

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXX—No. 1

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

*Address to the International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers in Brussels, September, 1959.*

WE ARE MET to do honour, in our deliberations, to Francisco Ferrer—a man who, in many ways, was ahead of his time in trying to free education from those shackles of power which are always in danger of binding it; and I would like to begin by adding my warm appreciation of Ferrer and his work to those statements of appreciation which have already been made by others. As I see it however, the best way in which to honour a man whose character and principles we admire is to continue to pursue those principles and to interpret them afresh and apply them effectively to the problems of our own day.

In some ways, and in some parts of the world especially, the problems which face those who love liberty and independence of thought are the same as they have ever been, and as they are always in danger of being in human life. The arbitrary power and privilege attached to religion, race, and narrow conceptions of nationality are still as strongly entrenched and have to be just as strongly attacked. Indeed—even in countries which have moved far in the direction of liberty in education (as, for example, in Great Britain)—the formal influence of religion in schools and other institutions is far greater than the known lack of interest and conviction in Christianity on the part of the majority of citizens warrants. In Africa most markedly, in the U.S.A., and in Britain, even, the sinister aspects of racial prejudice are still too powerfully manifested for the comfort and complacency of our consciences. The principles of social justice—in spite of the nominal acceptance of them by the United Nations Organization—have still to be secured in the greater part of the world. The old tasks of rationalism, freethought, and humanism are, then, still with us, and we should not under-estimate them. The character of rationalism may have to be changed somewhat—but its old fundamental tasks and premises remain firm and important.

On the other hand, in our mid-twentieth century society many new problems confront us which are much more subtle and much more difficult to disentangle, and which require an extensive consideration of humanist thought. It is on some of these characteristic problems of modern society that I wish to dwell. These characteristics are largely attendant upon the development of science, but they are also the outcome of other aspects of social development which, in their turn, seem to be powerfully affecting the nature of scientific activity itself. I hope these other elements will become clear in what I have to say—though, obviously, they require a fuller treatment than a talk of this kind allows. To give some shape to a talk which deals in such short compass with such vast issues I shall offer my remarks under three chief headings:—(1) Recent Developments in Science, (2) The Application of Science to the Study of Man and Society, and (3) The Dangers of Totalitarianism; but my remarks on all three themes are

interconnected and follow upon each other.

## (1) Recent Developments in Science

During the past few decades, much debate has taken place as to the relative weight to be attached to “the sciences” and “the humanities” in a balanced education. My own view is that this supposed dichotomy is, and always has been, a false and misleading one; splitting education arbitrarily into two apparently conflicting and radically different sets of subjects. I believe that science, properly conceived is a cultural subject as much as any other, and that properly taught, it offers a rich, reliable and continually rewarding approach to the study of the astonishing universe in which we live

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## *The Need for Independent Thinking*

—By Dr. RONALD FLETCHER—

and to the understanding of our own human nature. This is the kind of view which, I think, emerged during the nineteenth century especially, when—in the work of Darwin, Huxley and others—science replaced religion and metaphysics in offering a new approach to the understanding of the facts and perspectives of the human situation. But, however much we ourselves may accept this view, we must recognise that changes have taken place in modern society which tend to make science—as it is taught and practised—not the broad cultural subject we have conceived it to be. The fundamental change seems to me to have been the growth of exceptionally complex large-scale social organization based upon a highly specialised industrial technology.

In this social context, science has become intimately geared to technology (so much so that the two are often spoken of as being synonymous), and has developed rapidly in highly specialised directions in relation to specific industrial and military demands, so that the pressure is now inevitably towards more and more detailed specialization. In the universities, a student does not now study science, but one particular branch of it; and he does not now study the one particular branch in a broad sense, but is compelled to concentrate upon some highly specialised department of it. Through the demands for appropriate qualifications and the hierarchy of examination requirements, this specialization is in danger of being pressed into the level of general education in secondary schools. The provision of a broad, general education is thus threatened, and society is in danger of becoming a kind of ant-like community in which millions of individuals are highly trained to fulfil specific functions, and who have no time—and, perhaps later, no interest—in thinking about the human situation as a whole.

This leads me to the further danger which is that, in the context of large-scale social organization, we have witnessed, and are witnessing, the growing power of “experts” in every field—usually referred to as the danger of “bureaucracy”. The only aspect of this on which I wish to comment is the appalling naivety in the sphere of political wisdom which is sometimes found amongst some scientifically trained technologists and managers. I have myself heard industrial managers say, when reading of

social and political disputes of admitted complexity: "Surely it is time that we finished with all this party political nonsense. It's out of date. What can the ordinary man possibly know about these issues. Why on earth don't we leave politics to the experts?" This kind of view is the most decadent kind of Platonism—without any of Plato's own (very considerable) saving graces. If this view were to become widely prevalent and effective, we should lose at once the political wisdom which has been built up so gradually and so painfully in the constitutions of Western Europe upon the early basis of the Greeks. Such statements show an ignorance of social and political philosophy which one would expect of a babe in arms, but not of responsible, highly trained managers of our society.

In this situation, the expert scientist, especially, enjoys a great vogue. His authority tends to spill over into almost every field—so that if an eminent cosmologist, after telling his audience about the stars, goes on to state his views about politics or religion, his opinions tend to command support. He is a scientist—and, therefore, he ought to

know. And, of course, the scientist carries great power and status in modern society because he possesses the expertise which all employers—including governments—urgently need. But, just because of this power and status, he is also faced with extraordinarily difficult moral problems. Should he (say in the field of nuclear research) remain attached to customary patriotic morals? Or is his moral responsibility to mankind at large, and should he try to share his knowledge as universally as possible? Who—now—are the traitors to mankind? The scientists who "divulge information" to their fellow scholars of other nations? Or the respectable statesmen who set confines to the dissemination of knowledge for the achievement and maintenance of power? It is a nice question (and it might be a nice experiment—one of these days—to put the statesmen in prison, and to allow the "universalistic" views of the scientists an opportunity for practical political expression).

(To be concluded)

## Recollections of a Young Atheist

By CHRISTOPHER N. FINNEY

I HAVE OFTEN THOUGHT that it would be both interesting and instructive to compile a book describing how different people gave up religion and accepted the non-theistic view of life. Apart from the human interest angle that is always present in sketches of an autobiographical nature, it would be fascinating to observe how one person's experiences were duplicated in the lives of others.

Some atheists will have come from religious homes, and their formative years will have been influenced by the impact of theistic beliefs; others will have come from homes that were indifferent to religion. In so far as I fit into either of these groups, I belong with the second. I was fortunate in that neither of my parents were religious, and my home atmosphere was not saturated with religion.

By that I do not mean that when I was young I did not believe in God; far from it. I believed in God, just as, at an earlier age, I had believed in Father Christmas; in fact, on reflection, I think I had more of a religion than I am now sometimes disposed to admit. What I do mean is that my young mind was not so impregnated with religion that I was incapable of independent thought on the subject later in life. I was able to dispense with the idea of God without any of the heartsearchings and agonies of mind that are the lot of too many when they come to make their break with religion. I felt none of the anguish experienced by H. G. Wells when he wrote:—

It was only after terrific distress and terrors that I achieved disbelief. Fear lingered in my mind long after definite faith had disappeared.

I have said that when I was young I believed in God, but as I grew older so I grew more sceptical. I first deviated from the straight and narrow of religious belief on the question of miracles. To have "Faith" is a virtue of which much is made by Christian folk. But to me, on the other hand, to believe something to be true without a corresponding intellectual conviction of its truth was the reverse of virtue. I thought it a state of mind to be discouraged, one to be supplanted by the habit of asking "how" and "why".

My original heresy, then, consisted in demanding proof of miracles, where none was forthcoming.

My friends lamented my lack of faith; I said they were

credulous and gullible. And so I went my separate way.

When I left school at sixteen I still had not come into contact with Freethought, in truth it was an accident that I ever became acquainted with it at all. I had been strolling along a by-way near Holborn one day, when I chanced to light on a number of pamphlets by Chapman Cohen displayed in the window of a small bookshop. These I bought and eagerly read. I found in them a completely new account of religion—at least new to me—one that explained the origin of the Gods as due to ignorance and misunderstanding of nature on the part of primitive man, and in his attempts to describe his environment in terms of the only forces known to him, man-like forces.

When I came to apply my new-found knowledge I discovered that in a large measure it held true even to-day. I quickly learned that religious arguments may change their outward appearance from generation to generation, but fundamentally they have always been the same. Believers to-day make the same appeal to human ignorance: God is the cause of everything we cannot "explain". Basically, the arguments are those that the philosopher Spinoza designated "the asylum of ignorance".

I now felt that I could call myself an atheist. I had made the passage from belief to unbelief in a series of "gentle steps", until my unbelief was complete. There remained no fears, no bitterness, no regrets.

Finally, I must confess to having none of the sense of emptiness that the atheist is supposed to feel when he has given up religion. Apart from my attitude to religion itself, my attitude to life and its problems remains substantially unchanged. I can now concentrate on living as full and happy a life as I am capable, and I feel, with Colonel R. G. Ingersoll, that

We have no God to serve or fear,  
No Hell to shun,  
No Devil with malicious leer,  
When life is done.

—NEXT WEEK—

**WE'VE GOT TO FIGHT!**

By P. G. ROY

# "The Freethinker" and "The Faith"

By COLIN McCALL



LAST MONTH'S ISSUE OF *The Faith* (Malta) contains what it calls an "answer" to THE FREETHINKER. It refers to the Notes and News item (16/10/59) where we expressed amusement at *The Faith's* criticism of Communism, viz. "It has always been the gibe of Communism that religion offers only 'pie in the sky,' but does it give people anything instead. It is easy to promise happiness on earth, more difficult to fulfil that promise." "True indeed," we commented, "but what about eternal bliss which *The Faith* continuously promises?"

Now we have been answered! It is not *The Faith* that continuously promises eternal bliss, we are told, "it is God Himself, in the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ, Our Lord, in the New. Jesus Christ yesterday, today and ever." Which recitation no doubt makes Editor Father G. P. Paris feel a little more fortified. He warns us, mind you, that "Freethinkers, atheists, communists, and all other enemies of Christ and His Church [here, to avoid ambiguity, he inserts, 'The Catholic Church built on St. Peter'] are only losing time and money in fighting against Him," for "the powers of darkness shall not prevail." And again: "No amount of criticism, of hatred and persecution will destroy Christ and His Church. Jesus is the cornerstone and whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder." Ugh!

Perhaps Father Paris is right about "hatred and persecution." After all, he should know. His Church gave both of them a pretty good trial against its enemies, yet it didn't get rid of heresy. But criticism is a very different matter. Hatred and persecution won't destroy "Christ and His Church," but criticism bids fair to do so. Intellectually it has already done so, as many Catholics realise. The Church of Christ has had to yield to Copernicus, though it condemned his book, forced Galileo to recant, and burned Bruno at the stake. It is in process of yielding on evolution, though some of its Irish and Maltese priests are not yet perhaps aware of it. The more intelligent members of the clergy must often have wished that their Church could have answered its critics, instead of having to torture, to burn and to ban. Not being able to do so, it has had to live in a state of perpetual tension: ever fearful, ever watchful, as Bulls and the *Index* testify.

Keep the faithful from reading this; keep them from learning that. Ban that book, condemn that contraceptive, forbid that film! At all costs give the people no chance to doubt. Don't even let them think. That's the answer: banish thought from religion altogether; make it automatic. Give them ritual, colour, spectacle, to keep them occupied. Let them recite in unison; act in unison. One in Christ.

All right; but afterwards? What if they should think about it then? What if they should *think* about transubstantiations, immaculate conceptions, virgin births and bodily assumptions? The whole of Catholic teaching must be aimed at preventing such thoughts. Dogmas must be accepted. Argue, if you like (at least if you have permission) *from* such premises; not *about* the premises. Emphasise the horror of doubt. That's it: damnation for doubters!

Another page of *The Faith* very obligingly bears this out. "Let us be warned against this insidious doubt, this dangerous temptation." It so happens, on this occasion, that the words are directed against what is likely to offend "Christian modesty," but there is no restriction on their use. They are universal in application. Rome sees none of the merit in honest doubt that Tennyson did.

Self-preservation is its first law! And that leaves no room for doubt.

The same "Dangerous Temptation" article has a further bearing on Father Paris's rejoinder to THE FREETHINKER. The Christian who objects to something which offends his modesty is not infrequently "countered by a clever counter move." "You have a nasty mind, a prurient mentality," he is told. "You see evil where there is none. We meant nothing by it. To the pure everything is pure." So, "by an adroit trick," says *The Faith*, the "poor" Christian is "placed in the position of the guilty party . . ."

Recall now, the words of Father Paris regarding "hatred and persecution" of his (Father Paris's) or His (Christ's) Church. Was there ever so glaring an example of turning the tables? One has to hand it to the Church of Rome. The most terrible persecuting religion in history has virtually succeeded in drawing a veil over its ghastly record. For every person who knows anything about the Inquisition, probably a dozen will have lurid impressions of early Christians being massacred or thrown to the lions. For every one who knows of the Church's terror over Yugoslavia, or even of the clerical tyranny in Spain, at least a dozen will picture Communist tyranny against the clergy in China. It is a remarkable achievement to have history (even in Protestant countries) rewritten nearer to one's heart's desire. And the Church of Rome has done it.

"Never perhaps has the Church of Christ, during her two thousand years of existence been so terribly persecuted as she is in our times," says Father Paris. Regrettably he refrains from giving examples. Perhaps next month he will satisfy our curiosity: tell us where are the *autos-da-fé* in reverse; where priests are being burned at the stake? Of course, his Church has to struggle along with only a 75 per cent. grant towards its sectarian education in Britain. Perhaps that is persecution! In France, the wicked Freethinkers, Protestants, Freemasons, Radicals, Socialists, Communists and Anarchists are all protecting the separation of Church and State. Is that persecution? Does Adenauer persecute the Church? Or Franco? Father Paris may be deploring the plight of the clergy who are paid by the State in East Germany but, alas, have to obey the laws of the land! And there's that Freethought movement in Poland, with equal freedom of speech! It all depends what you mean by persecution.

However he may see it, it doesn't seem to deter him. For, in spite of it all, the Church has never been "so strong and so full of life, so beautiful." And the secret? "Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." So we are back at "pie in the sky" — not very methodically, one feels, but back nevertheless. For, concludes Father Paris, "we are not here to die like beasts, and finish with death: the principle of intelligence that is within us will live for ever." Forgive us for doubting, dear Father, not only that "the principle" will live for ever, but even if it is alive now. Once, maybe, but Catholic training is tough on principles, especially intelligent ones.

## PRESENT — ABSENT!

IT IS NOT SURPRISING that President Eisenhower should receive a splendid reception in Madrid! And as the *Daily Telegraph* noted, the "scarlet robes of a cardinal" were conspicuous in the welcoming group. Missing, however, were more than a hundred of Franco's opponents who, said the *Daily Mirror*, had been arrested overnight for fear they "might upset the cosiness of the ceremonies."

## This Believing World

The death of Sir Stanley Spencer, R.A., the other week, called attention to some of his religious pictures — notably his last one, showing Jesus in a black “boater,” looking conspicuously like an unshaved tramp, sitting in a wicker chair, and obviously angrily addressing a few of the inhabitants of the village of Cookham. The painting is a far cry from those commissioned by the Church during the Middle Ages when Jesus and his followers almost always dressed in superb clothes often in the latest Renaissance fashions to give the faithful the impression that he was a king. Spencer’s representation is just as faithful as the others — all thoroughly imaginary except that, without wealth or possibly even a home, Jesus would have looked far more like a tramp in Palestine than a King. We suspect that very religious people will not like Spencer’s conception of “our Lord.”

★

What queer ideas some pious ladies who write letters to national journals and nearly always get them published if they are very pious, have when boosting up religion. One of them in *The People* recently gave particulars of two clergymen in Leeds who “help” old and infirm people by “giving them the joy of a full Communion service in their own homes”; and she moans, “If only more clergymen were like them!” She obviously thinks that all old and infirm people want “the joy” of a Communion service to be *always* inflicted on them, willy nilly, so to speak. The truth is that, as many clergymen have found out to their cost, lots of the “aged” are bored stiff with any Communion Service either in their own home or in church.

★

What they would prefer is the “secular” joy of increased pensions if they are poor and, of course, “secular” cures of any of their painful and other ailments; and to be spared the attentions of pious busybodies — unless they have always been religious and dependent on Jesus rather than on ready cash. It is a pity therefore that it seems impossible to get the real truth from the old people themselves. Which do they prefer — increased pensions and similar help, or Communion services *only* in their homes?

★

After many centuries of religious hatred, the two rival religions, Islam and Christianity, look like “hanging together” if they don’t want to hang “separately.” The *Daily Express* publishes “an Intelligence Report,” disclosing that “after 1,000 years of opposition, Moslems and Christians have a point of unity.” As a matter of fact, they always had a point of unity, for Allah is precisely the same God as El or Elohim and comes from the same mint. But on this occasion, it appears that they are drawn together by “their mutual fears,” and so are planning “a Holy Alliance against Godless Communism.” Their particular objection is “Godless” Communism — but, as it can be argued that there is and always has been a Communism not Godless but Christian — one form is described in the Book of Acts, for example — it is possible that this will not be attacked.

★

In any case, parsons who can speak Arabic are going to meet elders of the Moslem faith in Cairo in a “campaign for God” and they are going to ban all publications from Russia as a start on the grounds that they “pollute our universities and offend students.” Then the “materialistic”

basis of Communism will be attacked in a united effort by Christians and Moslems; and, in addition, both religions will stop attacking each other. So the two religions “are shaking hands.”

★

Unfortunately, both Moslem and Christian campaigns against the “anti-Godites” up to now have signally failed. Their difficulty has always been to find some arguments in favour of God Almighty which have some resemblance of logic and coherence. It may be possible to find arguments against an economic system like Communism — but where are the arguments for the existence of God which can stand the searching analysis of instructed Freethought? Or of Science pure and simple?

## A Way Out for Rome?

SEMPER EDEM: Always the same, boasts the Roman Catholic Church, but this is nonsense. It couldn’t be otherwise. No organisation could exist as long as the Church has without changing, and changing very substantially. There could be no such thing as “pure” Christianity, even in its earliest days, because the scriptural basis of the religion is itself a hotchpotch. This has been both a curse and a blessing. It has led to endless disputes and many schisms: at the same time it has enabled the Church to change emphasis and shift position in adaptation to environment. It is hard to realise now how bitterly it opposed Copernican astronomy; it will soon be forgotten that it was anti-evolutionary. On birth control, however, it remains adamant.

Or does it? Surely the principle has been yielded. A Roman Catholic woman may prevent — or try to prevent — conception by recourse to complicated calculation on charts and chronometer, which the Church with unconscious(!) irony deems “natural,” and which a Roman Catholic writer, Mr. Paul Johnson, has recently described as making “roughly the same demands on the intelligence as the differential calculus and which, for sheer complexity, might have been written by Duns Scotus himself.” (*New Statesman*, 12/12/59.)

Mr. Johnson — no hidebound Catholic to be sure — discusses his Church’s attitude to birth control with frankness and, it will be seen, not without sarcasm. “Natural” contraception, he says, “has thus become far more unnatural than any method advocated by Dr. Marie Stopes; indeed, from the point of view of the Fathers it appears to have only one virtue: it rarely works.” Many Catholic couples, of course, defy their Church and use what it calls “artificial” birth control methods, partly no doubt because they are simpler, principally because they are more reliable. Indeed, Mr. Johnson cites an “authoritative” University of Michigan survey showing that 80 per cent. of Catholic women (compared with 90 per cent. generally) aged 30 or over, who have already one child, use birth control methods, and that 57 per cent. of these use “forbidden” methods.

As we have often pointed out, the Church must sooner or later face this subject realistically: it must come to terms with birth control. And it is interesting to note that Mr. Johnson shares our view on how this might be done. The development of an oral contraceptive could prove a blessing to the Church as well as to humanity as a whole. To permit its use while condemning other contraceptives would involve casuistry, but that is unlikely to deter the most casuistical of all the institutions known to man.

C. McC.

## THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.  
TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

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: One year, £1 15s.; half-year, 17s. 6d.; three months, 8s. 9d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25.)

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. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London (Tower Hill).—Every 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.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.

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.: Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street, Street.) Sunday, January 3rd, 6.45 p.m.: OWEN MANNS, "Science: the Self-Made God."

Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1.) Sunday, January 3rd, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Tuesday, January 5th, 7.15 p.m. MISS G. FARNELL, "Behind the Iron Curtain" — Colour Slides.

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate,) Sunday, January 3rd, 6.30 p.m.: THE CURIOSITIES CONCERT PARTY.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street,) Sunday, January 3rd, 2.30 p.m.: A MEETING.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, January 3rd, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "Hopes and Fears for 1960"

## Notes and News

WE HAVE A FEW JEREMIAHS among our readers. The Freethought movement is dying, they tell us. Of too much politics: of too little politics; of too much militancy: of too little militancy. You have heard their lamentations. We try to keep a balance. Another complaint is that we lack youth, though how this can be known to an elderly inhabitant of, say, Leamington Spa, who isn't even a member of the National Secular Society, is hard to see. Even if it were so, it would not make us unique in this world of many interests and distractions. And Freethought doesn't come all that easily to those who have had religious indoctrination. Even so, we have our fair share of youth, and of a generally high calibre, too. On this first day of the New Year, therefore, we appropriately print the first contribution of an eighteen-year-old Freethinker, Mr. Christopher N. Finney.

★

IN CONTRAST WITH the pessimists are those with grandiose notions of "mass movements." "The people are waiting,"

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

CLOSING TOTAL for 1959, £308 17s. 11d. (already acknowledged). A. E. Stringer, £3 5s.; A. G. Bedane, £1; D. Harris, 1s. 3d.; B. S. Jones, 5s.; A. George, 5s.; T. Walmsley, 5s.; Total to date January 1st, 1960, £5 1s. 3d.

they tell us, "you've just got to find the right appeal." It sounds easy, but we don't believe it. We agree with Mrs. Margaret Knight, who remarked the other day, that for the time being at any rate, we must act as a ginger group in society: doing all that we can, and assured of eventual victory, but at present facing very large odds.

★

IN THIS CONTEXT, it is encouraging to hear that the North London Branch of the National Secular Society reports 1959 as its most successful season ever, marked by steadily increasing membership (now over 100) and by ever increasing sales of literature. Young and new members have joined with the "old guard" in their efforts to spread militant Secularism by every means possible: press, distributing pamphlets, letters and articles to THE FREETHINKER etc. President and Secretary, Mr. and Mrs. L. Ebury, express particular thanks to Mr. W. J. McIlroy for instigating a new open-air pitch at Finsbury Square and to Mr. M. C. Lillingston for canvassing a whole estate at Basildon new town. The Branch sees as its main task, "the steady persistent and never flagging outdoor propaganda, which has produced such healthy results," and it acknowledges the help received from Messrs. A. Arthur, (West London Branch) J. W. Barker, (Kingston Branch) and D. H. Tribe, (Central London Branch).

★

WE NOTE THAT Mr. Robert Mellish, M.P. for Bermondsey has been awarded a Roman Catholic Knighthood "in recognition of his work in the Commons for the cause of Catholic education" (*The Star*, 15/12/59). We also have to hand the December issue of *Coventry Civic Affairs*, which reminds us of some of the expenses involved in such education, viz.: "The Local Authority is responsible for the provision or extensions of playing fields, additions or improvements of sites, such buildings as caretakers' houses and dining accomodation, salaries, books and stationery and caretakers' and cleaners' wages."

★

IN COVENTRY, incidentally, Roman Catholic baptisms have doubled since 1944. There were 1,242 in 1958 and it is "estimated that about 900 children will go to R.C. primary schools in five years' time and enter secondary schools in ten years' time." If these numbers are maintained there will be more than 3,800 in secondary schools by 1970, 1,000 more than their present capacity. However, the Church authorities and the City Council are working on the problem together, we are told. We may therefore expect the new buildings soon with 75 per cent state aid!

★

THE SOCIETY for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws founded in 1922, which operated in recent years from 40 Drury Lane, London, W.C.2, has now been dissolved, and its activities transferred to the Humanist Council, on which the Ethical Union, National Secular Society and Rationalist Press Association are represented. This step is in accordance with the declared policy of these various bodies for co-operative action in as many fields as possible through the Humanist Council. Any inquiries regarding the reform of the Blasphemy Laws should in future be addressed to, The Secretary, The Humanist Council, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8.

# The Devils of Loudon

By F. A. RIDLEY

ONE OF THE MOST PERSISTENT, as well as terrible superstitions which has haunted the human race is the belief in diabolical "possession." As the German historian of Possession, Professor T. Osterreich has reminded us, belief in diabolical manifestations, in the person and through the mouths of "possessed" human beings, remained virtually universal down to almost the 16th century, and still persists in backward races today. Christianity in particular, both in its Catholic and Protestant forms, has remained through the larger part of its history, inseparably connected with the belief in both the existence of devils and in their power to "possess." Jesus Christ was, if we are to believe the Gospels, an expert in "casting out" devils from their afflicted victims. While the Christian Churches, throughout their long heyday of temporal, as well as spiritual, domination over society, have deemed it to be one of their most sacred duties to detect, and whenever possible to punish with the utmost conceivable rigour, everyone actively engaged — for it was part of the Church's dogma that human beings could so engage — in the nefarious crime of witchcraft or sorcery. It is only in recent centuries that belief in possession has declined from a well-nigh universal idea into an esoteric prejudice, and even today the most powerful of the Christian Churches still confers the title and authority of "exorcists" or professional casters-out of demons on all its priests in the course of their sacerdotal training. The 17th century, an historical era still quite near to us in time (though far removed from us in its fundamental attitude) may be said to have represented the swan-song of diabolical possession. For this century saw both the earliest rationalistic criticisms of the whole cult of devils, as also its first effective legal prohibition in the centres of European civilisation. In the Protestant England of the Commonwealth; in the Calvinistic Scotland of the Presbyterian Kirk; and equally in the Catholic countries of the European Continent, the devils took their leave of mankind in a final orgy of possession before being cast out, we hope, for ever from the orbit of human society. For this was the era of the phenomenon of mass hysteria, the most grotesque, as well as horrible example of which was to be found in France.

The orgy of diabolical possession which swept over Loudon between 1632 and 1638, and which made a contemporary European sensation, has attracted the attention of many authors. The latest to be attracted by this macabre subject was Aldous Huxley (cf. *The Devils of Loudon*, Chatto and Windus.) In 1950, Mr. Huxley who, in his unintelligibly entitled, but grimly powerful *Ape and Essence* had already portrayed the hypothetical devil-worship of the post nuclear war future, proceeded to delve into the historical diabolism of the past. There is nothing new that could now be usefully added about the facts relating to the strange case of the Devils of Loudon, which as a *cause célèbre* of the cult of the Demons, has already been written about at length by greater authorities on Satan and his manifestations than Mr. Huxley — Coulange (Turmel) and Osterreich in particular. But as we have learned to expect, Mr. Huxley writes vividly and with psychological penetration on his lurid theme; his book is, perhaps, the best literary summary available of this truly shocking affair. The actual hero — or villain — of the affair of Loudon, was not Old Nick (who actually worked through picturesquely-named subordinate devils in this affair) but a local cleric, Urban Grandier, curé of St. Peter's Parish

church at Loudon in the province of Poitou; a post which he owed to the all-powerful Jesuits by whom this handsome and talented priest had been trained. Grandier, however, like other priests of his period, found the burden of celibacy which the Church imposed upon its priests, too much for him in both theory and practice. On his arrest for sorcery, *A Treatise on Celibacy* was found in his rooms in which he stated that secular continence was an impossible condition which he had no intention of observing; nor did he. During the course of his ministry at Loudon, he was responsible for at least one illegitimate child, and his amours became notorious throughout the town.

There was nothing very surprising in this failure of a hot-blooded priest to continue indefinitely in the unnatural state to which the Catholic Church, then and now binds its priests. But so mysterious are the ways of Providence, and presumably of Satan also, it was via the indiscretions of this amorous priest, that an army of demons from hell invaded Loudon in an orgy of mass possession, unknown since that famous episode of the Gadarene swine. The beginnings of the later orgy of possession appear somewhat obscure, even in the lucid pages of Mr. Huxley. Apparently Jeannes des Anges, the Prioress of an Ursuline Convent in Loudon, had been, or had wished to become, one of Grandier's innumerable mistresses; frustrated sex, plus probably the squalor and boredom of a 17th century convent, produced first in Jeanne, and later in her fellow nuns (presumably dutifully imitating not only the virtues, but the aberrations of their Prioress) strange hallucinations and manifestations. At first somewhat obscure, they eventually attracted the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities responsible for the spiritual state of "Christ's brides" in the nunnery.

In that age, during which the Devil was having what proved to be his last fling before the sin of witchcraft was engulfed by the rising tide of rationalism, sorcery was at once suspected. Exorcists were called in and then the suspected devils (no doubt thriving on auto-suggestion, as Mr. Huxley suggests) became more vocal, and brazenly dictated letters signed with their own infernal names. Still more celebrated exorcists were called in from outside Loudon. The affair became first a local, then a national, finally an international sensation. (By this time all the nuns were possessed by devils in all parts of their anatomy. Each devil had, so to speak, its own sphere of influence.) Devils with the most picturesque names which they (or rather the nuns under their influence) howled at the tops of their voices; under the continued auto-suggestion of the exorcists (who seemed to have worked under constant counter-attacks from the devils) the behaviour of the nuns became more and more obscene and violent. A Freudian psychologist would no doubt explain how the repressed sexuality of the nuns rose violently to the surface. In time, the exorcisms drew visitors from all over Europe, including the British Isles. The devils were in possession not only of the nuns, but also of Loudon.

(To be concluded)

## FREEDOM'S FOE—THE VATICAN.

By ADRIAN PIGOTT

Third and New Edition, revised and enlarged. A collection of Danger Signals for those who value liberty.

128 PAGES

PRICE 2/6; (postage 6d.)

## Colour Bar Conference

ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21ST, 1959, the National Council for Civil Liberties organised a Conference to discuss "Colour Bar—Legislation and Education". About one hundred different groups — trade unions, religious bodies, Coloured peoples' organisations, community committees, study circles and member societies of the Humanist Council (whatever group they fit into)—submerged their respective 'isms and 'ologies in a great flood of indignation against racial intolerance. Catholics and Communists, the former seeming to represent local organisations rather than the Vatican or Westminster, forgot for a time Mary and Marx in their united support for the rights of the Coloured races. Though a great number of delegates were unable to speak for lack of time, only one, a trade unionist, protested—with ample justification as he represented a vast number—and even he accepted the omission without a murmur of favouritism. This was indeed quite a triumph of sweet reasonableness.

After the Chairman's Mr. Malcom Purdie's official opening, Miss Claudia Jones, Editor of *The West Indian Gazette*, read an address prepared by Mrs. Paul Robeson, who was unfortunately prevented by illness from attending. Since the majority of citizens of the British Commonwealth were coloured, she said, it ill-behaved the heart of the Commonwealth to display race prejudice. Indeed, many member nations, notably Ghana and the West Indian Federation, were becoming increasingly solicitous about the welfare of their people in other countries. Though the English in England are supposed to be tolerant, it is very difficult for Coloured youths between 17 and 20 to gain employment, not to mention the well-known hazard of accommodation. Mr. Ted Braithwaite, author of *To Sir, with Love*, challenged us all to leave the Conference and do something. Britain is now, he said, an inter-racial society—let's face it!—and its Coloured members do not want charity or pity, but merely the right to do things for themselves that will benefit the community also. They had lost confidence in both the House of Commons, "where the cold wind of intellectual exploitation blows," and the Churches "when they refrain from commenting on social conditions in the community". "Prejudice through atrophy by activity" — true of the dark as well as the white citizens. Speaking as a jurist, Mr. Neil Lawson, Q.C., described equality before law irrespective of race, colour or religion, as a basic legal principle in Britain for 200 years. But clearly defined laws were needed to form a favourable climate of opinion against a social evil and to prevent its worst manifestations. To be effective, there must be powerful support from the community as a whole; the provisions must be enforceable, and those responsible for enforcement must be well disposed. Incitement to discrimination can today be prosecuted under the Common Law of Sedition, the Public Order Act of 1956, or—in the case of publicans—refusal of the justices to renew a licence on the charge of a Common Law breach of duty. None of these methods was satisfactory. He therefore submitted to the Conference for its approval a draft, "Racial Incitement Bill to make punishable incitement to acts of discrimination against persons on the grounds of race, colour or religion, and as a long term aspiration, a Race Discrimination Bill to make illegal discrimination to the detriment of any person on the grounds of colour, race or religion in the United Kingdom."

Colour, said Dr. David Pitt, the fourth speaker from the platform, was closely bound up with class, and he told this

story about a coloured doctor practising in England who overheard a little boy say "Look! There goes a black man". "That's not a black man," said his mate, "that's the doctor." Leaders of the Government should, he said, go before the people on television, urging them to welcome Coloured people to Britain. Fair-minded citizens should organise local groups, as in Willesden, North London, to combat racial discrimination. The Coloured people themselves should offer their services to local churches, trade unions and political groups—wherever their talents lay—and should be appointed to office. Speaking from the floor, delegates—who were such in name only, not having seen the agenda before the opening of the Conference—were overwhelmingly in favour of the introduction to Parliament of both drafts; and Mr. A. Fenner Brockway, M.P., who had already tried to introduce into the House a Racial Incitement Bill four times previously, announced to thunderous applause that he would gladly try again.

Mr. D. H. Tribe who, with Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, represented the National Secular Society, squirmed, however, a tiny jet of cold reason into the proceedings. Developing what had already been suggested by a representative of the London Caribbean Association and the Rev. C. B. Austin, vicar of Notting Dale, he pointed out that irrespective of whether the police or judiciary was vigilant in enforcement, the difficulty would be in gaining evidence. Who could say whether refusal of employment, promotion, or lodgings to a coloured man was based on his colour or some other factors, real or invented? As for the Racial Incitement Bill, it seemed to condemn the great literature of many major religions. It would certainly damn the Old Testament, since the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa justified itself by reference to Noah's curse on Canaan (Ham), the traditional ancestor of the negroid peoples. We already had enough censorial legislation, and the only effective safeguard against the pernicious nonsense of religious, racial or colour discrimination was an enlightened community. Until more stringent measures were taken to encourage tolerance and internationalism in our schools, legislation would almost certainly fall flat. Not surprisingly, in a meeting which tended towards the emotional, this message was not conspicuously applauded, though no later speaker refuted it. But the secularist was later complimented by another delegate—who happened to be an ardent Catholic! Since, however, any debate is good publicity, whether it leads to positive results or not, Tribe was among the overwhelming majority which ultimately voted for the measure.

The second half of the Conference, devoted to education, offered no significant lead. All agreed that action was needed, though a school governor said that she knew youths who had been perfectly race-tolerant at school, but had become involved in rioting later.

Summing up, Mr. Martin Ennals, on behalf of the Council, said that neither Christianity nor Socialism was the answer to colour prejudice, nor was it entirely a problem of minorities. The vital thing was for all to look inwards, challenge themselves, then get to work.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### SCIENCE AND EXODUS

I think Mr. Hallyburton's article on the above is excellent, so far as it goes, but in my opinion, and I may well be hypercritical, it does not go far enough. Would it not have been better to state that Moses never existed, that his band of cut-throats were never (so far as history shows) in Egypt, and that therefore none of the other wonderful events recorded ever happened?

C. STANLEY.

**DETERMINISM OR FREE WILL?**

I feel that Mr. Meulen has not represented Determinism fairly, since he says that, like free will, it tries to explain "the why" of events. Though this is true in a certain sense there is no idea of explaining the purpose of events in Determinism — this is the job of similar systems like Fatalism and Christian Predestination. It merely accepts the infinite sequence of causes and effects or, like Science in Mr. Meulen's view, puts events in their proper order. This has been generally admitted since the time of the Atomists with regard to matter (so-called) but the fact that it applied equally well to the brain was first recognised by Thomas Hobbes. This admittance of the sequence of causes and effects in the brain is the basis of all modern psychology and the fact that every event, both in the animate or inanimate worlds, happens necessarily, is merely a corollary from it, just as theorems derive from axioms in geometry. Why should there be any event which is spontaneous or outside cause and effect, which "arises within me" (whatever that means)? What value as evidence is the fact that I can "feel" that I can choose? I fear that Mr. Meulen's belief in Free Will is emotional rather than rational because the idea of Determinism is repellent to him. He is convinced that Determinists cannot lead normal lives; history proves him wrong, for Determinists have led happy and unselfish lives on the whole, e.g., Hobbes, Shelley, Sully, Bentham, and the Utilitarians, Haeckel, Freud, McCabe and Robert Owen, who believed that "Man's character is made for him, not by him" achieved remarkable results at his factory at New Lanark by applying Deterministic principles. Determinism inspires a more tolerant attitude towards other people, since we are all in the grip of environment. Take the case of the criminal: the Voluntarist would say that he chose wrong in preference to right and therefore should be punished: the Determinist would say that he had been unfortunate and was in need of psychological treatment.

Shelley thus states his belief in Determinism: "He who asserts the Doctrine of Necessity means that, contemplating the events which compose the moral and material universe, he beholds only an immense and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects, none of which could occupy any other place than it does occupy . . . Every human being is impelled to act precisely as he does act; in the eternity which preceded his birth a chain of causes was generated, which, operating under the name of motives, make it impossible that any thought of his mind or any action of his life should be otherwise than it is." The law of the infinite sequence of causes and effects, which for unknown reasons Mr. Meulen seems to doubt, is as firmly established as the law of gravity. Even apparently spontaneous choices can be accounted for. In his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud describes how he tried to choose a pseudonym for a patient of his, whose character-study he was writing: after he had chosen it he psychoanalysed himself and found the reason for his choice. Mr. Meulen says that no-one can prove that he does not choose in certain cases; this is an off-guard remark, for given a specific case a psychologist could analyse the causes of his choice.

Lastly, I should like to point out that Mr. Meulen is inconsistent: in the second paragraph he is sure that Free Will and Determinism are alike wrong, but by the time he has reached the end, "all human sanity and dignity impel him" to "choose" Free Will. Furthermore, could he please provide examples of "spontaneous desires"? He rejects God as "improbable"; Determinism makes it impossible, since God would have no work to do — he could not create or control the universe. Thus Mr. Meulen would be advised to look into Determinism a little more closely, whereupon he would not find it half so objectionable.

C. A. P. BINNS.

**THE SALVATION ARMY**

I agree with your principle of no public money for religion. Living in Canada, I am ignorant of the Salvation Army's activities in Britain, but I imagine it must do a lot of collecting to keep up its offices and to keep its "High Brass" in comfort.

I was a member in Edmonton for 10 years, but left 10 years ago, having had enough of the devilry of its Gospel Preachers. I know, no matter what they say about a person, they still want that person's money. I attended Edmonton No. 1 Corps, and between May 1948 and April 1949, a number of people left. There were ever more empty seats at the meetings. But it didn't matter: the Salvation Army gets public money through the Community Chest; money supposed to be used for public welfare.

The Edmonton North Side Corps needed a new hall. They bought a nice lot, but asked the municipal officials for money to put up a building. City tax money paid \$25,000 for that hall, and when it was open for services, there was no congregation to speak of. And 12-15 people can hardly pay for the upkeep of a hall. The public has to do that, too.

(Mrs.) ROSA SWANSON (Canada).

**RATIONALISM OR HUMANISM?**

I can't imagine why Mr. McCall should suddenly get so excited about the word "Humanism." He is one of the representatives of the National Secular Society on the Humanist Council — indeed, he is the treasurer. When the RPA changed the title of its monthly journal *Literary Guide* to *The Humanist*, I don't recall that he protested. Certainly our President, Earl Russell, whose pamphlet, *Faith of a Rationalist*, we still distribute, warmly approved of the change, in company with other distinguished members. So did Mrs. Margaret Knight who has done more than any single individual to popularise the name "Humanist." A significant number of groups have sprung up in the last few years, quite spontaneously, both in the universities and throughout the country. They have nearly all preferred the name "Humanist" to any other. When a label attracts customers it is stupid to ignore such a happy discovery.

All labels, political, religious or secularist are "vague," but the Articles of Association of the RPA defines its aims, and they are formulated again in our booklet, *Living with Reality*. Gilbert Murray once told me he preferred the term "Free Thought" to "Rationalism," but he didn't quite mean the same by it as Mr. McCall does. In common with the Churches and political parties our movement has a conservative element, reliving the battles of long ago, chewing over the old cud. Let us venerate them, but firmly refuse to be diverted from the task of restating our aims in the language of today and relating them to the worries of the contemporary world. Otherwise we shall go the way of the dodo.

HECTOR HAWTON,

Managing Director,

Rationalist Press Association Ltd.

[Mr. McCall writes: My excitement — if that is the word — was not so much over the word "Humanism" (though I have never disguised my dislike of it) as over Mr. Hawton's description of it as "the constructive phase rationalism is now entering." I asked what he meant by this: I still don't know. Instead he talks equally vaguely about "a conservative element . . . chewing over the old cud." Does he mean by this, those who share his own view that "the religion of the Churches is not a set of harmless ethical platitudes but an obstruction to progress"? It is true I represent the NSS on the Humanist Council. That is because I believe in co-operation between the various bodies comprising the Council.]

**CATHOLIC IMPERIALISM AND WORLD FREEDOM.**

By Avro Manhattan, 528 pages, paper cover  
Price 20/-; postage 1/3d.

**LECTURES AND ESSAYS.**

BY R. G. Ingersoll.

Paper covers, 5/-; Cloth bound, 8/6; postage 10d.

**FAMILY PROBLEMS AND THE LAW.**

By Robert S. W. Pollard. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

**GOD AND THE UNIVERSE.**

By Chapman Cohen. Price 4/3; postage 6d.

**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.

**THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims.**

By Avro Manhattan. 3rd Edition—Revised and Enlarged.

**ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING.**

By Chapman Cohen. Price 21/-; postage 1/3

Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound.

**PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT.**

By Chapman Cohen. Price 7/6 each series; postage 7d. each.

**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.

**AGE OF REASON.**

Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price 5/6; postage 8d.

**BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL.**

By Chapman Cohen. Well illustrated. Now again available. Price 4/-; postage 7d.

**THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (10th Edition).**

By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 6/-; postage 8d.

**THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (10th Edition).**

By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4/6; postage 6d.