

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXVIII—No. 52

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

## Christmas Again

By H. CUTNER

MOST FREETHINKERS are well aware that the festival we call Christmas is a purely pagan holiday taken bodily over by Christians when they invented the story of Jesus Christ and his Virgin Birth. It is a re-hash of a number of myths associated with the Persian and Roman Sun God Mithras, but actually December 25th was kept long before Mithras. The Romans, in fact, kept the day in honour of Bacchus, and called it Brumalia; and, as Gibbon notes, the day was also called "Natalis Solis Invicti," the birthday of the Invincible Sun. The curious thing about this is that the early Christians were by no means disposed at first to hold the birthday of Jesus on the same day as the pagan Romans held it for the Invincible Sun, and historians have noted that no fewer than 136 dates have been associated with the birth of Jesus by various Christian sects, some fixing it in February, others in August, and still others in January. December 23rd was finally fixed by Pope Julius I in 337 A.D., most probably because the pagans who were converted to Christianity could not be persuaded to give up their pagan revels on that day in honour of the Sun. There is not, of course, any evidence whatever for the birth of Jesus on any particular day, but December 25th, as a universal holiday going back in all probability thousands of years, is as good as any other for the birthday of a mythical Saviour.

Each country in Europe no doubt had its own special way of celebrating the feast long before Christianity became the dominant religion; and so in England, for example, we still call Christmas "Yuletide," the word "Yule" coming here with the Northmen—the Danes, the Saxons, and other "pagans," and with them came also their riotous feasting and drinking which (though perhaps sobered down a little these days) still distinguish Christmas as a "sacred" holiday.

But apart from this, the Church early discovered that its strongest hold was the Mother and Babe theme, then and always the most wonderful thing in life. It is not

surprising therefore to find it the theme in many other religions—in Egypt we get Isis and Horus, in India, Krishna and Devaki, as well as Buddha and Maya, and there are dozens more. Nearly all the Gods had virgin mothers, but the point I wish to make is the way the Mother and Child theme permeated nearly all religions. (Judaism, by the way, is one of the exceptions.)

Thus it is not surprising that, apart from all the eating and drinking, the Church concentrated a big effort in propagating its religion in connection with the Nativity. The two stories in Matthew and Luke were sung to music, and as soon as possible the Church employed artists to depict them. Here, of course, the Church was particularly lucky for there is no subject under the sun which appeals to many artists more than a mother with her infant child.

It became in the hands of those artists called "Italian primitives," to say nothing of artists in other lands, perhaps their most popular subject. They put into their work the naïveté we expect from them in those early days before the Renaissance—beauty, tenderness, lovely colour, and so on. These paintings, no doubt whatever, helped the

Church as much as the publicity given it these days by the radio and TV; and when the Renaissance came with its magnificent galaxy of perhaps the greatest artists the world has even seen, all at the service of the Church, it is not surprising that many of the world's masterpieces in painting have made the Mother and Child their principal theme. How many pictures of the Nativity have been painted it is perhaps now quite impossible to estimate, but Rembrandt, Titian, Botticelli, Credi, Rubens, Correggio, Murillo, Rubens, Velasquez, and many others in the past, to say nothing of scores of modern artists, all gave us of their best, to the great joy of the Church. And, of course, we must not forget the thousands of reconstructions of the Nativity in the form of "cribs" in churches all over Christendom, gazed upon by thousands of children wild-eyed with wonder and delight.



"... yes, as you say, at least we would be much warmer down there."

Mary giving birth to Jesus is the story which the Churches rely on perhaps more than the Crucifixion for making Christians, for it is of universal appeal. The birth of a baby is the most wondrous event in life and it has always been so. The helpless babe reaches out to the heartstrings of humanity as nothing else does. In taking over the Mother and Babe from pagan religions, the Christian Church made them its greatest asset.

But the strange thing is that the people who make up the modern crib generally go wrong in details, just as the great painters followed some of the stories related in the Apocryphal Gospels rather than Matthew or Luke. The crib shows Jesus and his mother in a stable where he is supposed to have been born. But according to Matthew, he was born not in a stable, but in a *house*.

And there is another point which believers in the birth story never seem to take into account. *How* did Mary give birth to Jesus? Was she alone, did she have a midwife, or a doctor, or what? Were hot water and blankets, etc., available? If Mary was fifteen or sixteen years old at the time, surely she would have been pretty helpless?

Most of the great paintings show Jesus in a stable with horses, cows, and other animals looking reverently on; and most of them appear to be uncertain whether to depict the Magi or the Shepherds or both in the picture. This is understandable because, while Matthew insists on the Magi—the Wise Men—Luke appears to know nothing

about them. He plumps for shepherds, and the angelic choir about whom (or which) Matthew knows nothing. We get the Flight into Egypt only from Matthew, for Luke is quite certain that the "Holy Family" remained in Palestine. Yet the Flight has always been a favourite subject for artists who can invariably make great play with Joseph as an old man with a stick, a beautiful girl-mother and her babe, and, of course, a mule or a donkey to take them on their journey.

Artists have also been attracted towards the Massacre of the Innocents—a story which is just as true as the story of Ali Baba. In fact, all these stories have marvellous pictorial possibilities, and paintings of them have been more than a Godsend to the Church. To see the things written about in the Precious Word depicted for us so vividly by great artists has made them real in the eyes of the multitude. It is much easier to believe than to bother about the "cold-hearted" analyses of Freethinkers. That is why the task of Freethought has always been so difficult.

Still, if we can do nothing else at the time, we too can enjoy the "paganism" in Christianity. We too can eat and drink—wisely—and take part in festivities which have come to us from a remote past when the Sun was worshipped, newly reborn every year, the veritable Light of the World. I never have believed in a dismal outlook at this time of the year. And I have pleasure in wishing a Happy Christmas to all our readers.

## Mother of God and Christmas Stamps

By DR. EDWARD ROUX

TO SOUTH AFRICAN FREETHINKERS the hullabaloo over the Christmas stamps has proved most entertaining. Sold every year for the dependants of tuberculosis sufferers, these stamps serve a worthy cause and the fund is administered without racial discrimination. The row occurred because certain Protestants, led by the Dutch Reformed Churches, objected to the design on the stamps (Virgin and Child complete with haloes), declaring that it was "Roman Catholic propaganda." When the stamps were withdrawn and a different design substituted, the Catholics held protest services, saying that their feelings had been terribly hurt "by the discourtesy shown to the greatest woman of all time." Hollander ex-Catholic priest Hegger, now stumping the country on behalf of Calvinism, supported the view that the picture was part of a Catholic plot. Someone discovered an old Dutch-Reformed Bible with an illustration of the Madonna and Child bearing haloes. Finally the artist who designed the stamp was found. He was Harald Prager, of Salisbury, Rhodesia, and he declared himself an agnostic.

In the course of this verbal scrum, from which the Calvinists appear to have emerged without the ball, very little was said about the real nature of haloes and madonnas. Protestants who, like other Christians, hold that God was the father of Jesus and that Mary was his mother, must accept the view that the young woman had a unique experience. Why, then, do they object to the fuss the Catholics make about "Our Lady"? They object because they consider that the cult of the Madonna, as well as many other Catholic practices, are concessions to polytheistic paganism. In this, of course, they are factually correct, as every unprejudiced student of religion knows. It is only necessary to look at Erich Neumann's book, *The Great Mother* (1955) to convince oneself of this. A glance at the illustrations alone should suffice. Here is the ancient Hindu picture of the Queen of Heaven with her Son. They

are surrounded by a halo. Other pictures show a statue of the Egyptian goddess Isis with her son Horus, and a pre-Colombian Peruvian statue on similar lines. Demeter and Kore appear in a figure from ancient Greece. And so it goes on. The Roman Catholics were clever enough to incorporate the popular and widespread fertility-moon goddess cult into their own religion. The halo, of course, has an obvious lunar or solar origin.

But the Bible-thumping Protestants, who pride themselves on having got rid of pagan polytheism, should realise that their own religion is not as "pure" as they think it is. It contains large pagan accretions without which it would no longer be recognisable as Christianity. This can readily be demonstrated.

Before the beginning of the Christian era orthodox Judaism had reduced its accessory gods to human status, abolished ritual prostitution and human sacrifice and had become a pure monotheism based on Jahweh-worship. A certain group of Jews who believed that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah was at first merely another sect within the body of Judaism. Some of them apparently conceived the idea of making Christianity a universal religion. Consciously or unconsciously they proceeded to incorporate into their dogma and ritual all manner of religious ideas and customs current in the Near East at that time. Their God, like all the other rival gods, was given a miraculous birth. Like the Egyptians, they produced a trinity. Like many other religions they introduced the symbolic eating of the god and the drinking of his blood—a rite stemming from primitive ritual cannibalism. They incorporated the Yule-tide festival and made it coincide with the birth of Christ; they adopted the spring festival of Easter and made it correspond with their God's crucifixion and resurrection. With a trinity purely masculine, they would never have won over the women (as their chief

(Concluded on next page)

# Republicanism and the British Commonwealth

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY, in common with other organisations of a similar, if less pronounced unorthodoxy, is a non-political organisation, at least in the sense that it does not subscribe, nor does it require its members to subscribe, to any particular political party. Indeed, the N.S.S. is perhaps the only society in Great Britain which contains within its ranks every conceivable type of political belief from the extreme Left to the extreme Right. Is there any other long-established body in this country which includes both Tories and Communists—not to mention a wide assortment of intermediate opinions within its politically comprehensive ranks?

However, whilst British Secularism is not, and never has been, party political, some of its more permanent aims and objects possess a clearly-defined political slant. In particular, I refer to those clauses proclaiming that it is permanently opposed to anything in the nature of hereditary rule and privilege. If logically applied to the current political scene, these imply the eventual abolition of both hereditary monarchy and the Second, still largely hereditary Chamber, that old Radical bogey, "their Lordships' House." This aim was pursued with much greater energy in the Society's early years than in our present age of political conformity.

Charles Bradlaugh, the founder and first President of the N.S.S., was about equally well known in his day as a political radical and a trenchant critic of the Victorian monarchy, as he was of traditional theism and the Established Church. His stormy electioneering at Northampton was as much a part of the scene as were his later forcibly frustrated efforts to affirm as an Atheist in the House of Commons. In the 1870s, "Senor Carlos Bradlaw" (*sic*) was greeted by the partisans of the short-lived First Spanish Republic, as the accredited representative of the militant and growing English Republican movement which, about that time, waxed considerably on popular discontent at Queen Victoria's absence from her official duties after the death of the Prince Consort. At that period, apart from Bradlaugh and Holyoake, English Republicanism could command the adherence of two rising young politicians, Joseph Chamberlain and Sir Charles Dilke. But Bradlaugh was probably the best known, and a Tory journal expressed the disgust then felt by "respectable" England when it declared that Northampton represented "a stinking den of Republican cobblers."

Since about 1880, Republicanism in Britain has been a declining force. The principal reasons for this were the rise of Imperialism, which needed a monarchical figurehead, and the later preoccupation of the young Labour movement with economic, rather than constitutional, reform. Outside the numerically not very important groups of the extreme Left, Republicanism is seldom heard of nowadays, even in Northampton, where Bradlaugh's present successor, Mr. R. T. Paget (Labour) signed a loyal address at Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation. (He also told me that Bradlaugh was "a great Christian"!.) However, it must be added that the steady decline in the Republican camp has not been without effect in the N.S.S. as well. One rarely hears this cause advocated on the platform. During the long "reign" of Chapman Cohen, in particular, the Republicanism of the Society appears to have hibernated.

Meanwhile, however, political evolution has not stood still. During the present century, and particularly since 1945, the British Empire has progressively given way to the "Commonwealth," in which consent replaces one-sided

force as the unifying political factor. Whatever the future fortunes of the British Commonwealth, it is clear that it is more flexible than the Empire. Indeed, it possesses one feature which is novel and perhaps unique in political evolution. It is now possible for republics to co-exist with a monarchy! India and Pakistan today; Ghana and perhaps other future Dominions tomorrow; all acknowledge a Queen—and a member of Bradlaugh's detested "House of Brunswick"—as Head of the Commonwealth. It now appears to be an accepted axiom that any constituent member of the Commonwealth can opt for a republican form of government, and this presumably includes Great Britain herself.

It is, I think, worth noting that it is perfectly possible to transform Britain into a republic by a strictly peaceful and constitutional process within the current political framework. Every Republican—and I take it that most Secularists are still that, whatever their political affiliation—may now note that all they have to do is to get a parliamentary majority, and then declare Britain herself, like India, a republic. No bloody revolution would be necessary, nor would any public executions in Whitehall. No guillotine need be imported from beyond the Channel. Her present Majesty (or her successor) could be quietly pensioned off with a life peerage as "Head of the Commonwealth" and everyone would be happy—most of all, perhaps, the Queen herself!

Meanwhile we are sure those great English Republicans and Humanists of the past, Bradlaugh, Owen and Paine, would rejoice in the Elysian Fields at this simultaneous demonstration of peaceful political and ethical progress.

## MISFIRE

MR. G. H. TAYLOR had an odd experience when representing the N.S.S. in a recent discussion on Christianity and Freethought at Guy's Hospital. His main opponent, Dr. Boyd, Lecturer in Physics, during the course of his speech, suddenly drew a gun and levelled it at Mr. Taylor. After several minutes, during which he continued his address and kept the gun trained on Mr. Taylor, he fired a loud blank, apparently hoping to make his opponent jump. Whatever point he was making was lost in the general surprise. Mr. Taylor opened his reply with "Now we'll have some fireworks of a different sort." As was the case last year, the N.S.S. viewpoint was received with enthusiasm by the medical students.

## MOTHER OF GOD AND CHRISTMAS STAMPS

(Concluded from previous page)

rival, Mithraism, had failed to do) had they not adopted the cult of the Great Mother and put their own Mary in the place of the moon goddess. The babe in the manger, the star in the east and the wise men, subject matter of Christmas carols, cards and sermons, are a heritage which Christianity shares with pagan religions.

In any case it is difficult to see why polytheism should seem so wicked. It certainly leads to greater variety in worship. And why not goddesses as well as gods? Why should males have a monopoly of divinity? Possibly the Calvinist objection to the Great Mother is based in part on certain passages in the Gospels, where Jesus deals rather peremptorily with his mother—"Woman, what have I to do with thee?" That is not a very gracious way of addressing one's mother, even if she were not the Queen of Heaven.

## This Believing World

After the triumphant election of the new Pope an election which the press, the radio, and TV, did their utmost to publicise (much to the delight of the Catholic hierarchy) we now get "the deluge" ("After us, the Deluge," said Louis XV), the Christmas deluge, Jesus as the Holy Babe of Bethlehem, and the Magi, and the Star in the East, and the Adoring Shepherds, with *all* the Churches taking first place this time—perhaps not altogether to the delight of Rome—on the press, the radio, and TV. If the scene is set as well as it was last year, or better, we shall have forced on to us a surfeit of religion guaranteed to go at least one better than even the election of the Pope.

★

That all this will be mixed up with "commercialism," the selling and buying of Christmas presents and cards, and as much guzzling in the way of food and drink as possible, is also quite true. But the Babe of Bethlehem will be the keynote of it all. Our parsons and priests—no matter how destructive has been the criticism of the famous birth stories in the two Gospels with its primitive nonsense of Angels singing Hosannahs in Heaven—will do their utmost to bring in all the superstition and credulity Christmas can bolster up for them. And, above all, God's Precious Word, the Bible, will be held up to the world again as unchallengeable, unbeatable, as always, God's most Precious Gift to man. Is it not fantastic?

★

Still, not all the time do we get Christmas backed up to the utmost. In the *Daily Express* for December 13th, 1958, was a not-so-holy satire on the venerable and sacred institution by its political correspondent, Mr. W. Barkley. He pokes fun at the way the Tory Government nationalised Christmas in 1971, after denationalising the mines, railways, electrical and gas industries, which were all sold for £5,000 millions; and this made it possible for Britain to be untaxed for a year. The inevitable result was "an orgy of Yuletide buying." To stop this, Christmas was nationalised as it had "never failed yet" to stop indiscriminate buying.

★

But the real point of the satire was not its political implications as much as the fact that Mr. Barkley hadn't a word to say about Christmas as a Holy and Sacred Feast commemorating the Birth of the Babe of Bethlehem and the Saviour of the World. Not a word about the year 1 A.D. being the greatest year in the history of the world. All he could think of was that Christmas was the time of riotous spending and a purely secular event. What a good thing for Mr. Barkley that Freethinkers have literally put out the fires of Hell!

★

In "News Chronicle" for the same date was an article by Mr. T. Baistow on "How Strong are Britain's Catholics?" It is purely a factual one and, of course, does not study the religion. We are informed that there are now 4½ millions of Catholics in Britain, and that in spite of the much higher Catholic birthrate and the constant stream of immigrants from Ireland (about 35,000 every year), "the Catholic Church loses more adherents than it gains by conversion." Probably Mr. Baistow does not know that "once a Catholic always a Catholic" is the rule by which the Church estimates its numbers of "believers." We wonder how many of the millions of born Catholics are as fanatical believers as the distinguished converts we are always hearing about?

★

But though Rome can claim these converts, and though conversions have increased 30% since the war, Mr.

Baistow does not think that Britain is going Catholic. He considers "the gains in relation to the growth of population are surprisingly unspectacular." That may be so, but is the Church of Rome itself so unspectacular? Would not his own (one-time Nonconformist) organ give as much publicity as it possibly could if there were another election of a Pope, and even more so if possible if the new Pope was an Englishman? The Church of Rome these days laps up criticism—what it fears is to be ignored. Publicity, publicity, and more publicity, is its modern slogan.

★

It is not surprising that members of the Church of England consider that the Christianity of the Witnesses of Jehovah is rank heresy, and in Bury they recently planned to counteract their door-to-door campaign. We wonder how the C. of E.s have got on? Nothing interests us so much as the way one Christian sect attacks another Christian sect, and all in the name of Jesus Christ. One thing does stand out, however: it is that Christianity is so like a nose of wax that no matter how you try to change or mould it, it still remains a nose of wax. Any Christian sect can easily prove it is absolutely right by going to the Bible. That is why they all flourish.

### THEATRE

## Hot Summer Night

By TED WILLIS

(New Theatre, London)

THE SUBJECT of *Colour Bar* has been smoothly written into dramatic form by a capable author. The difficulty is to find a solution to the problem, and this can only come about if all people can be converted to a reasonable and logical approach to it.

That a Black boy and a White girl love each other is as personal a matter as if they were two Whites or two Blacks. Alone they can be happy together, but in a community where so many have no experience of coloured people, they have to contend with hostile attitudes and humiliations.

Mr. Willis has aptly brought us into a working-class atmosphere, where one might expect to find some tolerance. For the worst possible mixture is class consciousness combined with colour prejudice. The father of the family is an open-minded trade union leader, ready to fight for any coloured man to see that he has fair treatment. But when his daughter falls in love with a Jamaican, he is influenced by his wife who reacts violently against the idea. She has been devoted to her home life and her husband's cause, but above all she dotes on her daughter whom she hopes will marry well. Therefore, she cannot be reconciled to the situation in the course of one evening in which the play takes place.

Joan Miller shows great sincerity in a magnificent performance as the mother, driven into hysterics by the mental shock of an unexpected crisis. John Slater is an honest-to-goodness husband of tough fibre and clear deliberation. Harold Scott is well cast as grandfather. André Melly and Lloyd Reckord bring reality and freshness to their love scenes, which are convincingly sealed by a kiss. Finally, Peter Cotes has spared nothing to make his production do full justice to the theme.

Some critics have said that this play solves nothing, and that the subject can be more suitably dealt with in films. Firstly, how can a solution to such an extensive problem be found in one evening at the theatre, when we know that it all depends on how future generations are educated to it? Secondly, this is a play for presentation in a theatre, and let us consider it as such, and in doing so leave the film to its own medium.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

## THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.

TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

Hon. Managing Editor: W. GRIFFITHS.

Hon. Editorial Committee:

F. A. HORNIBROOK, COLIN McCALL and G. H. TAYLOR.

All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s.; half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d. (In U.S.A.: 13 weeks, \$1.15; 26 weeks, \$2.25; 52 weeks, \$4.50.)

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

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.

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

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

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, December 28th, 7.15 p.m.: New Year Social Evening.

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 28th, 6.30 p.m.: New Year Party.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Upper Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 28th, 2.30 p.m.: H. H. POPPLEWELL, "Popplewell's Law."

## Notes and News

"HAVE you forgotten us? We hope you haven't," we read on the top of a circular received at the office the other week. In checking their files, the Irish publishers of *The Catholic Digest* found that we hadn't renewed our subscription. "This was probably an oversight," they remarked quite sweetly. But they were wrong. It was quite deliberate.

★

THE Minister of Education, the Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Lloyd, intends to increase Government allowances to Church schools and (*Daily Express*, 4/12/58) "hopes to get all-party agreement on their needs." The Roman Catholic Church is simultaneously demanding a 75% allowance against the 50% it at present enjoys. All Freethinkers should write to their M.P.s protesting against the suggested increase.

★

THE Rev. Clifford Rhodes, editor of *The Church of England Newspaper*, and well known for his outspoken and somewhat unorthodox views, has now turned his critical eye on the monarchy. Writing in the current issue of Lord Altrincham's magazine, *The National and English Review*, Mr. Rhodes describes the monarchy as "The core of contemporary English religion"; the only thing that can compete with "the sportsmen and the entertainers in drawing vast crowds in deliberate worship." But he regards it as "a very fragile symbol," and he proposes that an extended Privy Council of elder statesmen of the Commonwealth, or even the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference

should "nominate the heir from among the Royal Family." Victoria, thou should'st be living at this hour!

★

"THE Christian faith does not, thank God, depend upon scientific discoveries, or upon the size, position, movement or temperature of the earth, but on the truth of a living and personal God. Jesus... may have thought the earth was flat..." but, of course, it makes no difference, he is still the omniscient God! Just for the record, the writer of the quoted part above was the Rev. Peter Wilson, of Watford, Herts, in a letter to the *News Chronicle* following Mr. Fred Hoyle's statement of his atheistic view of the universe.

★

THERE has been an unholy row over a halo in South Africa. A Christmas stamp in aid of an anti-tuberculosis campaign bore a design of the Madonna and Child which, from the purely æsthetic standpoint, seems to have been quite a good one. But the Rev. A. M. Meiring, Transvaal Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church, noticed that the Virgin had a larger halo than the Child. (She had a bigger head, too, but let that pass!) This was "offensive to the Protestant and scriptural point of view." The figure of Mary is a special one for all Christians, said Mr. Meiring, but the "reformed Christian does not share the view of the Roman Catholic Church, which has bestowed on her a homage equal to that paid to the Saviour..." As our information on this squabble came from *The Universe* (November 28th) we expected the footnote that this allegation is, "of course, not true." But Dr. Roux has dealt with this matter more extensively on page 410.

★

THE same issue of *The Universe* quotes Father Agnellus Andrew, O.F.M., Roman Catholic adviser to the B.B.C., as saying that the Corporation "broke every rule" to put on the coronation of Pope John XXIII. "Never before has a period of four and a half hours been given to a single transmission of an event. Never before has a programme begun at 7.30 a.m." "The impact has been tremendous"—he added, and "The effect is incalculable."

★

IF you ever happen to visit the House of Lords—though personally we cannot see why you should unless Baroness Wootton or Baron Boothby happens to be speaking—and you notice a monk in the Chamber, don't think you have entered a monastic dormitory by mistake. No, you will be seeing the 47th Roman Catholic peer to take his seat, Father Peter Gilbey, O.S.B., who has claimed his right as Baron Vaux of Harrowden. But we learn with some disappointment that his parish duties will not allow him to attend the Lords very often.

★

READERS will have noted the disquieting fact that Roman Catholic Dr. Vittorino Veronese, former head of Catholic Action in Italy, is now Director General of U.N.E.S.C.O., having taken up that appointment on December 6th. We drew attention to his nomination in *THE FREETHINKER*, October 31st. The appointment is for six years, and a great deal of harm can be done in that time.

★

"THE Donkey, Too, Goes to Church on Christmas Night..."—Headline in *The Universe* (5/12/58).

No comment!

—NEXT WEEK—

NEGLECTED QUESTION

By G. I. BENNETT

## Free Will

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

RECENTLY I READ AN ARTICLE by Aldous Huxley which began, "The completely organised society, the scientific caste system, the abolition of free will by the methodical conditioning . . ."

Surely Huxley is sufficiently grown-up and conditioned to modern thought to avoid a loose employment of the term "free will" which has given rise to such a huge stream of theological and philosophical argument and acrimony.

Catholic theologians say that man's "Will" is entirely free, otherwise, I suppose, Sin would not be a theological reality. It is this use of the term in an absolute sense which has confused thinking on the matter. But before considering the scientific aspect, we might cast a glance at the effect of that most powerful of all Catholic motives, self-interest. If, as many scientists say, all behaviour is conditioned, and some actually automatic, and many authorities believe that crime and delinquency are inherited, Sin ceases to be real, in the sense that it is associated with lack of responsibility, and thus the huge vested interest of the Church in Sin vanishes and the huge financial rake-off from the sale of Absolution goes with it. So that in this matter the Church cannot be unbiased, and any arguments it advances are tainted. But even if the Church were completely honest, which is doubtful, its argument for Free Will would not stand up to examination.

There is of course such a thing as freedom of choice within a limited field. If my doting aunt gives me a large sum of money to be spent on a railway journey — my aunt being a big shareholder in railway stocks—I may choose to go from Birmingham to London or Manchester and it may be a matter of complete indifference which way I go; I am perfectly free to choose, which has no ethical, aesthetic, social or economic implications, except that, perhaps, I might have some compunction about spending money on an unnecessary journey imposed on me by my Aunt's singularly pure-hearted devotion to the directors of her particular railroad. In that case, of course, my expectation of future wealth when my Aunt dies, if ever, may have influenced my choice and this may have stemmed from an avaricious ancestor, because many altruistic people would probably refuse to spend my Aunt's gift in a wasteful way. But on the whole, my trip to London or Manchester would be an example of unexceptionable free choice. But the limits of choice in such a case are so extremely narrow that no moral imperative is in question. At this level there would be very little Absolution revenue. And I think that at any level there should not be any sense of guilt which cannot be dealt with by legal and psychological means instead of by a system which relieves a guilty person of all responsibility for wrongdoing once the guilt has been unloaded on a priest, who in turn dumps it on God.

The facts of wrongdoing are these. Every human inherits everything in his body — eye colour, hair colour, blood group, etc., and we inherit grades of intelligence and particularly grades of moral responsibility, so that from birth our behaviour is predetermined. Professor C. D. Darlington, a geneticist of the highest eminence, is sure the tendencies to Crime and Delinquency are inherited. Of course, environment can modify the inherited pattern. A counterfeiter, for instance, in goal would find the prison climate unfavourable to the production of home-made tenners. And to show how the tendency to crime or delinquency can be modified for the worse, let me quote, from a huge mass of data, the Sing Sing Prison Annual Report for 1925, and

from Healy and Bronner's "Delinquents and Criminals." Out of about 1,500 convicts in Sing Sing, 848 (60%) were Catholics, 300 (20%) were Protestants and 12 were non-religious. Catholics are 16% of the American population. Healy and Bronner studied 1,636 delinquents in Chicago; 90% had a religious background, 56% of the total being Catholics. Clearly there are three factors in the Catholic record. These people have a high inherited tendency to crime, something in Catholic belief or doctrine influences this tendency for the worse and I should think the rigid endogamy enforced by the clergy necessarily promotes a much higher crime rate than normal. Two parents with criminal tendencies would show a very strong probability of criminal offspring and the strong ban on "mixed" marriages outside the Church enforces union with a partner who has a higher crime tendency than in the general population.

To suggest that such an appalling crime rate is associated with absolute Free Will is to talk nonsense. No child or adult would choose a life of crime if free absolutely to choose. Heredity and close religious inbreeding are two of the factors that make Catholic criminals.

It is very curious to find the Catholic god treating his chosen terrestrial agency so badly.

## The Great Deception

By R. READER

EVEN TODAY, highly intelligent, gentle, kindly and well-meaning persons are still to be found. They are conciliatory and obliging by nature, and fundamentally averse to all sudden, violent happenings. They are, in fact, the foundation upon which all civilisation ultimately rests. Without them, the bear garden would be deprived even of those moments of guarded hostility which we call "peace," and the only remaining human emotions would be a fierce joy in savage victory, or the utter despair of abject defeat.

As a class, such people are disinclined to make efforts outside their own immediate work and interest. They instinctively distrust the too-close examination of things and ideas. Examinations reveal defects, defects suggest remedies, remedies spell changes, and changes only too often imply the sudden happenings they wish so much to avoid. Such people are not exactly lazy and gullible, but are inclined to take things at their face value. Often they promise themselves to look more closely into a matter when they "have a moment to spare." But they rarely do. Furthermore, having once accepted a proposition, their nature urges them to conserve it, even if it later shows defects.

Upon these people's strengths and weaknesses, religious neurosis plays with evil skill. To attempt to reason them into accepting dogma would be to risk defeat — once they give sufficient attention to an affair, they are extremely good reasoners. Therefore acceptance must be suggested through the five senses — particularly those of sight and hearing. Printed matter is therefore well-larded with words — "Prince of Peace," "Love," "Generosity," "Happiness," "Tranquility," "Justice" and so on, all of which evoke pleasurable images in the minds of such readers, who automatically approve the salesmen who so agreeably set out their desirable wares. And if, subsequently, such

readers can be driven into a building, the visual impressions of the printed page can be reinforced by auditive suggestions, delivered in a monotonous, hypnotic sing-song, or strikingly dramatic voice, accompanied by eloquent waving of the arms and other visual gestures, with olfactory-memory-stirring burning incense thrown in for good measure. In this manner, large numbers of intelligent kindly peace-loving folk are infected with religious neurosis. The whole process is analogous to the induction of sympathetic vibrations in one tuning fork by holding a second fork, of the same frequency, and already vibrating, near to it.

These people are implored to take off their rosy spectacles. When making an investment, they do not accept everything set out in the company prospectus. They examine the names and credentials of the men behind the concern, and its past record. Let them do likewise with religious neurosis. Behind the facade they will see a 2,000-years-old tradition of suffering, strife, tears and death; the systematic repression of all spontaneous natural behaviour, and its replacement by unnatural timorous indecision and fatuity; the slow persistent undermining of humanity's confidence in its own future; and the creation of a murderous atmosphere of moral judgment and condemnation, inviting all to envy, hate, persecute, rob, torture, and kill in the name of degeneracy and mental disease, the whole capped by the impudent assertion that, failing these things, we should be in a far worse plight! Let these people ask what is the real purpose of chanting dogma in a whining sing-song, if not to distract and lull the critical faculties of the hearers. What does the average sermon read like, when taken down verbatim by a shorthand writer and studied apart from the gesture and intonation? Frankly—the writer once had this done—it reads like the meanderings of the mentally deranged. Starting with a short quotation, each word is taken in turn and branched out in a lush growth of wildly-imaginative, almost completely-irrelevant "association." Every fortuitous circumstance is seized upon to keep the voice going: chance similarities in spelling of words; chance similarities in their sounds; repetition by inverting sentences; fantastic analogies, a slight tickle in the throat to break off, cough, and set out again on a new tack. It is as purely emotional as oratory delivered in a legislative chamber, a thing so devoid of connection and precision that it defies all attempts to discover what, if anything, was meant.

Kindly-intentioned people are the victims of this deception. They feel that, by supporting religious neurosis, if not by reason, at least financially, they are lessening the likelihood of upheaval and violence. They are doing precisely the opposite: they are making quite certain that the wild hopes, fears, and catastrophes of the bear-garden will continue.

## A Christmas Carol

*Time and Tide* set a competition for "a serious new Christmas carol or hymn, written with especial reference to the problems of our time." Their Christmas issue prints the efforts of the prize-winners, and two contributions particularly attracted our attention. One begins:

O little coloured Jewish boy,  
Whose birth was hailed by angel choir...

Another opens with a statement which should cause consternation in the pews, and was submitted by a gentleman living in a vicarage:

Mary had a child too soon;  
What will the neighbours say?  
All the exulting Host of Heaven  
Is praising Him today.

## A Freethinker Anthology for 1958

(Culled from the pages of *THE FREETHINKER* for the year.)  
AVRO MANHATTAN: Pope Pius XII not only co-operated with the bloodiest Fascist warmongers of the century, he actively helped them, first to get into power, so that they could start a war; then, by supplying them with quislings and the silent blessing of the Church, to wage it. (*October 31st.*)

H. CUTNER: There are no bigger frauds in the Spiritualist movement than "spirit" photographs, and whenever they are taken under *genuine* tests nothing ever happens. (*May 9th.*)

DR. J. V. DUHIG (Australia): The Lourdes miracle factory is the most cruel swindle of modern times. Al Capone, one of the Church's favourite sons, was a simple lisping baby in comparison. (*May 9th.*)

D. SHIPPER: Medical research into causes and treatment of homosexuality is hampered while much evidence is withheld for fear of prosecution. Medical men agree that adequate treatment for homosexuals cannot be provided in prison and that the prison atmosphere is hardly conducive to a cure. (*August 1st.*)

W. L. ARNSTEIN (U.S.A.): Perhaps from a practical point of view the most dangerous of the doctrines upheld by the R.C. Church today is its steadfast opposition to birth control. (*August 15th.*)

REV. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.: Above all else the chief enemy of happiness is Christianity, which casts its blight over almost every free activity of man. (*June 27th.*)

C. H. HAMMERSLEY: Whereas the discoveries of science have been of inestimable benefit to mankind, should we be any the poorer if religion were to vanish overnight? (*October 17th.*)

DR. EDWARD ROUX (S. Africa): Proteins are known to consist of large numbers of amino acids linked together. Amino acids have been made from certain gases by artificial lightning flashes. It is clear that the search for the origin of life has reached the experimental stage. (*May 23rd.*)

G. I. BENNETT: Cosmically insignificant as the myriad forms of life by which we are surrounded on this little planet of ours, this does not rob our living of its essential dignity and meaning for us. (*July 18th.*)

ERNEST BUSENBARK (U.S.A.): If the doctrine of vicarious atonement were true it would mean that there is one standard of justice on earth, and another, lower standard for divine justice. (*August 22nd.*)

COLIN MCCALL: No doubt because I was deprived of the infinite blessings of Holy Mother Church I can never quite appreciate the appeal of these paranoiac [R.C.] publications—they cannot be called literature—that are served up and lapped up in profusion. (*October 31st.*)

O. C. DREWITT (ex-Father Norbert, O.P.): Had the masses of people not had their capacity for freedom curtailed by religious morality... the feudal and bourgeois forms of society could never have arisen. (*May 23rd.*) It can be argued scientifically that religious training deforms the free character. (*April 4th.*)

DR. M. BEDDOWS BAYLY: The justification of vivisection involves the "right" of the strong to exploit the weak, of the clever to take advantage of the less well-endowed. (*March 28th.*)

J. GORDON: In science or medicine you might lose your job for not thinking enough, but in the Church you can be dismissed for thinking too much. (*October 10th.*)

LEON SPAIN (U.S.A.): Christianity has found it difficult to operate on an equal basis with other religions and has sought to abolish, when and where it could, competing religious bodies. If unable to abolish them it has sought a privileged or established position for itself. (*October 24th.*)

RUBY TA'BOIS: If it were possible to kill superstition by ridicule astrology would have been dead for more than two hundred years. (*October 10th.*)

F. A. RIDLEY: When the Vatican parades before the world in democratic sheepskins, it remains, and from its totalitarian nature, always will remain, as Fascist at heart as when it wore the black shirt of Italian Fascism and drowned Spanish Democracy in its own blood. (*Dec. 19th.*)

C. G. L. DU CANN: After reading this novel [*The Keys of St. Peter*] no one would trust the Roman Church with the keys of a child's money box let alone the keys of Heaven and Hell—unless all these receptacles are empty. (*March 28th.*)

DR. J. WILSON JONES: Many of the contemporary ills and world-wide troubles are no more than the outward symptoms of the birth of a new age in which man begins to realise that his salvation lies within himself, not in some heavenly Mount Olympus. (*March 14th.*)

ARTHUR G. CROMWELL (U.S.A.): Rationalism is the open door, the "welcome mat," to human knowledge. (*July 25th.*)

F. J. CORINA: If the curious manner of Jesus's alleged conception was not insemination by donor, I don't know what is. (*April 4th.*)

DR. AXEL STERN: Since we understand children and childish animism, and fairy tales and poetry, we can in the same way understand people's talk about God. (*Sept. 26th.*)

R. READER (Belgium): A world war is simply a biological drama which carries out, brutally and inhumanly, a task (the reduction of population) which reason should have accomplished harmlessly two decades before. (*April 18th.*)

A. B. HEWSON (U.S.A.): The Roman Church has consistently competed with Communism in an attempt to infiltrate and control American labour unions in the interest of its eventual domination of American government. (*March 7th.*)

"P. G. ROY": The idea that rest is tantamount to gloom could only generate in an unhealthy mind less concerned with Man than with a God in whose name they pretend to speak. (*August 22nd.*)

DR. GUY VALOT (France): There is nothing at Lourdes except pseudo-miracles of suggestion. . . . Since we got good pulmonary radiographs there has not been a single cure claimed of pulmonary T.B., while in that happy epoch when there were no radiographs of cases which could not be understood, the medical bureau at Lourdes recognised hundreds of cures! (*March 21st.*)

G. H. TAYLOR: While the scientist cannot change marsupials into monkeys, geology shows that evolution has had countless ages at its disposal. Those who contend that science cannot do this, that and the other, must show that it cannot do these things in *equal time*. (*May 23rd.*)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### RELIGION AND CRIME

The article by Dr. Duhig (December 5th) goes surely a little too far. For example, from the proportions of the various religions in Sing Sing prison in 1925, he deduces that "the non-religious taxpayer has to carry not only religion but also the cost of religion's criminals in gaol." May I ask what proportion of the criminals said they had a religion just to get out of prison sooner and not because they actually followed one?

But obviously a person who has been influenced by religion in some way or another can fall into temptation and commit a crime, since the religion has no physical control over him. As I see it, the only fair way to look at the question is to ask: "If this person had not been influenced by the religion, would he have committed a worse crime, or even more than one crime?"

It is very easy, in general, to pile up the bad facts about religion from its history since prehistoric times, as it is with any system of thought, not excluding Freethinking. But since history

is the story of moral and material progress (at least on average) the vital question is: "Would the world have been better or worse, richer or poorer (in both senses) at the time without the system of thought?" Not that I would like to defend religion from some of the charges Dr. Duhig lays against it. But to array the bad facts against the pagan and non-religious civilisations in history would surely be distasteful to him, requiring more paper than he has available.

I believe that rationalism (*i.e.* genuine free-thinking) provides a certain basis for a modern "Liberal" religion. Dr. Duhig says he would cut it out like a cancer and leave nothing; just as one might forbid all children's fairy tales at bedtime, because they are untrue and give some sensitive children nightmares. D.M. (B.Sc.). [Certain points in the above letter would seem to be covered by Dr. Duhig's article on page 414.—Ed.]

### FREEMASONRY

I find the views of H. Cutner rather odd for a Freethinker when he speaks on non-religious questions. For instance, in reply to P. G. Roy he says "... isn't [Freemasons helping one another] exactly what Trade Unionists, Communists, Catholics, Jews and many more 'closed shops' do?" Is Mr. Cutner in favour of the "closed shop"? Does he uphold the *exclusive* character of these sectarian co-operatives which actually help themselves to the detriment of other people? Let him clarify his position, please.

E. CROSSWELL.

### OBITUARY

ERNEST ROBERT HAWKRIDGE was a keen and forthright Freethinker, prevented, alas, by his work from doing all he would have liked for the movement and the West Ham and District Branch of the National Secular Society to which he belonged. His death just before his 67th birthday followed a long illness and his last days were marred by an act of Roman Catholic cruelty, but he never wavered in his views. A Secular Service was conducted at the City of London Crematorium by the General Secretary of the N.S.S. after Mr. Hawkridge's working colleagues had paid a moving silent tribute. Mrs. Warner represented the West Ham Branch. We send our sympathy to Mrs. Hawkridge and her son.

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.

FREEDOM'S FOE—THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott. A collection of Danger Signals for those who value liberty. 128 pages. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims. By Avro Manhattan. 2nd Edition—Revised and Enlarged. Price 21/-; postage 1/3.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen. Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound. Price 7/6 each series; postage 7d. each.

PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT. By Chapman Cohen. Price 3/- (specially reduced price); postage 5d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED (Third edition). By Chapman Cohen. Price 5/6; postage 7d.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE. 18 of Chapman Cohen's celebrated pamphlets bound in one volume. Indispensable for the Freethinker. Price 5/6; postage 8d.

WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? By H. Cutner. Price 1/3; postage 4d.

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL. By Chapman Cohen. Well illustrated. Now available. Price 6/-; postage 7d.

AGE OF REASON. Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen. Cloth 4/-; postage 7d.

HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST. British Christianity critically examined. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 1/-; postage 3d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4/6; postage 6d.

A CHRONOLOGY OF BRITISH SECULARISM. By G. H. Taylor. Price 1/-; post 2d.