

# The Freethinker

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ACCORDING TO OUR NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS, that very angry young man of the late '50's, Mr. John Osborne, whose plays, notably *Look Back in Anger*, have brought him fame and fortune, had the indignity of having one of them rejected by the ITV company Granada. Of course, having a play accepted or rejected is not of particular moment to the average members of the public — but this one, by Mr. Osborne, would have been of the greatest interest to Freethinkers. It is good to learn therefore that the latest reports about its fate are that it may be accepted after all.

The really interesting point about it is the ignorance of the writers who reported the rejection. We were solemnly told that the play dealt with the "last trial for blasphemy" in the country (in 1842) and that the hero — or villain — of the trial was "George Jacob Holyoake, a Chartist," which was about all they could find out about poor Holyoake who, for the greater part of his long life, was a prominent "agitator" in many movements, the author of many books and pamphlets, a pioneer of the Co-operative Movement, the inventor of the word Secularism and, as a Secularist, the editor of, and contributor to, a number of Secularist journals.

## Masterly Debates

Holyoake held two debates with the Rev. Brewin Grant in the '50's of the last century — and it would do some of our newspaper men a power of good to read the verbatim reports of these two debates. One of his most important books — perhaps his best — is *The Trial of Theism*, first published in 1858, the idea of which came from *The Trial of the Witnesses*, a once very famous anti-Deistic work published in 1728, and written by Dr. Thomas Sherlock, the then Bishop of London.

Holyoake early became, as so many famous men of his day became, a Chartist. Unfortunately, Chartism was almost as divided in some of its projects as Christianity, and it gradually fizzled out, though many of its ideas have now been incorporated into our political and social life. That Holyoake early became imbued with its strenuous urge for reform is not surprising, for much the same urge brought young Bradlaugh into the forefront of British reformers, though a little later than Holyoake, of course. The Chartists numbered many eminent men, but Holyoake had to earn a living, and so soon became a lecturer for them as well as a "Social Missionary," his first job bringing him 16s. a week. After six months, he became an accredited lecturer for the then very young Socialist movement. And Trade Unionists might be interested to learn that his first pamphlet was entitled *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Trade Unions*.

## The "Oracle of Reason"

Soon Holyoake became associated with Charles Southwell, then a fiery Freethinker, with little respect for conventions in general and those of Christianity in particular. He was a splendid speaker, and took part in many debates,

wrote a few highly controversial pamphlets, and published a scholarly translation of the chapter on Christianity in the abridged version of C. F. Dupuis's *L'Origine de tous les Cultes (The Origin of all Worshhips)*. Southwell and Holyoake produced the *Oracle of Reason*, a highly "militant" journal, and after only four numbers had been published, Southwell was given 12 months imprisonment, and fined £100. Holyoake promptly took his place, and carried on

the journal, thus incurring the wrath of the "outraged" authorities. They had their pious eyes invincibly fixed on a coming blasphemer.

Holyoake almost promptly obliged them when he lectured in Cheltenham backed up as they were by a Mr. Bubb, "a particularly gross,

furious, squab-built, vulgar person," and two parsons on the bench of magistrates. One of the witnesses was "a dog fancier and prizefighter" (there were few, if any, Gene Tunneys in those days); and as bail was not allowed, Holyoake had to walk the nine miles to Gloucester Gaol which, bug, lice, and rat ridden, was the lot of a horrid "blasphemer" in 1842.

We often in these columns attack the Roman Church for its gross cruelties and intolerance. Holyoake in his *Sixty Years of an Agitators Life* acidly comments: -

The reverend adversaries into whose hands I had fallen, committed me for felony. Free speech, however objectionable it might be, was not felony. If it was not ignorance in them to treat it so, it was malice. They also said in the warrant that I had spoken "wickedly." Yet there is no wickedness where there is no evil intent . . . At that time I was in the hands of the clergy . . . and it created in my mind a dislike and distrust of them I had never felt before . . .

These Protestant parsons were certainly liars of the worst kind, but then what can one expect from the supporters of Christianity against those of us who see in that religion a creed of hatred and intolerance?

## Six Months for "Blasphemy"

It would be quite a mistake to imagine that "martyrdom" was to Holyoake's taste. He certainly did not want to go to gaol, but he refused to take the necessary oath to be released on bail — as he said, "Not assenting to Christianity, how could I take the Christian oath?" In any case, the Home Secretary (then Sir James Graham) admitted in Parliament that "the magistrates had behaved with extraordinary harshness towards" Holyoake — the magistrates being "Men of God."

At the actual trial before Mr. Justice Erskine, Holyoake spoke for over nine hours — but naturally it would not have made any difference had he spoken for 90 hours. There had been dozens of trials for "blasphemy" before Holyoake's and most of them took the same course. God— Almighty God — had to be protected in our Courts of Law.

But the really amusing thing about the whole affair looked at in 1960, as far as I read about the play by John Osborne, is that "blasphemy" is taken even now as a matter of course. There really is such a thing as "blasphemy" and no doubt George Jacob Holyoake "a Chartist" richly

## — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

### John Osborne's T.V. Play

— By H. CUTNER —



deserved his fate. It was no use being angry about it. I do not know, of course, what Mr. Osborne himself thinks about it, or whether his play is an "angry" attack on this piece of pious imbecility. I do not know even if he really knows what actually happened.

Our national newspapers said that Holyoake got six months for saying that *the clergy* should have been put on half pay. This is not only completely untrue, but is not even fair to the intolerant humbugs who did their utmost to stifle all Freethought criticism either of Christianity or of the Bible. Besides, no judge, not even the most bigoted, could have been silly enough to have given six months to any man for merely mildly criticising the clergy. What Holyoake said was that spending something like 20 millions a year on the Church was making worship too expensive, and "poor men" would like to see the clergy put on half pay; "and while our distress lasts," added Holyoake, "I think it would be wise to do the same with deity." And that sentence, suppressed by our national journals, got Holyoake six months! The judge was horrified — he evidently thought the jury might not be so for he told them that if they were convinced "that the words complained of were uttered with levity, for the purpose of treating with contempt the majesty of Almighty God, they would have to find a verdict of guilty," which they promptly did.

Erskine, who seems to have been a Protestant version of Judge North (who sentenced G. W. Foote 40 years later to 12 months in prison) told Holyoake that while the courts did not presume to protect the character of our God, he (the judge) had to protect the people from "indecent" language; and no doubt as joyfully as North did in the case of Foote, gave poor Holyoake — who always protested that to "insult God" was never in his mind — six months.

#### "Blasphemy" Still a Crime

But Holyoake's sentence was not the last for "blasphemy," there must have been more than a dozen afterwards. As in the case of Foote, they were a disgrace to any pretence to civilisation. Holyoake wrote a full account of his trial, but he called it *The Last Trial by Jury for Atheism*. Like Bradlaugh, Holyoake was always an Atheist, but he preferred to call himself an Agnostic or a Rationalist, and did his utmost to banish the word Atheism from Freethought. But his *Trial of Theism* made all Theistic theories vanish in the light of logic.

How much of all this Mr. Osborne knows I cannot say. But if he can make people not only angry but thoroughly ashamed of such an anachronism as "blasphemy" in our midst, he will have earned the gratitude of all thinking people.

## Religious Broadcasting in the U.S.A.

*Robert H. Scott, of Saratoga, California, whose efforts on behalf of Atheist broadcasting are well known, sent the following letter, on December 7th, 1959, to the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. We think it will interest English readers.*

Gentlemen: The Commission has instituted public hearings, beginning with December 7 of this year, to determine, among other things, whether certain licensed radio and television broadcasters in the United States have operated their stations "contrary to the public interest."

I herewith remind the Commission, as I have done many times since 1947, that all the licensed broadcasters in San Francisco refuse to abide by the regulatory dicta of the Commission's Scott Decision of July 19, 1946, a carefully written document of 2,500 words, entitled "Memorandum, Opinion, and Order No. 96050," which was handed down unanimously in response to a petition by me.

In that Scott Decision the Commission gave licensed broadcasters clearly to understand that inasmuch as the airways are part of the public domain and are used by them free of charge, and since atheism is one side of a controversial question or subject of which theism (or Godism) is the opposite side, they cannot in the public interest accept religious programmes if they refuse time for atheism.

I further remind the Commission that, notwithstanding my many formal protests since 1947, it has deliberately failed, in "expedient" obedience to the coercive pressure of certain Church groups, principally Roman Catholic, to implement the regulatory dicta of its Scott Decision of 1946 even in cases of admitted direct attacks upon atheism or atheists as a class. Witness, for example, the Commission's shameful and craven renewal of the operating license of Radio Station WHAM of Rochester, New York, in August of 1948 despite the warning of the Commission's own General Counsel that WHAM's position was "squarely in conflict with the Commission's decision in the Scott case . . ."

As I have several times informed the Commission, though the atheistic broadcast which I made on November 17, 1946, over Radio Station KQW (now KCBS) in San

Francisco was characterised as "scholarly" by *Newsweek* magazine in its issue of December 2, 1946 (page 71), and though that speech, which was made possible by the Scott Decision, was received with approval by an overwhelming majority of the more intelligent and better-educated men and women who wrote to the station or to me in comment thereon, the station, a commercial corporation which accepted religious programmes, yielded to pressure, much of it threatening, by certain Church groups, principally Roman Catholic, and refused additional radio-time for atheism, a defiance of the Commission in which the other broadcasting stations of San Francisco joined.

Atheists are everywhere a majority in the higher intellectual and cultural levels of society. Moreover, avowed atheists are of rare occurrence in prisons, jails, and reformatories. Nevertheless, the airways of the United States, which have been open regularly and frequently for religious programmes, are and have been closed to atheism and also agnosticism (with a few exceptions) and to virtually all facts of science and recorded history that discredit or conflict with basic religious beliefs. As a result the American people, in general, have been forced into a mould of intellectual and cultural mediocrity which is favourable to the God-belief.

In striking contrast, the atheistically governed and educated people of Russia and certain other parts of the U.S.S.R., despite enormous war-losses of every kind, have outstripped the people of the U.S.A. in certain highly important areas of science, engineering, and technology, especially in the realm of Outer Space. In these and certain other ways they have demonstrated that the slogan "In Ourselves We Trust" would be better by far as a national motto than the words, officially used in our own country, "In God We Trust."

Let the Commission have the will and the manliness to stand by the democratic and enlightened position of its historic Scott Decision of July 9, 1946. Let the Commission open the airways of the United States to each side, or else close them to both sides, of the theism-atheism controversy.

ROBERT H. SCOTT.



## In Reply to My Critics

By G. I. BENNETT

SINCE THE PUBLICATION of my article, "An Atheist's Attitude to Theists," two criticisms of my views have appeared in THE FREETHINKER. Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe has also written concerning a point in my article but he and I are not at cross-purposes, and I suggest only that he has not quite understood me. The burden of my objection to the word Secularism being used interchangeably with the word Atheism is that a secularist is an atheist *plus*. He is *positively* concerned with the affairs of this world. He hates injustice and man's inhumanity to fellow-man and fellow-creature. He is something of an ethical and social radical. He must indeed as a secularist be an agnostic or atheist; but an agnostic or atheist is not necessarily a secularist. I call myself a secularist and, like Mr. Colin McCall, and for very similar reasons, I prefer that name to *humanist*.

Now as to my two critics, Mr. C. Stanley and "N.F." of Lisbon, let me say right away that I do not think in any circumstances they are likely to accept my point of view; but I consider it worth while that readers generally should be clear about my reasons for having written as I did. The novel feature of this sort of controversy is that my unbelief is as complete as my critics'; wherein we differ is in our attitude to our religious opponents.

No doubt there is a fair number of hypocrites, of bad and immoral people, of those who are hard, unbending, and cruel, among religious adherents. For them I have no good words. I have despised hypocrisy all my life; I am sorrowed and distressed by intolerance; I am revolted and angered by cruelty, physical or mental. But these things are not confined to religious believers. There are some black pages in religious history, it is true. But there are also black pages in political history, in the evolution and working out of nationalism, and in the discrimination between men based upon racial theories. Some — to my sorrow, too many — of those who adopt the good name of Freethinker seem to forget these last, choosing to remember only the first: the ugly chapters in religious history. Because certain powerfully placed ecclesiastics backed by their surrogates and purblind followers have in their madness perpetrated in the name of faith foul acts against their unconforming fellows, some atheist zealots in our ranks would have us lump all believers together as either knaves or fools and wage a kind of indiscriminate vendetta against them.

I can have no part in this. I must know who my enemy is before I assail him. If he is a villain, then I will not spare him. But, however much I may disagree with his faith, I am not prepared to ridicule, laugh to scorn, make war upon every poor parish priest and every member of his little religious community, just because he is a priest and they are his parishioners. He and they may be misguided by our lights, and their faith may have unfortunate or regrettable features; but are we to allow that there is no honour, no goodness or kindness in anything but our own emancipated freethinking fraternity? To propose the question is to expose its absurdity.

Perhaps my experience in these matters has been more fortunate than either Mr. Stanley's or "N.F.'s". I number among my friends people of Christian and other faiths, and of none. One of the most likeable men it has been my privilege to meet — a simple American farmer of the mid-west of the United States — is an adherent of the Roman Catholic faith. How false as applied to him, I could not help thinking, are these words of Eça de Queiroz, which "N.F." quotes: "The good Catholic has no powers

of reasoning, no will, no judgement, no personal feelings . . ." No doubt there is a good deal of truth in what this writer says in the whole of "N.F.'s" quotation. But it is so easy to speak with sweeping simplicity of a whole group or community of people. The world is made up of all kinds and conditions of men and women. I do not hold with the Roman Catholic faith. I cannot imagine I ever shall. It makes life, which is normally difficult enough, more difficult, and adds to its problems. But it seems to me wrong to assume there are no decent Catholic lives that perhaps owe some of their decency to religious influence. Let us remember there are good men as well as bad who impart a faith. When I say that I am not arguing for religious teaching; I am only arguing that a religious environment is not necessarily the wholly evil thing that some atheists think. A great deal depends on one's circumstances, one's mentors, one's temperament.

I note without surprise the confession of our lady in Portugal that she was a Catholic for 30 years of her life. Her upbringing was obviously unfortunate; that is why she now waxes so vehemently against all concerned with it. Had she had my lukewarm Protestant background, I think she would agree it might have been very different. Has Mr. Stanley similarly unhappy memories of a childhood and early adulthood darkened by religious bondage? If so, he has my sympathy. We appear to have quite a number of such people in our movement. Of people who, having broken the chains binding them to a bad master, are filled with a kind of overriding hate of him ever after. Unfortunately, they are sometimes led to hate those who are innocent of the charges they are inclined indiscriminately to impute to religious believers generally.

"N.F." complains that she is "ostracised and snubbed by Protestants and Catholics and purposely left out when there is any kind of social gathering." That may be true; but is she openly contemptuous of them? If so, is it really surprising that they avoid her and do not invite her to their functions? Although I agree that religious bigotry is socially blighting, I think people's attitude towards us is largely affected by *how we react to them*.

For reasons that I have previously set out, I am not in favour of atheist militancy. I think we must face the fact that freethinking is not a habit of mind that can be bulldozer methods be thrust upon the world. It is a delicate plant of slow growth tended by men and women of independent mind. It is possible that it will never become a general feature of society. We are right to hope that it will, but we must not be too sanguine. We shall not have failed, however, if we win for ourselves and our views the civilised toleration that we, for our part, must always extend to those who are sincerely motivated by differing or contrary conceptions.

### Footnote:

With the printers' proof of the foregoing article I received from the Editor a copy of Mr. P. G. Roy's article, "We've Got to Fight!", asking me whether I should like to add anything to what I have already written. I think there is little I could with profit or without tedious repetition add. Having stated my case at some length, I am content to let readers be the judges.

But I would say this in contradistinction to Mr. Roy. I do not remember a time when I was impressed by heated and noisy polemics. My clarion call is and has ever been Reason, always Reason. I am a disciple of persuasive rationalism. It was contact with that which made a free-

(Concluded on next page)



## This Believing World

As a preparation for the stream of addle-headed and pious blather which poured from the Church for weeks before Christmas, the *Sunday Express* published a number of articles on "immortality," most of them, of course, by thorough believers. They wrote as if Christianity, nearly 2,000 years ago, had settled the question of "survival" for all time. Jesus said that *all* who believed in him would have Everlasting Life. Everlasting! Christianity has a lot to answer for, but that this kind of nonsense proves anything, and is really believed, makes one wonder of what use are the millions spent on Education.

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Everybody knows that Paul used to boast that he was all things to all men — to Jews he was a Jew, to Greeks he was a Greek, and so on. So we are not surprised to find the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his special Christmas Message to the readers of the *News of the World* pleading almost the same for "our Lord." He was not a King this time, but a *workman*. Jesus came down from Heaven. Christmas "celebrates the birth of One who was a first-class workman" declared the Archbishop. But he was much more than a first-class workman. "He knew," added the Archbishop, "what he wanted to do *before* the day of his Birth on Earth." What a marvellous thing it is to be an Archbishop who knows so many things denied to those of us who are not Archbishops!

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The "Straits Times" some weeks ago printed particulars of a new Goddess — and it certainly is time for one to come along. The last true God was Jesus, of course, so a Goddess as a change would be most welcome. She has been installed by a bunch of adoring followers in Kampung Pandan Dulam, and crowned with a golden circlet; and it is no mean feat at the age of 15 to be adopted by such a Deity as Dewa Sapri as one of them. Already people are flocking to adore her and ask for blessings and favours. We Freethinkers are apt to think that no Gods or Goddesses could possibly be born again—but we hope these few particulars will dispel this ignorant delusion. By the way, her name is Zaharah Binte Mohamed Yunus which, though a bigger mouthful than Jesus, is quite as effective in prayer.

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The pet Astrologer kept by "Psychic News," a lady called Dorothy Adams, was recently asked why three national Sunday newspapers always give entirely contradictory readings and, by the way, this goes also for our daily journals. We have sometimes compared them and they rarely if ever agree. Well, the answer is very simple. "One is written by an astrologer, and the other two by the office boy." Some office boy indeed! The truth is that anybody who can write a little and invent a lot could turn out "readings" equal in veracity to anything Miss Adams manages to get printed even with all her knowledge about the stars.

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Even astrologers admit that unless they get the *exact* time of birth they can give a wrong horoscope — a couple of minutes too much plays havoc with some "conjunctions." Miss Adams begs readers not to take "newspaper" astrology seriously just as if any brand of astrology could possibly be taken seriously. The jargon used by astrologers almost equals that of Christian theologians or Idealists. Sun-Arians, Neptune in midheaven, the Sun and Moon in Aquarius, Jupiter in the eighth house, and so on, all no doubt representing something, but God alone knows what.

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No one could expect Christmas to come along without the most Fundamentalist drivel broadcast everywhere, but the

saddest example we saw was on ITV. A *doctor* (who is roped in very often, we think) gave his testimony for Christ, and he must really have thought that he scored heavily by repeating the Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery — a story long recognised as a forgery, and which is almost proclaimed so in the Revised Version. For this medical man, the story proves the "truth" of Christianity — its miracles, its Devils, its Hell and Heaven, and, of course, its Virgin Birth. Has this doctor ever read anything?

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In the meantime, ITV's religious director has found out still another way of proving the truth of Christianity. It is by means of Christmas cards — those with pictures of camels, palm trees, the Wise Men of the East, the Babe of Bethlehem in a manger, and so on. It is a pity that these religious people can't perform a miracle with Christmas cards — but there it is. The only true miracle is that there are still intelligent people who can swallow this trash!

### Mr. Ashe Sums Up

Encouraged by Mr. Cutner's invitation, may I express my thanks publicly to him, to yourself, and to your readers for so much attention? I have no wish to add anything now beyond a final attempt to sum up the main issue.

It still seems to me exactly the same, and scarcely touched by any of this criticism.

(1) The early Christian community did in fact come into being, act in certain ways, endure certain persecutions, and produce certain writings. It is thus an historical phenomenon which requires explanation.

(2) Its members gave an account of its birth and growth which is very extraordinary and meant to be so, but which in its context, accords with their own extraordinary conduct and is at least not demonstrably impossible.

(3) No historian has yet managed to devise a comprehensive and workable theory to replace the Christian account. The question "If not this, then what?" has never been satisfactorily answered.

As for the "anti" side, I note that Mr. Cutner has preferred not to consult any of my authorities. That, of course, is his own business, but he can hardly hope to impress me with arguments which explicitly ignore them: arguments, moreover, of a sort which I used to employ myself, and which — notably in the case of the Resurrection — always broke under pressure.

As for (3), such theories as have so far been offered are purely speculative, mutually contradictory, and humanly quite incredible, for reasons I was careful to indicate. What good is it to repeat "myth" if you cannot even make a plausible guess at the way the myth developed over that crucial century or two? Mr. Cutner concedes that one part of the problem, the effectiveness of the Christian narrative in inducing belief, is beyond his power to explain. But such things have to be explained; they are historical facts; that was my point.

So long as (3) remains true, I see literally no alternative to accepting the Christian narrative as my working hypothesis and making what I can of it. *Solvitur ambulando*. If your readers really want answers, I shall be pleased to reply privately to genuine queries.

Again — with complete sincerity — my thanks.

GEOFFREY ASHE.

### IN REPLY TO MY CRITICS (Concluded from page 19)

thinker of me, and I might never have been one otherwise. How many more are there like me? I don't know; but, if I may judge from discussions and considerable correspondence I have had with various people over the years, the number may well be greater than we think. Anyway, I doubt very much whether strident unbelief and militant propaganda achieve the results Mr. Roy and his friends look for. That is why I have presumed to write more than once upon this subject, which is unfailling in the liveliness of the response it evokes in THE FREETHINKER.

—NEXT WEEK—

SCIENCE AND FREETHOUGHT

By PROFESSOR LUCIA de BROUCKERE



# THE FREETHINKER

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. 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 week-day, 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 Cinema, Paradise Street.) Sunday, January 17th, 6.45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "More About the Christmas Myth."

Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1) Sunday, January 17th, 7.15 p.m.: H. G. PARKHOUSE, "Basic Tenets of Scientology."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Tuesday, January 19th, 7.15 p.m.: MRS. JEAN PASMORE, LRCP, "The Case for Family Planning."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate.) Sunday, January 17th, 6.30 p.m.: P. DOWNEY, "Health and Disease in Present-Day Society."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, January 17th, 2.30 p.m.: J. D'ARCY, SPGB, "Is Class War Obsolete?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, January 17th, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "Science and the Soviet Union."

## Notes and News

FREETHINKERS LIVING WITHIN EASY REACH of Leicester may be interested in a ten-week W.E.A. course to be held in the Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, on Tuesday evenings at 8 p.m., commencing January 19th. Entitled "Turning Points of Science," the course will deal with the effects of science on human thought in general, and on religious thought in particular. The tutor will be Mr. R. Harré, M.A., B.Sc., B.Phil., of Leicester University and, as is usual with W.E.A. classes, there will be discussion following each talk.

THE WINTER 1959 number of *The Plain View*, edited by H. J. Blackham, is now available from 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8. price 2s. 6d. The "Humanist Symposium of Metaphysics," edited in the last issue by Dr. Corliss Lamont, is continued now by Professors P. H. Nowell-Smith and A. G. N. Flew, and Dr. Arthur E. Briggs; Timothy J. Cooney writes on "Radical Non-Cognitivism," and F. H. Amphlett Micklewright on "A Legal Layman and the Street Offences Bill." There are also a number of book

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged: £18 17s. 7d.; A. J. Wood, 2s. 6d.; H. G. Blewett, 5s.; A. W. Coleman, £5 5s.; Miss D. W. Coleman, £5 5s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1 1s.; F. A. Pearson, £1 14s. 4d.; R. Gerrard, £1; A. H. Briancourt, 10s.; D. Cordingley, 10s.; S. G. Leech, 10s.; T. Walmsley, 10s.; W. J. Bennett, £1 5s.; J. T., 10s.; T. C. Yelland, £2. Total to date, January 8th, 1960: £39 5s. 5d.

## A New Year's Resolution

THE NEW YEAR, we are fully aware, is a time of much expense: many subscriptions (like those to the National Secular Society by the by) become due. That is why we have let a few weeks go by before reminding you of what we hope was one of your resolutions: to help THE FREETHINKER Sustentation Fund.

We have heard that "you've never had it so good." That may or may not be so, but presumably you are interested in Freethought and believe it is important. In that case, THE FREETHINKER's continuation is important and, in turn, your contributions to the Sustentation Fund are important, because they can help to ensure that continuation.

We get many letters of appreciation of the paper. That worthy veteran of many battles, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe wrote (apropos our first item in Notes and News in 1960) that "Notwithstanding the Jeremiahs," THE FREETHINKER is "good as ever." And many, we are glad to say, echo him. But alas, we can't keep going on appreciation alone, and another respected reader, Mr. A. W. Coleman told us when sending most generous donations from himself and his sister, that they "were saddened to see that the Fund had received little more than £300 during last year." "I should think readers could exceed that sum without unduly distressing themselves" he added; and, "Let's hope 1960 will make a better show!"

Let us, indeed. So please remember that New Year's resolution.

reviews. In fact, fifty pages of solid reading for half-a-crown.

★

IN HIS "NOTES & COMMENTS" COLUMN in the *South London Press* (1/1/60) "Wanderer" referred to the terrible traffic in horses from Ireland to the Continent, with particular reference to the ten dead animals washed up in Carmarthen Bay. "There have been protests here against this barbarity for many decades past," he wrote, "but the level of civilisation in Ireland and Belgium is lower than ours." "The only cure I can see is to try to rid the peoples of Ireland and Belgium of priestcraft" — he added "but we musn't touch that subject, I suppose."

★

THE SAME WRITER dealt with the date of Christmas day, doubting "if the Church now maintains seriously that Christ was born, rather conveniently, on the day of the pagan feast," and emphasising that "the popular feast is more pagan than Christian."

★

WHAT WAS CALLED "an odd application to sell drink out of hours" was refused by Warrington licensing justices (*The Licensing Magistrate*, October 1959). Permission had been sought to open at 10 a.m. instead of 11.30 a.m. on the annual Sunday School "walk" on July 23rd last on the grounds that it brought a large number of people into town, many of whom would require refreshment. "Although there were those who regarded the occasion as a religious festival others did not regard it completely in that light and it was difficult for licensees to keep customers out of the premises before opening time."



# Stonehenge

By F. A. RIDLEY

EVER SINCE THE 12TH CENTURY when the Norman chroniclers of a then recently conquered England first drew attention to it, the eerie circle of giant stones on Salisbury Plain, known collectively as Stonehenge, has been regarded as one of the wonders of the British Isles. No doubt they were already so regarded when the Romans arrived in Britain in the first century of our era; for even at that time, Stonehenge was an ancient monument; a prehistoric creation of the dim long ago, with already some 2,000 years of history behind it. When seen in the dim light of evening over the windswept expanses of Salisbury Plain, the gaunt pillars of Stonehenge still possess that awe-inspiring sense of remote mystery that induced the men of an earlier day to attribute them to the work of antique magicians. And even today, it would probably be accurate to style Stonehenge as the most famous relic of by-gone days to be found in these islands as our nearest equivalent to the Pyramids of ancient Egypt, several of which, incidentally, were probably contemporary with the original foundation of the ancient British sanctuary.

I spent my earliest years on the edge of Salisbury Plain, and memories of the remarkable ancient monuments in that history-haunted area are consequently entwined in my earliest recollections; in particular, the chalk White Horse of Westbury (supposed to have been set up by Alfred to mark his victory over the Danes at the adjacent village of Ethandune). And of Stonehenge itself, then universally regarded as the creation of the Druids; the romantic but sanguinary spot where these ancient Celtic priests, clad in white and crowned with mistletoe, celebrated the Summer solstice on June 21st, the longest day of the year, by offering human victims to the sun. Now, however, the precise calculations of modern archaeology have superseded the romantic imagination of a less critical age; for a new governmental publication devoted exclusively to the prehistoric monuments and relics on Salisbury Plain, has effectively debunked, or so at least it claims, both these hallowed traditions. Neither Stonehenge nor Avebury, we are informed, owe anything at all to the Druids. Indeed, both could already have been classified as ancient monuments before the Celtic Britons with their Druid priesthood first set foot on these shores. For we learn, while the Celts (and the Druids) only arrived in Britain some 250 years before the beginning of the Christian era, the temples and tombs which still survive on the Plain, date back to a prehistoric era and culture many centuries before. Our authority traces with meticulous detail the successive stages in the building of Stonehenge, Avebury, *et al.*, and concludes that they all transpired between about 2,000 and 1,400 B.C., by which latter date, all these monumental creations had been concluded. So, exit the Druids of hallowed and awesome memory! Nor is this all; we must, it seems, unlearn another fond tradition relating to Stonehenge; there is no evidence at all, categorically declares modern archaeology, that the misnamed "Slaughter Stone," the high-light of the formerly accepted legend was ever what its present title implies. There is no evidence that human sacrifice was ever offered within the gaunt pillars of Stonehenge. (The skeleton of a slaughtered child was recently dug up among the débris of a wooden building at Woodhenge nearby. This may actually represent a human sacrifice.) Science is notoriously antipathetic to romance. The picturesque horrors upon which I was reared, the white-robed Druids decked with the sacred mistletoe thronging the eerie circle of giant pillars, awaiting the sun-

rise and the expiatory sacrifice of the human victim recumbent upon the Altar Stone; that, too, it appears, must go the way of all flesh — and of all myths. Christianity is not the only mythology upon which modern scientific research lays its iconoclastic hands.

Since the Druids are out, who then were the actual builders of Stonehenge; or to speak more precisely, of the whole congeries of ancient monument, all of roughly the same period which are scattered over the Plain? Broadly speaking, what is true of Stonehenge is also true of the others, though there is no evidence that Stonehenge was originally the most important, as it is now the best-known. The giant Circle of Avebury, 20 miles to the North (near Marlborough) is much larger, and may originally have been much more important. Indeed, a recent writer has described Avebury as the "St. Paul's Cathedral" of the unknown religious cult responsible for all these monuments, while the original Stonehenge was merely the "parish church." Both have suffered much due to wind, weather, and probably worst of all, to human vandals. All these monumental creations are remarkable in terms of their primitive technique, erected between about 2,000 B.C. and 1,400 B.C. by prehistoric tribes who belonged to the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age cultures. What little can be known of the religious cult in whose honour and service they were constructed, can only be arrived at by more or less probable inferences. It appears certain that most, if not all, of these prehistoric creations were connected with the worship of the dead; many tombs are still to be found on the Plain. It is also probable that the giant circle at Stonehenge was, originally a Temple to the Sun, though apparently Professor Atkinson does not regard even this as quite beyond doubt. That, for some religious reason, the Plain had special religious significance in the eyes of its prehistoric neighbours would appear to be certain. But nothing, or so we gather from the author's silence on the subject, is positively known of the names of the gods to whom these giant sanctuaries were raised, nor of the ceremonies that were performed in their honour. Professor Atkinson, aided by the illustrations of an imaginative — perhaps too imaginative — artist, Mr. Alan Sorrell, goes in considerable detail into that aspect of Stonehenge which must have aroused the curiosity of everyone who has ever visited these still impressive remains: how was Stonehenge built? How were these gigantic, many-tonned pillars of stone transported by a primitive technique to this remote area of the lonely Plain? If our author's interpretation is even approximately correct, we must dismiss many preconceived legends about the prehistoric inhabitants of Wiltshire as "noble savages" running about in woad. For we are face to face with a technical feat of great magnitude, implying a highly developed social organism endowed with a corporate purpose and considerable technical proficiency. What is here described, is a kind of ancient British "Five Year Plan" by which the two kinds of stone of a combination of which Stonehenge is built — sarsen (sandstone) and bluestone — were transported thither.

The sarsen stones were rolled by hand (on rollers) across the Plain where they originated, a distance of about 20 miles; whereas the Bluestones, which are only found in the Prescelly Mountains in Pembrokeshire, were brought by both sea and land with the aid of both rafts and rollers — a distance of about 250 miles — an outstanding technical feat. As our authority notes, such a procedure required a fairly large labour force, several hundred men at least, and



their strict social control over a period probably amounting to several years. No means now survive to enable us to say whether slave labour was employed (as in the case of the Pyramids) or whether religious fanaticism represented a sufficient motive. There is no evidence of the presence of foreign consultants, for the Phoenicians do not appear to have reached Britain so early. By about 1,400 B.C., Stonehenge and Avebury, both far larger than now, already confronted both the Wiltshire sky and the imagination of posterity.

[cf. *Stonehenge and Avebury*, issued by H.M. Stationery Office, 3/- Text by R. J. C. Atkinson, Professor of Archaeology, University College, Cardiff.]

## The Conversion of England

By EVA EBURY

THE ARTICLE ON "Marriage in England" (THE FREETHINKER, 27/11/59) from the *Donegal Democrat* has been reprinted in the *Sligo Champion*. It may only be that its author considered such words of sanctified wisdom deserved a greater public, but the picture of social and economic conditions in Western Eire, drawn from items in his own paper, gives a more probable reason.

The emigration from Donegal, we are told, is perpetual and increasing; the young depart never to return. The emigrés are thanked in touching terms for their love and patriotism in remembering their homeland, and returning to their families for their holidays. Controversy rages over the teaching of Erse in the schools; it is considered a waste of public money to teach children a language that they will never use, as their working lives will be most likely spent in an English-speaking country.

So despite the prohibition of birth control knowledge, and despite enormous families, the flock of the Church is decreasing in Eire. Moreover, the children of its children are being born in that "Pagan" land across the Irish Sea. This is the problem that faces the Irish Catholic Church. It cannot keep its flock safely in Knock, and it has found that neither prayers nor missionaries are really successful when its children see that larger world outside the walls of Knock.

The *Donegal Democrat* (20/11/59) now brings us further evidence of the Church's care for its wandering sons. "A struggle is taking place there [England] around the souls of children [of Irish parents]" it says. And "A child's soul is more important than it's body . . . for life is a dangerous adventure with a heaven to win and a hell to avoid." Later it tells us that "The bishops and priests of England realise the danger to the souls of children either from careless homes or pagan surroundings. Hence they have spent millions of pounds on building Catholic schools to preserve the faith of Catholic children. The Irish missionaries go over every Autumn to add their small help to the general effort."

Thus our educational stream is to be polluted with Irish Holy Water; our public life to be harassed with black garbed priests, monks and nuns; our papers filled with the peurile flashiness of Catholic advertisement; saints and saints' days, processions and public masses and penitences are to become a part of everyday life in England! Indeed, "Marriage in England," confidently concludes, "If the Irish marry aright, they and their children will soon make England Catholic again."

Yet England is in a measure only reaping what she has sown. She made Irish Patriotism and Roman Catholicism almost synonymous. As we threw off the manacles of superstition, the Irish picked them up and willingly put them on; what England despises, Ireland must enshrine.

The Freethought movement cannot be blamed for the tyrannies of Imperialist England, as Bradlaugh's stubborn fight on the Irish Question shows. The National Secular Society is still fighting for mental emancipation of the Irish, though they revile us now as they did an illustrious founder then. Bradlaugh wrote in *The National Reformer* (1888) of the result of injuries done to Ireland during years of callous oppression, and in opposing the passing of the Coercion Bill, he said: "Some remind us that three-quarters of the Irish M.P.s voted against us, and that nearly every Irish paper attacks us. That is so, but it does not alter our duty. Our duty is to work honestly for the redress of Irish grievances although every Irishman may be personally unjust to us."

Our only means is by taking our propaganda to the "Great Catholic populations," which have grown up, as the *Donegal Democrat* says, "wherever the Industrial Revolution provided work for our emigrants — the coal of the Tyneside, the coal and cotton of Lancashire, Liverpool, Manchester, the Potteries, and finally the innumerable occupations of London."

Here it is that we must try to reach the ear of the wretched Irish Catholic dupe.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### WILL

I may be wrong, but both Mr. Meulen and Mr. Jones appear to accept the proposition that there is a kind of "thing" or "force" called "will" which a man can use, rather as though it were the function of something (God knows what!) inside him, comparable with the use of, for instance, his eyes for sight. But there is no bodily organ which is the base for "willing," and I suggest that the term "will" is no more than the metaphysicians' ruse for the introduction of a mystery where in fact none exists. I cannot think of any relevant circumstances where it could not be said that "Mr. So-and-So made such-and-such a choice"—rather than "Mr. So-and-So willed such-and-such." It is the whole person who makes a decision, and such decision will depend on numerous factors, each one of which is a cause contributing to give a resultant effect — the "choice" finally made. In intelligent creatures one of these factors will be the use of reason, and it is in these circumstances that we use the word "why." "Why?" implies purpose, and it is only where the use of a brain is involved, i.e., in animals (including *Homo sapiens*) that we can rightly ask "Why was this action done?" in addition to "How was this action done?"

The only intelligent question to ask of events not involving sentient beings is "How?" and if either Mr. Meulen or Mr. Jones can tell me in what respect the additional question "Why?" can have any meaning over and above "How?" when applied to events not involving the use of a brain, I shall be pleased to hear what it is.

It is for the above reasons that I disagree with Mr. Jones when he states that "Mr. Meulen's discussion of the How and Why of events does not appear to be relevant to his conclusions." On the contrary, it is precisely because Mr. Meulen makes the assumption that because one can ask "Why?" (implying for what purpose?) of some events (i.e., those involving intelligent creatures) then we are correct in asking a similar question for *all* events, that he is faced with his "problem."

I hope I have shown that his problem is self-made and that it disappears when he realises that words can be tyrants in the hands of metaphysicians, but tools for understanding in the hands of realists; such a word is "Why." (Excuse the metaphors, but I am only using words as tools for communication, not as "absolutes." If I don't point this out I may be asked "how" a word can be in someone's hands. I may even be asked "why?!")

P. E. J. JORDAN.

[We regret we have only been able to publish a small selection of the letters prompted by Mr. Meulen's article, "Determinism and Free Will" (11/12/59). Mr. Meulen will reply to those that have appeared.—Ed.]

### POPE JOAN

While agreeing with Mr. F. A. Ridley's general thesis on the state of the Papacy in the 9th and 10th centuries, I do not consider that he has done justice to the legend of Pope Joan itself. If, as Mr. Ridley suggests, it is a personification of Papal corruption, why is the story so precise? In most versions the Popess is placed between Leo IV (died 855 A.D.) and Benedict III (died 858 A.D.), giving her a reign of two years five months. It is interesting to



note that the tale did not become current until the end of the 11th century, quite a time after the monastic revolution. It was a favourite with anti-papal propagandists, and the Protestants in the 16th century most certainly supplied delicate little touches of their own. In fact, Benedict was elected six months after the death of Leo, so there is no room for Joan.

As to the meaning of this highly salacious titbit; it is known that Christianity was not the long suit of some of the Popes of the period, and rather than a mere drunken orgy, it may have been a very serious piece of Paganism. The Popess is prominently figured in the Tarot pack, which in the light of modern theories would appear to be Icons of a cult running counter to the Church. I am sure the theology of the Popes in question would cause raised eyebrows in Farm Street. P. F. MOORE.

Re. "Pope Joan." Bearing in mind the notorious relationship between Edward II of England and Piers Gaveston, and the fact that James I of England was derisively known as "His Sowship," it is a possibility that "Pope Joan" was a nickname bestowed on a particularly effeminate Vicar of Christ. The Popes imitated all the other foibles and vagaries of their predecessors, the Roman emperors, and their contemporaries, the absolute monarchs of the petty European nation-states, so why should they not have emulated Nero and our second Edward? S. W. BROOKS.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

C. N. Finney, our new young contributor, would find much to interest him in a paper-back published by The Rationalist Press Association about 20 years ago, *Why I am a Rationalist*. He will find many examples similar to his own. As a 30-year reader, I envy Mr. Finney his explorations. He will find each copy of THE FREETHINKER a wonderful experience.

D. CORDINGLEY.

#### ISLAM

F. A. Ridley's article "The Origins of Islam" (25/12/59) appeared to me to tell us very little about the origins of that religion. The writer seemed more interested in presenting an "apologia" for why he thought Islam had "greater survival value" than Christianity.

Muslims accept the doctrine of progressive revelation — that there has been a succession of Prophets, and while Muhammad is claimed as the seal of the Prophets: Qur'an: 33.40, some people have held that this applied to each Prophet; the Persian, Baha'u'llah deals with this at some length in his *Kitab-i-Iqan* (available in English).

As Mr. Ridley indicates, the Qur'an is all-important to Islam. This book, the first book of the Arabs, was given to the world by a man best described as illiterate. This fact has demolished theories that suggested the Qur'an as being derived from Jewish and Christian sources. Muhammad knew only Arabic, there is no evidence that he ever saw a Bible, the earliest official translations into Arabic of that book having appeared, according to R. V. C. Bodley in *The Messenger*, p.86, centuries after his death. Information about the Bible could have been conveyed to him by verbal means; it probably was, Christians and Jews lived in Arabia. But be that as it may, in the whole Qur'an there can be found only one direct quotation from the Bible, it is Surih 21:105 which quotes Psalms 37:29.

Mr. Ridley pointed out the cosmopolitan nature of Islam, remarking that there is no chosen race theory. He then goes on to contradict this by adding: "There is, however, one concession to the Arabic 'Chosen Race' theory — the Koran must always be recited in Arabic." While this may be true, it is hardly a "concession" to racial theories, it reflects the fact that to Muslims the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, and hence they wish to retain its original purity. Translations can — and do — change the meaning of a word.

In conclusion a word about Mr. Ridley's "the glittering pyramids of metaphysical subtleties that characterised Christian . . . doctors like Aquinas . . ." It would appear that the Muslim doctor Averroes, 1126-98 A.D. was, through his translations etc. of Aristotle, in no small way responsible for preparing the ground for Christian "pyramids of metaphysical subtleties."

ROBERT MORRELL.

#### SILLIEST ARGUMENT FOR EXISTENCE OF GOD DEPARTMENT

The following quotation is in support of my nomination of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, prominent American television star, for the title "Author of the silliest argument for the existence of God":—

"The very fact that there is a league against saloons, the Anti-Saloon League, implies the failure of prohibition and the existence of saloons, or at least speak-easies. If there were never any cigarettes, there would never be any anti-cigarette laws, and if there is no God, how can there be atheism? Does not atheism imply something to atheate?" — Fulton J. Sheen, *Old Errors and New Labels*, page 89, Garden City Books, Garden City, New

York, Imprimatur, 1931. One is almost embarrassed to point out the simple and obvious fact that atheists are not denying or "atheating" God, since the word presupposes that he exists; rather we deny the belief in God is based on evidence. Atheism does indeed "imply something to atheate" and that is the unfounded assertion that God exists.

This absurd argument may be considered a negative and vulgarized rendition of the ontological proof, which Thomas Aquinas rejected. The bizarre inference of the classical argument is that the mere idea of god implies his existence. Sheen's argument would have it that the idea of his non-existence implies that he exists.

A consequence of this delusion would be that one must admit that any conceivable superstition is true if there are people who deny that superstition.

I enclose the preceding section of the paragraph quoted above: "Certain things are so fundamental that to deny their existence is to assert them. For example, if I deny that I exist, I imply my own existence, for I have to exist before I can deny my existence. The denial implies an affirmation, and in a still more general way, the denial of the principle of all existence implies the existence of that principle. If there were no wives nor liquors we would never have prohibition." (Page 88/89.)

Again, the obvious point is that denying one's own existence is self-refuting and is nothing like denying the existence of a hypothesized entity outside of space and time.

HARRY J. NANCE (New York).

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