disquieting in the extreme. What next? Have we now to rewrite English history so as to regard the Spanish Armada as a crusade which unfortunately failed in its avowed objective of restoring the Catholic religion in this

island? Must we regard "Bloody Mary" as a misunderstood humanitarian saint?

After Press and radio have exhausted themselves in presenting the frustrated advocate of an atomic holocaust, Pius XII, as a Pope of Peace, may we not now expect on November the Fifth, to hear that the frustrated parliamentary reformer, Guy Fawkes, was the champion of our present parliamentary liberties?

## Germany Re-visited

By WALTER STEINHARDT

IT WAS WITH FEELINGS of apprehension and expectation that I flew into Berlin Tempelhof after an absence of more than 19 years. Many of the places and faces I then knew had greatly changed or disappeared. But, within a day or two, I had once more the "feel" of this unique town, where I lived in my 'teens and under a terror and persecution difficult to overstate.

I spoke to many Berliners. Some were still old, unrepenting Nazis. It's easy to find them out with a few leading questions, like: "When was it clear to you that the 'Führer' had lost the war?" or "What, in your opinion, went wrong with National-Socialism?" and "How can you explain that the nation that produced men like Beethoven, Schiller, Kant, Dürer, Heine, Siemens, Haeckel, Koch and Rilke, could have fallen for a third-rate Austrian house painter with the noble ideals of Genghis Khan and Attila?"

Others, perhaps the majority, I met, were politically non-committed. And to the very young, the names and the deeds of the monsters are just faint history, or not even that.

I was surprised that no less than three persons asked me about that idiotic statement of our Archbishop of Canterbury re the will of God and the H-bomb destruction of mankind.

The Peter Townsend affair and the travels of the beautiful Soraya occupied still much space of the popular papers, just like here. There is also a certain hankering after royalty of the moderate Scandinavian type. This may be due to a feeble attempt to find another "Ersatz" for the withering religious convictions and emotions, never very strong in these parts of Germany.

The most depressing aspect I encountered was the almost universal recounting of all the sufferings caused to Germans by the allies, particularly the Russians and the Anglo-American bombing, while maintaining complete indifference to the monstrous outrages inflicted by their nation against the rest of Europe. I made it my task to rectify this in no uncertain terms whenever I could.

Berlin's modern character has been formed by five tremendous events:

1. The rule of the Nazis, rejected by the majority of Berliners. (Berlin was Germany's second "reddest" town—after Hamburg.)
2. The air raids, particularly those in the winter of 1943-4.
3. Berlin as battleground and the following Russian occupation.
4. The partition of Berlin and the air-lift of 1947-8.
5. The rebuilding on a colossal scale during the last 10 years.

One should bear these facts in mind when considering any facets of the life of Berliners today, including the rebirth of its Freethought movement.

The office of the Berliner Freidenker Landesverband is situated at No. 9, Rollberg Strasse, Neu-Kölln. There I met the secretary, Herr Willi Muller, and a member of the

Executive. The first thing I noticed upon entering was the large photograph of the late Max Sievers, former President of the German Freethinkers League. Among German Freethinkers he was the outstanding victim of Nazi-Fascism.

Within a few days of gaining power, the Nazis occupied the Central Office in the Gneisenaustrasse, robbed the money, destroyed the organisation and arrested the leading Freethinkers. Many were murdered. Max Sievers escaped from confinement, went abroad, but was later recaptured and returned to Brandenburg prison. There, after a sham trial, he was executed by decapitation on January 17th, 1944. He was 56 years old. Let us add the name of Max Sievers to those worth remembering.

Before 1933 the German Freethinkers were an organisation on a massive scale, with over 1,700 local branches. Berlin alone had 225,000 members. Its work was directed against nationalism as well as religion, having well realised the paramount importance of the former in German affairs. It also pioneered, organised and insured for its vast membership a secular cremation service.

After 1945 the small group of remaining Freethinkers began under great difficulties to rebuild the broken organisation, but only in 1949 did they receive official recognition. Slowly, Berlin is once more becoming a pivot for Freethought. One important aspect is the so-called "Jugend-Weihe," a sort of solemn secular dedication ceremony of young people when leaving school. Already about 2,000 children annually take part in West Berlin alone. Freethinking teachers or other members instruct the children prior to the ceremony in ethics and freethought. The groups meet weekly for two hours of instruction.

Another success is the recently gained permission to teach in schools directly to children withdrawn from religious indoctrination. The curriculum composed by the Landesverband Berlin is indeed a remarkable document, suggesting detailed freethought teaching for children from six to 18 years. They expect to commence regular work in the schools of Berlin next year. The organisation is also engaged in various adult educational activities, distribution of literature, particularly the monthly *Der Freidenker* and socials of the usual kind, in and out of doors.

Unfortunately, there is as yet only little (and no official) connection between Freethinkers of the West and East sections. The branch is not allowed to function in the Soviet-occupied parts. One hopes that this unnatural state of affairs will not be permanent.

In 1955 German Freethinkers celebrated the 50th birthday of their organisation. The pamphlet issued to mark the occasion concluded with these words:

"In the face of dark opposition and much aggravation, but strengthened by the experience of many an old fighter and supported by the willingness of young people in Berlin to take part in the fight, the German Freethought movement once more arises to its task."

Let us congratulate and wish well our friends in Berlin.

# G. E. Moore (1873—1958)

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE RECENT DEATH of George Edward Moore removes the philosopher who, among his contemporaries, had the greatest influence on Bertrand Russell. The development of Philosophy in the western world in the present century owes vastly more to the Cambridge trio, Moore, Russell and Broad, than to any other single school of thought. It is largely the story of the triumph of Realism over Idealism, the latter coming to its final resting place at Oxford, the "burial ground of German Philosophy." It is hardly too much to say that all that has proved fruitful in Philosophy has stemmed, in some degree, from Russell; has come, as it were, through "Russell Junction."

It was Moore himself who gave what was to become the death blow to Idealism, for at the turn of the century the battle raged evenly between the rival schools of thought, with Idealism carrying the big guns in F. H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, A. J. Balfour and Viscount Haldane. Such was the prestige of the Idealist philosophy that even a staunch evolutionist like T. H. Huxley appeared to succumb to their arguments and this led him to renounce any connection with Materialism as it was then defended.

Moore's famous essay, "The Refutation of Idealism," became the standard work, and though attempts were made to dodge the conclusions, the work was followed up and successive schools of Neo-Realism and, later, Critical Realism, arose. Metaphysicians, especially those with religious predilections, were fond of challenging the Materialist to establish his premise that "matter exists." Questions were being asked which, it was piously hoped, would render Materialism invalid: "Can you prove the table exists in our absence?" "Can you think of matter existing by itself, without a perceiving mind?" "If so, how would you describe it?" "And if you maintain that things *do* exist when they are not experienced by us, then you need God to hold them for us in his Absolute Mind."

While many in the Realist camp felt sure that such ways of reasoning were false, disproof did not always come easily. Engels got out of the difficulty by claiming that human action had solved such riddles before they were adumbrated, while naive realists held that phenomena existed exactly as they were mirrored in the perceiving mind. What Moore did was to break up the Idealist position by sheer logical argument, and, with some refinements, his position has lasted with success.

He concluded by turning the Idealist's argument round on himself: "When any Idealist thinks he is *aware* of himself or of anyone else, this cannot be the case; the fact is, on his own theory, himself and the other person are in reality mere *contents* of an awareness which is aware of nothing whatever" (*Philosophical Studies*). In the same work he disposes of the type of religious philosophising which contends that sense-data are possessed by the "ego" as an irreducible principle. "When I say they are 'mine,' I mean they have relation to *one another*."

Moore made no concessions whatever to doctrinal religion and maintained the atheistic approach. In his book, *Ethics*, he writes: "I think myself that, in all probability, there is no such being, neither a God nor any being such as Universal Will, True Self, etc." He likewise dismissed the idea that man has immortality (*vide* his contribution to *Contemporary British Philosophy*, 1925 series).

His theory of values, however, would perhaps be disputable among Freethinkers. In *Principia Ethica* he takes the position that things *are* beautiful whether observed or not. Beauty is an intrinsic quality and only awaits the eye

in order to be experienced and appreciated. Opposite to this is the view that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" and not in the object. We cannot stay to debate it here.

Writing of ethical judgments, he says: "The question whether an action is right or wrong *always* depends on its actual consequences." We may comment that this involves the proposition that all our "moral" actions are in some degree plunges in the dark, and cannot be known to be right or wrong at the time they are performed. Again, the debate continues!

Besides being Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge, Moore was for some 25 years editor of *Mind*, one of Britain's two philosophical quarterlies.

No obituary that I have seen has emphasised his atheism.

## Open Letter to Gilbert Harding

on his TV meeting with Welsh Sunday Observance Council

By J. S. REYNOLDS

YOU WERE INDEED "in the lion's den" and showed remarkable courage in facing up to such a body. That you were completely outmanœuvred was no fault of yours. The dice were loaded against you. Instead of the opposition firing questions at you, you were the target for a bombardment of sincere but bigotted speeches. You were even without the protection of a chairman who was lined up with the opposition. That, in the circumstances, you were able to get across one or two pungent points is to your credit. A less astute advocate would not have managed that.

But really, Mr. Harding, your position was untenable from the start. One cannot pose as a Christian and attempt to defend a free Sunday. You cannot "run with the hare and hunt with the hounds."

To have logic on one's side fully, only the freethinker or rationalist can advocate a rational Sunday. The sooner the members of the Sunday Freedom League realise this and line up with the National Secular Society or Rationalist Press Association the better. When they have shed their beliefs in religious dogma and myths they will be on safe ground in their timely campaign. This applies equally to Roman Catholics with their greater ritual and lesser restraint as much as to other sects.

Dear Mr. Harding, you will have to aver with Shaw that "God is a discarded and unnecessary hypothesis." You will have to accept the truth that the Bible is not a divine book; that it came into being through purely human agencies like any other document.

As an intelligent man, you should know that all religious ideas, theories and creeds are entirely man-made; that all religions are founded on fear, ignorance and superstition; that all gods, devils, angels and spirits belong to the same category as fairies and bogies.

You should know that all so-called "sacred" scriptures are without authenticity; that they were compiled by people who had no scientific background. Those who believe in a future life cannot produce the smallest evidence in support, while all human experience contradicts such a theory.

Ministers of religion would be more usefully employed in activities concerned with the only life we know of. All this silly ritual and mumbo-jumbo should be treated with ridicule in this scientific age. As to prayer, all intelligent persons should be ashamed to find themselves on their knees kow-towing to an invisible and non-existent god.

## This Believing World

Our Rationalist contemporary, "The Humanist," has followed up its two articles on Bradlaugh and Ingersoll—it will be remembered that the first one forgot to mention that the great Iconoclast was an Atheist, and the second confidentially told us that Ingersoll was not a "profound thinker"—with an article on "How True is Christianity?" in which we are informed that the Jewish rabbis of the "early centuries" never queried the actual existence of Jesus. This is a palpable untruth. Trypho, in his famous dialogue with Justin (written about 150 A.D. and preserved by Christians), says as clearly as words can make it that Christians had made for themselves "an imaginary Christ," that if he ever came, he "is unknown," and his was an "idle story." In other words, Trypho pooh-poohed "the existence" of Christ, and dismissed it with a laugh at Justin's credulity.

★

This passage in the famous "Dialogue" has upset Humanists and reverent Rationalists as much as Christians, but it is there, and it should be added to what that very respectable Church Father, Irenæus, wrote about Jesus. In his *Against Heresies*, he maintained that Jesus died "an old man," and that he got this from "the elders" who knew John as well as other apostles, who all confirmed it. In all this account of Jesus, there is not a line about his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. To put it another way, we have here two "witnesses," a Jew and a Christian, as early as the second century, completely at variance with the Gospel story. But one would never gather this from the article.

★

Although the new Sandy Wilson musical, "Valmouth," is based on a novel by Ronald Firbank (who was a devout Catholic), it is being slated by critics as "sacrilegious, offensive, and nauseating to churchgoers." Most of these critics no doubt are as devout Catholics as Firbank himself, and we often wonder why it is that so many of these pious people manage to get on a newspaper ready to "smear" any book or play as "blatant blasphemy," no matter how good or true it is. Fortunately, the public mostly ignores them, and avidly buys the book or goes to the play. In spite of the most intense boycott, Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* has sold hundreds of thousands of copies and is still a freethought "best seller"—and it is certainly "blasphemous."

★

Should the leaders and members of a Church Youth Club go to church was the momentous problem which faced the priest in charge, the Rev. M. Wright. He discovered numbers of them did *not* attend any church at High Wycombe, and two other ministers have had the same dreadful experience. However, rather than go to church, three of the leaders of the church clubs there have resigned, and a number of members have walked out. It is all very confusing, but why do the dissidents give in so tamely? Why do they not start a "secular" club for youths in which religion is resolutely barred. In the ultimate, is not that the best solution?

★

The "Sunday Graphic" recently devoted nearly two pages to a "poltergeist" story which has about as much evidence in it as Elijah flying to "Heaven" in a fiery chariot. The presence of a twelve-year-old girl appears to have been responsible for the way in which a chair danced to rock 'n' roll music, heavy furniture moved about, cutlery and crockery flew through the air—all the usual happenings we all know so well, and all due, we are told, to the presence of "an adolescent girl." The people most concerned were her

grandparents, old enough to know better, but far too old to see how the sly young thing must have been laughing at their inexperience and credulity.

★

But here comes in the "Sunday Graphic's" science correspondent, Mr. J. Stubbs Walker, who swallows—hard—every particle of the poltergeist story. He believes that it is "a phenomenon"—in which "physical energy" causes solid objects to move about, "though where the energy comes from is quite unknown." The "physical energy" in this case is the dear little girl fooling her grandparents—and Mr. Walker.

★

But Mr. Walker insists that the Society for Psychical Research has 600 "fully authenticated" cases on their records. We wonder whether this is so? As far as we have examined their journals, bulletins, etc., we cannot recall even one "fully authenticated." The "phenomena" associated with "poltergeists" always ceases when the young people—or whoever is responsible—are caught. But the astonishing thing is that a "science correspondent" actually believes in poltergeists!

## Monitor

NEARLY half a million Roman Catholic pilgrims went this year to Aix-la-Chapelle (Adenauer Germany) and München-Gladbach to see the exhibition of reliques which are there shown every four years, such as the Lord's napkins, part of his regal red coat, a dress the Virgin went in, part of the table cloth spread on the occasion of the Last Supper, etc. 15,000 ailing people had themselves touched with the miraculous loin cloth the Lord was supposed to wear. And this at the time of the Geophysical Year! One wonders how R.C. believers can claim to be considered as civilised contemporary human beings.

★

Of the world's population of 2,440 million the Roman Catholic Church claims 472 million (19%). Among them 31 million (2.3%) are members of the 1,300 million of Asia's population. In Europe, however, where there are 591 million people, the Roman Church can claim 230 million or 39%. In America, with 337 million population, there are 190 million, and in Africa 17 million among a population of 198 million. The figure for Oceania is 14 million or 20%.

If we add 250 million Protestants and 200 million other Christians all the world over, all shades of Christianity muster 922 million against 1,518 million non-Christians.

P.G.R.

## Wish-Wash Quiz

How MUCH do non-Catholic children know about the Pope? On the day of his death a group of forty, aged 12-13, not 100 miles from our office, were asked, "Who was the Pope? What was his position?"

Only six vouchsafed answers. In order not to prejudice opinion they were told to write the answers down instead of saying them aloud. Here they were, as written: (1) "the Archbishop"; (2) "like Jesus"; (3) "the old Roman Emperor"; (4) "the Vatican"; (5) the King of Italy; (6) "One of the Christians."

The teacher then added three other alternatives in order not to advertise the right answer: (7) a famous poet, Alexander Pope the Great; (8) head of the Roman Catholic Church; (9) St. Peter's uncle. The children were then told that one of the nine was correct. Which one did they think it was? Twenty-eight voted, of whom only eight picked the right answer.

# THE FREETHINKER

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER and C. E. WOOD.

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.; every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street).—Sunday, November 9th: D. SHIPPER, "Freethought Overseas—Activities and Possibilities."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, November 9th, 7 p.m.: JOAN BELLAMY, "Our Revolutionary Ancestors."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, November 9th, 7.15 p.m.: G. HARDY, "The Man who never Died."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 11th, 7.15 p.m.: KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS, "Women, the World and War."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 9th, 6.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Germany, East and West."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, November 9th, 2.30 p.m.: H. WILTSHIRE, "Radio, TV and Society."

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant).—Sunday, November 9th: Dr. LLOYD FRANKLIN, "The National Peace Council."

Oxford Humanist Group (Taylor Institute).—Tuesday, November 11th, 8.15 p.m.: Prof. I. T. RAMSEY, "Some Thoughts on Miracles."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 9th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, P.H.D., F.R.S.E., "Memory Hold the Door."

## Notes and News

SHAME on the irreverent Mr. H. T. Chilton who, in two letters to the *Manchester Guardian* (October 6th and 18th), satirised Canon E. G. Burrough (Oxford)—"a profound believer in angels, and also in demons or evil spirits." Mr. Chilton advocated setting up Chairs of Demonology and Exorcism at all our medical schools, admitting that where he lived "there is an Angel... the pub next door." "Spirits can also be found here"—he added—"but not evil ones." We are reminded that the late, overlamented Pope devoted one of his last addresses to the subject of angels. "No one is so humble"—he said (humility, of course, being

a pet theme of his)—"but he has angels to attend him. So glorious, so pure, so wonderful they are. . . . Not only do they wish to defend you against dangers lurking along the way; they are also active at your side with a word of encouragement. . . ." But need we go on? What a comment on our press and radio when a man who can talk like this in 1958 is praised to the angel-populated skies. What a relief to turn to the *Manchester Guardian* and Mr. Chilton!

★

WE strongly approve the action of the Rhondda Director of Education, Mr. D. Jones-Davies, in refusing to allow a Canadian evangelist to preach to children at school (*South Wales Echo*, 4/10/58). It may be the first time this has happened to the Rev. John Wesley White in "eight years" preaching in the Western world," as he claims it is; Wales may be "a land of traditional Christian witness"; but the Director is surely right in instructing headmasters not to allow advantage to be taken of "children's compulsory attendance," and insisting that the Rev. White's campaign should make use of the same avenues of approach to schoolchildren as are open to them in the case of adults. Mr. White, of course, thinks it "a deplorable tragedy." We hope Mr. Jones-Davies will now urge the abolition of the already existent "compulsory attendance" religious period, the worst feature of the 1944 Education Act.

★

THE Hampstead Humanist Society is holding its Annual Dinner on Monday, December 15th, at Romano's Restaurant, 50 Greek Street, W.1. The Guests of Honour are Lord Chorley, H. L. Beales and Dr. W. E. Swinton. Chairman, Frank Horrabin. Tickets, 10s. 6d., can be obtained from M. L. Burnet, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W.8. Visitors will be especially welcome.

★

THE Central London N.S.S. Branch secretary informs us that the branch is organising an excursion to Downe House, Downe, Kent, on Sunday, November 16th, in connection with the Darwin Centenary, meeting at Charing Cross Station at 1.30 p.m. Will those who intend joining the party please inform the Secretary, Mr. J. M. Alexander, 249 Caledonian Road, N.1 (phone Terminus 6930), in good time so that advantage may be taken of cheap fare facilities.

★

THE *Daily Express* (4/10/58) detects rumblings that may further widen the gulf between Anglo-Catholics and the Church of England. A group of clergymen is so enraged by the Lambeth Conference approval of birth control that it intends to present an ultimatum to the 43 C. of E. diocesan bishops and, if that fails, to organise a mass rally in London. As the *Express* says, the extreme Anglo-Catholic wing is "still inside the Church of England—but only just," and if they go over to Rome they may prefer to do so in a "public, even dramatic, way." If they do, we only hope they realise it will be their last ultimatum.

★

WE hope as many readers as possible will go to the Conway Hall on Tuesday, November 11th, at 7.15 p.m., when Mrs. Kathleen Tacchi-Morris is to speak on "Women, the World and War." It will be remembered that Mrs. Tacchi-Morris wrote on this subject in THE FREETHINKER (11/7/58).

### NEXT WEEK

#### PRAYER ENSLAVES

By A. G. CROMWELL  
(American Freethought Author)

# On Christian Relics—1

By H. CUTNER

THE RECENT RUMPUS on Tower Hill against N.S.S. speakers, and the threats of "blasphemy" prosecutions were the result, as much as anything else, of the almost incredible beliefs in "relics" held by all good Roman Catholics. This may be a little qualified by admitting that perhaps many *modern* Catholics know very little about relics, and believe only what they are told. It must come as a great surprise to them to find their Holy Church not only guilty of the most impudent of lies, but guilty also of trying to inculcate belief in the most hopeless of superstitions.

No one need be ashamed of taking an interest at least in some of the "remains" of great men and women. I personally do not admire the character of Napoleon, but I used to look with the greatest interest at the many personal things of his preserved in Paris and elsewhere—and, of course, at his tomb. In the same way, a museum like that of the Dickens Museum in London or Portsmouth is, for an enthusiastic Dickensian like myself, packed with "relics" of the greatest interest—and indeed this can be said of most museums in general. The "relics" which the Catholic Church adores are of a quite different order. They are nearly all frauds, deliberately designed to hoodwink the credulous, which indeed they do.

When the Catholic Church is publicly advertising itself as the Church of God in our national newspapers and other journals, nothing is said about its "holy" relics. The emphasis is laid on its "universal" appeal, on its long history, on its wonderful ethics, and so on. We are never told, for example, that there are literally thousands of pieces of the "Cross" of Jesus scattered all over Europe in churches and convents. In his once famous work, his *Treatise on Relics*, Calvin says:

An account of those merely with which I am acquainted would fill a whole volume, for there is not a church, from a cathedral to the most miserable abbey or parish church, that does not contain a piece... At Rome they show a crucifix of considerable size made entirely, they say, from this wood. In short, if we were to collect all these pieces of the true cross exhibited in various parts, they would form a whole ship's cargo. The Gospel testifies that the cross could be borne by one single individual; how glaring then is the audacity now to pretend to display more relics of wood than three hundred men could carry. As an explanation of this, they have invented the tale, that whatever quantity of wood may be cut off this true cross, its size never decreases. . . .

And what about the nails of the cross? Helene, the mother of Constantine (he is called the Great because he is *said* to have become a Christian) had one of the nails put in his helmet, and two others in the bridle of his horse, though this is disputed by St. Ambrose, who insists that one of the nails was put in the *crown* of Constantine, and another was made into a bridle bit for his horse, while a third nail was retained by Helene.

However, there are plenty of these nails in existence all over Europe. Calvin gives fourteen known in his day, but his English translator claims another thirteen unknown to him. The full list was compiled by Leo Taxil in a quite forgotten little work of his, *Les Friponneries Religieuses*—he makes the number twenty-eight, not counting much accompanying file-dust from the nails.

Then there is the famous spear which pierced the side of Jesus. There should be only one, but miraculously there are now four—one in Rome, one at the Holy Chapel in Paris, one at the Abbey of Tenaille in Saintonge, and one at Selve, near Bordeaux.

You can find a part of the Crown of Thorns at the Holy Chapel at Paris, but individual thorns appear to be planted

all over the place. Taxil gives dozens of churches and convents in France which possess many; Calvin enumerates many all over Europe; while his English translator appends a note—"If a diligent inquiry were instituted after these relics in particular, four times as many as here enumerated might be found in other parts."

Then there is the famous handkerchief known as that of Veronica with which Jesus is said to have wiped his face and produced a wonderful image upon it. The true one is in St. Peter's of Rome, but there are several just as authentic, for example, at Carcassone, Nice, Aix-la-Chapelle, Trèves, Besancon, to say nothing of equally authentic *fragments* which have been preserved through the ages.

This brings me to the famous Shroud of Turin about which I wrote some articles in these columns in reply to that famous but wholly credulous airman, Group Captain Cheshire, V.C., who made a speciality of going about lecturing on its authenticity, and even did so on TV, to the delight of all good Catholics. What a boost that was for the Church—though I cannot remember the Turin Shroud ever referred to in the alluring advertisements which appeared either here in England or America. Here is what Calvin has to say about it:

How is it possible that those sacred historians who carefully related all the miracles that took place at Christ's death, should have omitted to mention one so remarkable as the likeness of the body of our Lord remaining on its wrapping sheet? The fact undoubtedly deserved to be recorded. St. John in his Gospel relates how even St. Peter, having entered the sepulchre, saw the linen clothes lying on one side, and the napkin that was about his head on the other; but he does not say that there was a miraculous impression of our Lord's figure upon these clothes... the evangelists do not mention that either of the disciples or the faithful women who came to the sepulchre had removed the clothes in question... on the contrary... that they were left there.

Calvin goes fully into this particular fraud, and is forced to say "either St. John is a liar, or all those who boast of possessing the holy sudary [shroud] are convicted of falsehood and deceit."

It should be added in fairness that not all Roman Catholic priests and bishops have believed in the authenticity of the Shroud—nor in its more or less fabulous history. I think that the late Fr. Thurston has admitted that it is *not* authentic, and I believe that the Church of Rome has not yet settled the question. But for generations it has been exhibited as the actual Shroud with which Jesus was wrapped in the sepulchre, and which, of course, performed many miracles of healing. The Turin Shroud is likely to be worshipped for many centuries yet by the credulous fools who believe in these "holy" relics.

In the Church of the Holy Cross at Rome, you can see the sponge which was filled with vinegar for Jesus on the cross; while the famous pieces of silver for which Judas "betrayed" Jesus can be found in churches at Florence, Rome and other places. And the miraculous blood which, as Calvin points out, "flowed from several hosts," can also be seen in a number of churches. If you want to see the famous "penknife" which once was used by a Jew to pierce a host, and which "the poor Parisians hold in as much reverence as the host itself"—that is also displayed in Paris.

But the "relics" of Jesus are perhaps endless. No doubt, if they were counted, those of "our Lady" would equal them. Although Catholics strenuously deny that they worship Mary, it would be safe to say that priests give her

quite as much attention as nuns do to "our Lord." And, of course, churches all over Europe have all sorts of things which once belonged to her. One of her "shirts" is at Chartres, and another is at Aix-la-Chapelle. With regard to her milk, Calvin says:

There is not perhaps a town, a convent, or nunnery, where it is not shown in large or small quantities. Indeed, had the Virgin been a wet-nurse her whole life, or a dairy, she could not have produced more than is shown as hers in various parts. How they obtained all this milk they do not say, and it is superfluous here to remark that there is no foundation in the Gospels for these foolish and blasphemous extravagances. A few more very Holy Relics will be described in a forthcoming article.

### Pius XII Protest Meeting

AT A CROWDED MEETING in the Caxton Hall on Thursday October 30th, organised by the National Secular Society, but enthusiastically supported by many Protestants, F. A. Ridley, Adrian Pigott, Avro Manhattan and Hector Hawton spoke on the subject, "Pius XII: Man of Peace or Ally of Dictators?" As the Chairman, Colin McCall, explained, the meeting had been called at short notice to try to counteract the uncritical eulogies of the late Pope on the BBC and in the British Press.

He read messages of support from Viscount Alexander of Hillsborough (President of the U.K. Council of Protestant Churches), H. R. Trevor-Roper (Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford) and C. Bradlaugh Bonner (President of the World Union of Free-thinkers).

Speaking first, Mr. Ridley dealt with the historical background of the Papacy and British Protestantism. Citing 17th-century John Pym's observation that the Church of Rome speaks humbly of loving kindness and moderation when in a minority, but thinks more of exterminating the heretic when it is in power, Mr. Ridley said that the tremendous publicity it had lately received had strengthened the Roman Church in its attempted comeback in this country. The late Pope had been first and foremost a diplomat and he had successfully accomplished the amazing switch from supporting Fascism to supporting Democracy.

Mr. Pigott thought the Pope had been helped in this by the blunders of Stalin, which Pius had exploited to the full to drive a wedge between the two potentially progressive systems of Democracy and Communism in the interest of his own reactionary Rome. During his 32 years' service in the Royal Navy, Mr. Pigott had noted the degradation in countries where the Roman Catholic religion predominated. But he spoke mainly of a country he had visited since his retirement, Yugoslavia. Here, as Mr. Pigott said, Roman Catholic atrocities during the pontificate of Pius XII were among the most terrible in history.

Mr. Manhattan then dealt chronologically with the late Pope's career, showing his close connection with the rise of Nazism in Germany, quoting from the Hitler-Pacelli Concordat, and commenting on the Pope's significant silence at crucial moments. It was only—said Mr. Manhattan—when the tide of war began to turn in favour of the Allies that Pius turned in their direction, too. And since the war he had instigated a hate-campaign.

Concluding, Mr. Hawton laid stress upon perhaps the worst of all Pius XII's silences: that on nuclear disarmament. It was said that Curia Cardinal Ottaviani had urged the late Pope to condemn nuclear war as immoral. Had he condemned the H-bomb—said Mr. Hawton—I should not have needed to come here this evening. But the alleged "Pope of Peace" had not done so.

The audience fully appreciated the four speakers and the telling, factual way in which they had presented the case against Pope Pius XII as a man of peace. The Chairman then put the following motion to the meeting:

"This meeting draws attention to the uncritical eulogies of Pius XII on the BBC and in the great majority of the British Press, whereby the ally of dictators was presented as the Pope of Peace. It urges these organs to correct their misrepresentation, which might be feasible in a Roman Catholic country but is totally out of place in a Protestant land."

It was passed overwhelmingly and with acclamation, there being only half a dozen dissentients. Copies of it have since been sent to the Prime Minister, Mr. Gaitskell, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the BBC and various news agencies.

### Lone Wolves

By D. SHIPPER

MY FRENCH-CANADIAN CORRESPONDENT, Robert Hudon (of Val D'Or, Quebec), tells me there are no groups of organised freethinkers, rationalists or humanists in the province of Quebec, a Catholic stronghold. For several years Mr. Hudon has been endeavouring to organise such a group, but is still "a lone wolf, fighting the corner." Although he has made many approaches to people he knows are rationalists, they are mostly business men or in public employment and, being afraid of discrimination, are unwilling to help, or even join, a rationalist society.

The people of Quebec are completely dominated by the R.C. Church, who work hand-in-glove with the present government. The R.C.s have infiltrated all public services and all levels of society and Catholic Action, with its many different branches, acts as an efficient hierarchical Gestapo, the groups even spying on each other.

The workers themselves are, generally speaking, not particularly religious and are even interested in hearing a "good de-bunking talk," but "at school they have learned nothing but prayers." Therefore, most of them take little interest in reading, French rationalist literature being practically unobtainable.

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### ONTARIO

IN ONTARIO, Canada, I hear from Mrs. Helen Elkington, who went to Canada as a "war bride." Since that time she has not met one person with similar views, rationalists apparently being a "rare animal" in Canada, and is always glad to exchange letters with people of similar mind.

The R.C. domination of Quebec and the Maritime Provinces extends to much of Ontario, and Cornwall, Mrs. Elkington's home-town, is only a few miles from the Quebec border and is roughly half-French, half-English.

Helen Elkington was educated at a R.C. school in Yorkshire (although not from a R.C. family) and so is well qualified to assert that the French-Canadian R.C.s "are an entirely different brand from the British ones." Her house is surrounded by Catholics, "living and dead," as besides a large majority of the neighbourhood being R.C., a Catholic cemetery faces her house. The R.C.s do not seem to have progressed since the days of Jacques Cartier, and many of their ideas are nothing but mediæval superstitions. They have "a very good crop of home-grown saints," most of whom are unknown overseas, St. Jovite, St. Hyacinthe, St. Eustache, etc., most of the Quebec villages being named after saints.

In national politics, the Liberal Party (most certainly a misnomer, says Mrs. Elkington) is mainly French-Canadian R.C. and the Conservative Party mostly English Protestant. The other parties are numerically negligible and the majority of Canadians "get their politics when they are born, at the same time as their religion." Among religionists in prominent political positions is a provincial premier, Mr. Manning of Alberta, who is a minister of a Fundamentalist sect. When a house is assessed for taxes a note is made of the occupant's religion and the council sets aside a portion of the tax collected for schools, this being shared between "public" and R.C. schools according to the numbers of taxpayers of each religion. In Cornwall (at least) the R.C.s pay a higher school tax than the Protestants. Mrs. Elkington doubts that the quality of education in R.C. schools justifies the extra cost and thinks a certain amount is apparently taken for building new churches. Many R.C. parents send their children to R.C. schools only long enough to learn the rudiments of their religion and then transfer them to "public" schools. In these the first half-hour of the day is given to religion (prayers, etc.), but my correspondent feels sure that when possible other subjects are given a religious slant. The local radio station provides almost nothing but "so-called popular music and cowboy moanings," but two-thirds of Sunday programmes are religious. Although the national service is not quite so bad, there is no such thing as open discussion of religion. Mrs. Elkington complains bitterly that the cowboy ballads were bad enough before, but lately, instead of crying because their girls have left them, they seem to have "got religion" and when switching on for the news or a weather forecast, one is forced to listen to the choice of some "half-witted disc jockey" singing a general invitation to "Stroll Down the Path to the Little White Church in the Wood"—this accompanied by sound-effects of birds singing, a poem to follow, and then the playing of a hymn.

Concluding, Helen Elkington writes of the loneliness of the "lone wolf" and how envious she is of those who are able to join in branch activities.

With local library stocking nothing in the freethought line, she is starved of literature.

So I will end with an appeal—if any readers have freethought literature they have finished with, don't throw it away (it's too rare for that anyway!) but send to Mrs. M. Elkington, 434 Eleventh Street W., Cornwall, Ontario, Canada.

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### NATAL

MY CORRESPONDENT IN NATAL (South Africa) is Mr. S. J. Barker, of Mooi River. Mr. Barker, an N.S.S. member, has been reading THE FREETHINKER since before the last war when, as a student on Tyneside, he attended lectures given by the late John T. Brighton.

Mr. Barker reports that there is no organised rationalism in Natal, all the whites being engrossed in money-making, pleasure-seeking, religion, or politics, whilst the native Africans, it appears to my correspondent, are still largely bound by their ancient superstitions and traditions, this applying even to the "de-tribalised" natives working among the "whites," far from the native locations. Only a small percentage are practising orthodox Christians. Mr. Barker points out that his experience is based on the backward rural natives, generally illiterate. This type are usually "flat-earthers."

Although Mr. Barker has had discussions with several people locally (including the C. of E. padre), he has only found one person with rationalistic views.

As in other parts of the Union the Dutch Reformed Church is the most powerful sect among the whites (who are in a minority of roughly one to four compared to non-whites) of Natal. The members of this Church are remarkably loyal and subservient to it and even most of the smaller villages (besides the towns) have new, strikingly designed churches. This is in marked contrast to the "British" churches.

Mr. Barker thinks Apartheid is unworkable and doomed to failure. In a dozen generations the population will be predominantly coloured, in spite of the anti-miscegenation laws. Already in some areas it is difficult to tell who is a "pure-bred white."

Mr. Barker feels that rationalistic views on life lead the holders to have fewer children, therefore rationalists continually tend to die out and are swamped by the unthinking majority. "Many parents use religion as a conscience salve for having produced their children, the gift of existence being hardly a blessing to the recipient!"

## CORRESPONDENCE

### FISHY

Because a fabulous Christ was fabulously crucified on a fabulous Friday, the Roman Church has decreed that no meat shall be eaten on Friday, but only fish! Why should fish be "butchered" to make a Roman Holy Day? The question arises, "Should Catholics be fishmongers, or should fishmongers be Catholics?" Certainly the latter out of gratitude, for the possible addition of one-seventh to their sales! Who originated this idea? Perhaps it was some ancient Pope or Cardinal whose father was a fishmonger and who wished to give the family business a "leg up!"

W.D.K.

- CAN MATERIALISM EXPLAIN MIND?** By G. H. Taylor. Price 3/6; postage 6d.
- THE PAPACY IN POLITICS TODAY.** By Joseph McCabe. Price 2/6; postage 5d.
- A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP.** By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.
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