

The Freethinker

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"THIS IS NOT A MATTER in which the Holy Father could possibly intervene" (the Pope's spokesman, reported in the *Daily Mirror*, January 20th, 1960).

No! It is only the cruel treatment of worn-out animals in the traffic of horses for meat between Roman Catholic countries. A cruelty that Mr. Lemass has most unconvincingly denied.

It was not a matter on which the Holy Father could possibly intervene when it was only the indescribable torture of human beings in the traffic of black slaves.

The Papal anathemas cannot thunder in matters of this kind. Had not Papal Infallibility authorised the first slave market in Lisbon?

As Joseph McCabe said:

"When Bishop de Las Casas in 1517, begged that Africans might be imported into the West Indies to replace his Indians in the mines, Spain made treaties 'in the name of the Most Holy Trinity,' giving monopolies to traders, and no priest saw the blasphemy." The matter was awkward. The Catholic Church had owned, bought and bred slaves itself. Divine sanction had been given to the keeping of slaves, the sons of Ham were the legitimate prey of the descendants of Shem and Japhet.

Non-Intervention

Pius XII could not possibly intervene when the wave of antisemitism spread across Europe. The Concordats were signed between the Vatican, and the perpetrators of these beastly crimes against humanity. He could not intervene when the Orthodox Serbs were slaughtered in their thousands by the army of the Ustashi and, and later, he must shelter his son, the infamous Ante Pavelich, in the Vatican.

"It is not," says the Holy Father, "his wish that any dumb creature should be subjected to unnecessary hardship." But the Holy Father cannot intervene!

Intervention

There are matters on which the Papal authority *can* intervene. It could make and unmake Kings; it could preach a Crusade; it could call upon its child, the Holy Inquisition, to drench the earth with blood. But that was long ago. It can today, preach a crusade against Communism; it can threaten excommunication on all who vote Communist or Socialist. It can condemn liberal thought and free expression of opinion. It can prevent all knowledge of birth control from entering Roman Catholic countries and compare Malthusians with Goering. It can ruin a medical welfare bill in Ireland. It can play the game of attuning its doctrines to the varied intelligence of its adherents. It can call its anathemas on those who resist its teaching.

Trivialities

But the Holy Father cannot intervene in the mere matter of suffering caused in the trade of horses for meat; a triviality to a Church that trades on obscurantism and relics. It is not a matter of faith and morals. There is nothing here to condemn, either as mortal or venial sin. A sun-top blouse on a girl; short trunks on a youth; statues

of nudes; an embrace in the streets in Spain; these are things the Church must condemn. Recently the Pope declared it a venial sin for a priest to curl his hair or cover his tonsure: a sad retreat from the jolly moment when he encouraged nuns to show their ankles, brighten their garb and stop idling.

It was such a gaiety, no doubt, that encouraged the young priests to titivate themselves and to go on the spree

now and again; even to watch television! The Pope, in a message that came over to every household in Britain the other week, on a 9 o'clock news bulletin, declared it a sin for priests to act with such levity or to attend cinemas, theatres and the like.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Pope and the Irish Horses

By EVA EBURY

These are matters on which the Holy Father can intervene. But the campaign for humane treatment of animals has failed. The one voice that, if raised, could have swept in an instant this inhuman traffic into the limbo of the past, that one voice will not be heard. "The Vatican"—thought the *Daily Mirror*—"is now officially concerned about the Irish horse trade." Concerned, but not concerned enough to stop it. The Vatican's little bleat is already lost.

No Accident

Of course, it is not an accident that the Pope should decline to intervene. Were he to do so, he would draw attention in an obvious way, to one of the most striking examples of Catholic moral inferiority; of Catholic countries with non-Catholic ones. For, with the honourable exception of the Franciscans—which gets its full meat of publicity in Catholic and non-Catholic Press—the Church now follows the Dominican teaching on animals. And that may be summarised as: the animals were made for our use: we have no duties towards them. And in Lyon, at one of the most modern slaughterhouses in Europe, a letter-writer to *The Sunday Times* (31/1/60) said he had seen "much that would horrify most people in Britain or, indeed, anywhere", those responsible for leading the animals to the slaughter sheds using "the most brutal and callous methods."

The Roman Church flirts with evolutionary ideas — on paper — but its profoundly anti-evolutionary outlook is expressed in its treatment of animals. The sharp division is drawn between man, God-created Lord of Creation, and the animals made for his use — and for his entertainment. So is bull-fighting tolerated and not condemned. So is the Irish horse-traffic beyond Papal intervention.

Slow Success

The campaign, begun some years ago by the *Manchester Guardian*, recently taken up so strongly by the *Daily Mirror* and others, has failed. Yes. Yet slowly, a civilising influence will be felt. The evolutionary idea is spreading; the knowledge that sentient creatures react to pain as man does, will bring success to the campaigners of the future. The National Secular Society's "object," "to extend the moral law to animals" will be on the statute book of even the most backward Roman Catholic state.

Father to the Man

By COLIN McCALL

WE ALL HAVE A TENDENCY to look back nostalgically at our childhood days. When we are children we long to grow up and do the things adults do; when we are adults we wish we could do at least some of the things that children do. How else explain our delight in mechanical toys and bonfire night? But most of us, fortunately, are able to see these yearnings in their proper perspective. Others, however, are not. It is with them that I wish to deal here.

They are met with particularly in literary circles. And not surprisingly, due to the deficiencies of our educational system. Not only is scientific training deplorably neglected in our schools; there is a gulf between science and the arts in our universities that is rarely bridged. A few months ago I heard a very intelligent and successful arts graduate admit: "As an arts student, of course, I was and am strongly anti-science." And he went on to equate science with the Hydrogen bomb. Shortly after I heard two young Grammar School English mistresses advocate the teaching of Latin before the teaching of science — and they are far from alone in their views. Clearly this is an important problem.

It was epitomised for me at a recent literary meeting in the town where I live, when I could do very little about it because I was in the chair.

The speaker was a fairly well-known author, and headmaster of a village school in one of the home counties. I shall call him Mr. Ball. He was, I need hardly say, a poet. Poetry was the proudest product of his village school. He was also, not surprisingly, a religious man. He was, in fact, the personification of the anti-scientist. He was a Wordworthian of the worst ilk. The artist, in his view the highest of human kind, should be childlike, and should be alone. Only so could he find and express "absolute and eternal truths." This is no exaggeration of Mr. Ball's views. Indeed he reiterated them.

He supported them in curious ways. The primitive cave artist must have been a lonely man, said Mr. Ball. But there is surely no evidence for this. Cave art is, by all indication, an essentially social art, and certainly closely related to everyday life. I don't mean by this that the art is purely representational, a lifelike reproduction; that isn't so. But it depicts scenes from everyday life — the hunting life of Paleolithic man. And there is reason to believe that it has magical content, too: that depicting an animal hunted and caught increased the chances of a successful chase in real life. Some of the art, it is true, is in inaccessible places, but this might be to increase the sympathetic magic; there is no reason that I know of, to regard the artist as especially lonely. Mr. Ball's reason can only be an idly romantic one.

There was, he *thought* (which is a milder way of putting it than his own) a "difference of kind, not degree" between the artist and the ordinary (or should I say "common"?) man. Now this "kind-degree" distinction is a wholly artificial one and unless its relativity is recognised it should be dispensed with. But Mr. Ball's use of it didn't quite square with another of his assertions: that all children are poets — or would be if they were allowed to be. There can be no difference in kind, so far as my mundane mind can see, if we were all poets once. The fact that we aren't now — on Mr. Ball's argument — is due to our training. It is our schoolmasters' fault: they didn't pay enough attention to our inborn poetic powers. Again I don't exaggerate Mr. Ball's views when I say "inborn." He went on record with the declaration that "even morons can write poetry."

Perhaps I should remind you here, that this was no

moron speaking; it was a well-known headmaster of a village school, whose books have been well received. Perhaps I should add that his speech was well received by most of the audience and that quite a few people were enormously impressed. Had it not been so, I should not have noticed it here. I must say, however, that a schoolteacher friend of mine shared my dissent.

Mr. Ball read a few examples of his scholars' poetry; and they were very fine. The one question I did permit myself from the chair, was: were they exceptional? He said no. But I am doubtful. Would he not have quoted the best? And when he went on to attribute poetic powers to morons, my suspicions were increased. Naturally he will get more poetry from his children than will other schoolteachers who don't concentrate upon it so much, but I still think a lot of it will be bad poetry. I still don't think all children are "born" poets, any more than they are "born" painters or "born" musicians. Given exactly the same tuition, A will still be unable to paint as well as B; C will be unable to play the piano as well as D. Training is valuable in every case, but all the training in the world won't make a Rembrandt or a Rachmaninov. Children are born unequal. Some are the stuff from which poets — or painters, or musicians — are made: some are not. Let us by all means have training; let us develop as many artists of all kinds as we can.

But — and this is the important qualification — art is by no means all. We live in a world of moon rockets and electron microscopes. Our children must grow up into that world, and they should be fitted for it. This can only be done by scientific training: the training that Mr. Ball despises. In his view, the botanist spoils a flower by studying its structure and its growth. This is a silly idea, but it is widely held. I am not sure that it isn't a help to the poet to know something of a flower's development; I know it is a help to mankind at large. It is knowledge — more knowledge — that the world needs, and it can only be got through science.

Here come the moans: "Oh, but you destroy the flower when you analyse it!" (Never the same complaint about a microbe, you will note.) The romantic Wordsworthian child- and nature-worshippers have had too much influence on our life and education. The time has come to recognise them as the anachronisms they are. For, although most children are not poets, they *are* inquisitive: they want to know things. There is nothing dull about this; it is the great driving force behind human progress. The search for truth is stimulating, exciting. It is our duty to encourage it in the young.

ATHEIST AND THE OATH

AT LOUGHBOROUGH MAGISTRATES COURT on January 27th — according to a Leicester newspaper report of that date — a woman accused of driving without due care and attention said that "she was an atheist but that she would take the oath as that was the usual court procedure." She elected to give evidence from the witness box rather than make a statement from where she stood, having been told that "evidence on oath would probably add more weight to her case." It seems a bad case of neglect on the part of the court, not to have informed the woman that an affirmation could have been taken instead of a (to an atheist) meaningless oath. The Secretaries of Leicester Secular Society and the National Secular Society have written to the Town Clerk of Loughborough indicating this.

He Made the Stars Also

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE BOOK OF GENESIS, a compilation of legends of Mesopotamian origin which purports to describe the origin of the Universe, begins its narrative with the categorical statement: "In the beginning the gods created . . ." It then proceeds (or at least did proceed in the polytheistic original text) to indicate how the gods, on six successive days, created all living things. By the time Genesis had reached canonical status as the initial book in the Hebrew scriptures, the monotheistic worship of the desert deity Jahveh, whom the Hebrews had traditionally met in the Mount Sinai region, had ousted that of the other gods. So despite the fact that the Hebrew term *Elohim* is still plural, the current narrative goes on to ascribe to Jehovah alone, all the wonders of creation which then follow. The Jewish God, we are told, persisted in his creative tasks for six days and upon the seventh he then rested for all eternity; thereby, as a witty French Socialist was later to remark, affording a splendid example to the world's workers! Among the serial works performed by the Lord in those famous six days which made the world, we learn that "He made the stars also." Obviously, as is clear from the narrative, the authors and editors of Genesis had little interest in astronomy and regarded "the stars also" as objects of quite minor importance, particularly when compared with the earth which, as is implied in the narrative, owes its central position in the scheme of things to the fact that it was specially created by Jehovah to be the abode of man which, apparently, the stars were not.

The legends which were later collected in Genesis, go back a very long way since their place of origin, Mesopotamia, was one of the oldest, perhaps even *the* oldest, of recorded human cultures. By the time the legends about the lost Paradise "eastward in Eden," whence the human race derived, had become domiciled amongst the Hebrews, we are already in a fairly late period — in probably the First Millennium B.C. All Jewish chronology prior to the Babylonian exile, c. 600 B.C., is suspect, but, if anterior to that date, the formation of the Jewish Bible, including Genesis, cannot be very much so, and can hardly date in its present form at the very earliest, much before 1,000 B.C., a date at which Stonehenge was certainly standing, and in which the Homeric poems were perhaps already in process of composition. It is of course possible that it was only actually at the time of their exile in Babylon (which appears to be the earliest accurate date in Biblical and Jewish history) that the Hebrews finally incorporated the Mesopotamian narratives into their sacred texts. In any case, it must not be supposed that the primitive opening of Genesis with its casual mention of "the stars also," did in fact, represent the highest level of astronomic culture current at any period in the First Millennium B.C.

For even before the Greeks arrived on the scene with their truly wonderful scientific intuitions, both Egyptians and Chaldeans had already attained a fairly high level of astronomic culture. When compared with the learned star-gazers who surveyed the skies from the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates, the narratives of Genesis, with their crude anthropomorphism, were already primitive. And when, a little later, the Greeks, building (as is now known) on Egyptian and Babylonian speculations, proceeded to lay the foundations of an authentic science of astronomy, the crude guess-work of Genesis became relegated to the sphere of primitive folklore by the learned contemporaries of the great Greek astronomers Aristarchus

of Samos ("the Copernicus of antiquity") and Hipparchus. If the Hebrew scriptures were at all known to these savants, they must have regarded them as the primitive folklore of a prehistoric past. No doubt the Greek astronomers would have smiled with incredulity had anyone told them that, within the next few centuries, and then for a whole millennium, the primitive Hebrew fairy tales would become the unchallenged arbiter of both history and science! However, history is full of improbable paradoxes and that is what actually came to pass.

One cannot repeat too often — if only nowadays to annul the counter-suggestion perennially pumped out on radio and TV — that the victory of Christianity at the end of the 4th century represented one of the major setbacks in human social and cultural evolution; and it may be added, nowhere more so than in the domain of astronomy. The wonderful scientific evolution of Greek astronomy came to an abrupt stop, and for the next millenium, the declaration of St. Ambrose of Milan that the study of the movements of the sun and the planets had no relevance for human salvation, remained the last word on the subject. Greek astronomy strove not unsuccessfully with deductive logic to compensate for its still primitive scientific apparatus. It was superseded by the primitive creation legends of Genesis, actually a rather curious metamorphosis since Genesis is nowhere quoted by the Jesus of the Gospels. It was no doubt to Paul that Genesis owed its theological promotion to the role of infallible arbiter of physical science: one of the most painful and prolonged recessions in human scientific evolution. Paul made the Genesis legend of Adam and the Fall the coping-stone of his entire theology; a species of promotion that restored the obscure opening narratives of the Bible to a position of theological importance hardly inferior to the Gospels themselves. Paul is the "godfather" of Genesis!

As is common knowledge — at least to readers of THE FREETHINKER, if not to the BBC — modern astronomy began its long struggle against the cosmogony of Genesis with the scientific revolution begun by Copernicus and later developed by Bruno and Galileo. Since the now rather remote era of Galileo, the conflicts between Science and Religion have successively invaded the realms of biology, Biblical criticism and sociology; at present it rather looks — to the present writer — as if the next decisive phase in the now age-old controversy, will yet again centre upon astronomy, and that it will again be Genesis — and in particular, the Creation stories — that will come under intensive fire. For, though a layman cannot presume to be dogmatic about the matter, it certainly appears that astronomic science has now reached a point where in the perhaps not distant future, it will definitely be able to pronounce on how the Universe actually originated. If so, what becomes of the basic theistic dogma of God, the Creator? Was there any Creation at all? Was there any Creator to make the world in six or six billion "days"? or to make the stars also? Perhaps all these leading questions will soon be positively answered — in the negative!

—NEXT WEEK—

CONTROVERSY
A'HARA v. McCALL

This Believing World

To convince schoolchildren that there was a "personal" God, the BBC brought in Dr. F. A. Cockin, the ex-Bishop of Bristol, the other day, in discussing "The Christian Religion and its Philosophy." Dr. Cockin was always very sure about the three — God Almighty, the Christian Religion, and of course its Divine Philosophy, in his many former broadcasts; but on this occasion he floundered hopelessly on them all, particularly on the question of a "personal" God. The reason was perfectly simple. He has completely thrown overboard the Genesis story, and now knows that the Earth is nearly 4,000 million years old, and therefore he was quite unable to find where his one-time "personal" God came in — or even "our Lord" for that matter. A few more "expositions" of this kind, and most of the schoolchildren who hear him will become naughty little Atheists.

★

The "new" idea in ITV's "About Religion" the other Sunday was called "Eye Level," and the Rev. N. Perry-Gore had little difficulty in making it clear — no matter what other people meant by the term — he meant that Jesus Christ was God Almighty at "eye level." His attempt to substantiate this hopeless nonsense was characterised by the *Daily Mail* critic as "confused and scrappy" — which was much too kind criticism. Still, even with all the resources of ITV, it is not easy to get religion over to anybody who can think.

★

According to "The People," the Pope has revolutionised life in the Vatican — which may quite possibly be true. But he dare not revolutionise the "Faith." One of the stories related of him showed his dislike of "low-cut dresses" on women. He gave one of them at a dinner an apple, and she asked why. "Because it was when Eve ate the apple," answered the future Pope, "that she realised that she was naked" — a reply "that interigued all Paris." But it proved one thing clearly — that this story about Eve was true! And now, as Pope, he probably believes it more than ever.

★

So, after all, Mr. John Osborne's TV play on Holyoake is to be produced by ITV, and the *News Chronicle* celebrated the victory by once again referring to Holyoake's trial as the "last-recorded trial for blasphemy in Britain, early last century." It wasn't that early — there were something like a dozen before 1842, and there were at least a dozen afterwards including the 12 months' hard given to G. W. Foote in 1883 — much to the joy of Liberals like Sir William Harcourt.

★

But the dreadful crime of "blasphemy" is to the fore again in Oxford, with an angry "junior dean," a Mr. A. Horgan, refusing to allow *The Making of Moo* — a play well known to our readers — being performed there by the Oxford University Experimental Theatre Club. The play was far too "irreligious" for such young innocents as Oxford undergraduates to see.

★

Unfortunately for Mr. Horgan, TV Professor Alan Bullock stepped in, and the play will now be performed. After all, it was also approved by the proctors, though the *Daily Mail* critic, when it was produced two years ago, felt it was bad taste "to mock religion" as it did, especially when it also "poked fun at the Pope." Here was true "blasphemy" indeed, and *The Making of Moo*, in his opinion

no doubt, deserved "to flop." Congratulations to the Oxford Group who insist of producing it. That "blasphemy" should still be considered a crime in 1960 is downright religious impudence.

★

That staunch German Roman Catholic, Dr. Adenauer, who always insists that he was never a Nazi, and that he always opposed Hitler, seems however to talk like that bestial thug whenever the occasion demands. The other week he said: "I believe that God has given the German people in these calamitous times a special task." This was the constant cry of the "great Fuhrer," especially during the war — God was always with the German people then, as he was always with the German Emperor during 1914-1918. When the German people (with God's help) get, in their opinion, strong enough, it may mean God help the rest of the world!

Edinburgh University Poll

"THE MORE EDUCATED a man or woman becomes, the less likely he or she will believe in a deity." This is the finding of the Edinburgh University magazine *Comment*, as summarised in the *Edinburgh Evening News* (25/1/60). The magazine ran a poll at the end of the last term during which it questioned 700 Arts students about their religious beliefs. The questions asked were: "Do you attend church?" "Do you believe in a deity?" "Has religion an important part to play today?"

The results showed a marked difference between men and women. 33.4 per cent. of the men attended church regularly, compared with 55.7 of the women; 25.3 per cent. of the men never attended church, compared with 7.8 per cent. of the women. "That more women attend church than men would no doubt be expected," says *Comment*. "but that the difference should be so great is interesting. Is it due to certain social pressures on women or is it the result of the position which women hold in our society? Or is it something much deeper, something more inherent in the nature of women as opposed to men that causes this difference?"

To the question, "Do you believe in a deity?" 83.8 per cent. of the women students answered "yes," compared with 65.6 per cent. men; 5.4 per cent. women did not believe, compared with 18.4 per cent. men. The third "involved certain ambiguities which seriously limited the value of the results"; but 85.4 per cent. women and 70.5 per cent. men considered that religion did have an important part to play in the world today.

However, the survey showed "a very significant falling-off according to the year of study at the University in the percentage of students who believed in a deity." The first year it was 80.2; the second, 80; the third, 75.2; and the fourth, 59.3. Among Arts students only, remember.

Comment expected this falling-off because, "As a student progresses through the University acquiring more knowledge and experience of life, rational thought begins to play a greater part in his or her beliefs. The student is possibly not so easily swayed by his emotions as he was when he first entered the University, and this will result in fewer people believing in a deity." There may be other reasons, adds the writer, "but this suggests itself as the most probable." And we agree. We should like, now, to see the results of a poll among science students.

"MENACE TO FREEDOM"

The Oxford Union Society at its debate last night carried by 387 votes to 220 the motion: "The Roman Catholic Church is a major menace to freedom of thought and conscience in the Western world."—*The Guardian*, 29/1/60.

THE FREETHINKER

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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. I. 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.
- Marble Arch 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.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTIUR.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street) Sunday, February 14th, 6.45 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "An Innocent Abroad — Impressions of U.S.A."
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute) Lecture every Sunday, 7 p.m.
- Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1) Sunday, February 14th, 7.15 p.m.: J. ROBINSON, "Progress — Where To?"
- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Tuesday, February 16th, 7.15 p.m.: DR. J. LEWIS, "Mental Health—2."
- Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate.) Sunday, February 14th, 6.30 p.m.: P. BRODETSKY, M.A., "Should Morality be Enforced by Law?"
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street) Sunday, February 14th, 7 p.m.: C. T. SMITH, "God in the Space Age."
- Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, off Edgware Road, 3 mins. Marble Arch Station) Sunday, February 7th, 7.30 p.m.: E. MILLS, "Does God Exist?"
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street) Friday, February 19th, 7.30 p.m.: A. ELSMERE, "The Dead Sea Scrolls."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, February 14th, 2.30 p.m.: R. J. THOM, M.A., "The Comprehensive School."
- Orpington Humanist Society (Sherry's Restaurant) Sunday, February 14th, 5.30 p.m.: Speaker from the Danilo Dolci Committee.
- South London Humanist Group (Mulberry Lodge, Barnes Common, S.W.13) Sunday, February 14th, 8 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "The Harm Religion Does Today."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Sunday, February 14th, 11 a.m.: DR. J. GILL, "The Moral Crisis in America."

Notes and News

OUR GOOD FRIEND Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe of Clevedon, Somerset, was recently invited to address a gathering of students and others at Bristol University, but being unable to travel, he had to decline. However, the Principal came to visit him and tape recorded Mr. Ratcliffe's speech on "Public Speaking." Mr. Ratcliffe has also been asked to participate in a TV series "Life Begins at Eighty," but doesn't think the travelling difficulties to Cardiff can be overcome. However, if they can, he says, "I'll try to get in a bit of Free-thought; if I only say I'm a Freethinker."

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED: £53 18s. 11d. Miss N. M. Brooks, 10s.; N. A. Pease, £1; North London Branch (N.S.S.), £1 1s.: Anon, 2s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1 1s.; E. Greaves, 10s.; F. J. Melhuish (Canada), £3 10s.; G. Dickinson, 2s. 6d.; F. Edwards, 10s. Total to date, February 5th, 1960: £62 5s. 5d.

THOSE WITH CORRESPONDENTS in Australia will have seen the Dominion's Christmas 1959 commemoration stamp showing the three wise men on camels following the star to Bethlehem. Incongruously, the latest (January) issue of *The Westralian Secularist* arrived bedecked with this "five-penny purple." The *Secularist* had its own comment:—

A babe was born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago; Our PMG gets wind of it and thinks we ought to know. To proclaim the joyful advent he strikes a special stamp And makes us pay, quite nasally, for his evangelistic ramp.

Rather more seriously, the paper referred to the widespread idea that religion is good for children. By all means teach them about Jonah's Whale, it said:—

Of course we know it's just a tale, but the kids should think it's true.



OUR ATTENTION HAS BEEN DRAWN to a public lecture to be delivered in the Portland Lecture Hall of the University of Nottingham on Monday, February 15th at 5 p.m. Mr. J. F. Dixon, M.A., of the University's Extra Mural Department, will be speaking on "Charles Bradlaugh, 19th Century Radical." We hope Nottingham Freethinkers will turn up in force to hear this address on the founder of the National Secular Society.



THE AMERICAN FREETHOUGHT MAGAZINE, *The Liberal*, Philadelphia, December, 1959) quoted a special article by John Wicklein on adoption in *The New York Times*. A childless couple must profess a religion if they want to adopt a baby in New York State, said Mr. Wicklein. "If they are atheists or agnostics and say so, their application will be rejected . . . because state law requires the couple to raise the adoptive child within a specific religion." And *The Liberal* adds that similar laws prevail in many States.



THE PIONEER PRESS recently received an order for books from Colombo, and the accompanying letter is worth recording. "Owing to the pressure exerted by the Roman Catholic Church," it says "booksellers in Ceylon do not generally import books that are critical of the dogmas and policies of that Church. As a result of this, the non-Catholic intelligentsia are quite uninformed about the sinister policies and activities of the Church, and generally believe that Roman Catholicism is 'yet another religion working for the good of humanity.' As the local Press is owned either by Roman Catholics or other Christians, it generally plays up this idea. A few of us have now got together with a view to making books that reveal the workings of the Roman Church available for the people of Ceylon." Proposing to "start in a small way," the writer ordered works by Joseph McCabe, Avro Manhattan and Adrian Pigott. We wish him every success in his worthy work.



AS MR. ADRIAN PIGOTT'S much appreciated series of articles on Pushkin ends, we are able to announce that an English translation of the great Russian poet's *Ode to Liberty* will be printed in THE FREETHINKER. Bavard Simmons, who has done this translation, thinks it will be the first time an English version has appeared in magazine, as distinct from book, form. Be that as it may, we are sure it will be read with interest. So, too, will a new series prepared by F. A. Ridley, on the four major Roman Catholic orders. Each article will be complete in itself and will give readers the benefit of Mr. Ridley's immense scholarship.

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)—Poet and Pioneer

By ADRIAN PIGOTT

(Concluded from page 47)

Pushkin still felt frustrated by the censors and the Police. He wanted to go to England or France where there was more freedom of thought and where he would have fuller scope. However, his application to leave Russia was refused and in a foolish moment, he decided that an escape from his troubles would be marriage. The Don Juan whose amorous adventures had enabled him to read the human heart as acutely as Shakespeare had read it, picked upon a totally unsuitable person for matrimony. Natalie Goncharova had a pretty face and was of a good Moscow family, but she had little else to commend her.

Her mother (who had a chapel in her house) demurred at first at Alexander's atheist views—but eventually she overcame her objections. His father's present to him (ironically enough) included 200 serfs. The bride was not interested in his work and was quite undomesticated. Very soon they were heavily in debt.

Dances were her pleasures, so the unfortunate poet had no home life, but had to accompany his frivolous wife to a succession of parties and evening receptions. She attracted even the Czar, and unluckily, a certain Captain Danthes, an Alsatian refugee who was a lady-killer. He had a fine presence and (although he didn't know one word of Russian) he was able to enter a crack regiment as a standard bearer. He met Natalie at official dances and the pair became mutually infatuated.

Owing to Danthes' undue attentions to his wife, Pushkin challenged the Alsatian to a pistol duel. This took place in a snow-covered field outside St. Petersburg in January, 1837. Both were injured. Pushkin received a broken thigh and Danthes had two ribs damaged. But the poet's wound was mortal and he was carried to his home where he lingered in pain for two days. He saw his friends, pardoned his wife and Danthes, and grew weaker. On hearing of the news, the Czar sent him a scribbled note: "As a Christian, I pardon you. As a monarch, I shall aid you. As a man, I pity you".

It was suggested that a priest should attend. "All right," murmured the dying man faintly. "Bring anyone you like."

And so Alexander Pushkin died a nominal Christian.

Hundreds of people had begun to assemble outside his house, eagerly awaiting any bulletins. A barricade had to be put before the front door. One poorly dressed old man stood sobbing in the cold, and a sympathetic policeman enquired "Did you know the deceased?" The old man replied: "No; but I am a Russian." This simple sentence crystallised the feelings of the nation. The Police, sensitive to the chances of another attempt at a Revolution, were fully alerted for possible trouble. But they were unprepared for the wave of emotion which occurred. They had ordered that the poet's name should not be mentioned and that no obituary notices were to be made. One bold editor disobeyed, and printed a lament in black edging:

The sun of our Poetry has set.

Pushkin is dead, in the vigour of his magnificent career. Every Russian knows the meaning of this tremendous loss.

Pushkin—our poet, our joy—has gone.

The fire has gone out on the altar.

Next day, the offending editor was summoned before the President of the Censorship and given a severe reprimand. "What do you mean by 'Pushkin's magnificent career'?" asked Prince Dundokov irritably. "Was Pushkin a general or a minister or a statesman? He was only a poet." The President's lips curled in scorn. "The Mini-

ster reminds you that you are an official in the Education Department and that you must refrain from any further displays." The editor departed abashed.

Meanwhile the Police had become increasingly alarmed at the amount of public sympathy which was being exhibited. Hitherto the Russian people had only mourned or rejoiced at the orders of the Czar—and now they were daring to weep without permission! The funeral service was arranged to take place on an afternoon in the big cathedral of St. Isaac. However, during the morning, large crowds had already begun to assemble, so the Police ordered a last minute change to the small church of the royal stables, with admittance by special ticket.

As a further precaution, after the ceremony the coffin was secretly removed from the church at midnight for Pushkin's last journey over the snow-covered road to Pskov. And so an eerie cavalcade of three troikas slid noiselessly out of the capital on a moonlit night. The first sledge carried a posse of soldiers (to prevent any possible demonstrations on the way); the second carried the coffin, with the poet's devoted manservant crouching on the running board, and braving the intense cold with true Russian stoicism. The third carried one of his literary colleagues, representing the family and his friends. The Police had limited the number to one—and none of his family was interested in attending. In due course, the troikas arrived at Pskov and the poet was buried in the family mausoleum.

Today Pushkin is a permanent best-seller in Russia. The genius who spent much of his life in exile, harried by the Censors and Police, certainly does possess posthumous appreciation and the devotion of all modern Russians. They realise how much they owe to the efforts of this early preacher in the wilderness who voiced the campaign against social injustice. They revere him more than any of their writers.

Pushkin was the Chaucer and Shakespeare of Russia. It may surprise Britons, (whose literature originated 600 years ago), that up to as late as 1820 Russia had not produced one single author, poet, or dramatist of note.

This was due to centuries of stagnation under Czarism. Priestcraft and vodka, all of which frustrated the artistic possibilities of a gifted people. Then in 1820 this persecuted genius Alexander Pushkin arrived, to break the spell. Once the slumbering national talents had been aroused. Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Tchekov and others were soon blossoming. It is little wonder that modern Russians, (with their great love for reading and the theatre), hold Pushkin's name in the highest reverence.

He "blazed the trail" in poetry, prose and the drama—as well as promoting Liberty and exposing the current social scandals. This was a wonderful record for a man who died at the early age of 37—especially when it is remembered that he had to spend some of his time at his dreary desk at the Foreign Office; and that he had no modern advantages (such as a secretary, a typewriter or books of reference) to assist him.

His works contain so much human interest that they have provided operatic composers with more inspiration than those of any other writer apart from Shakespeare.

Examples are:—

"The Queen of Spades" (Tchaikowsky).

"Eugene Onegin" (Tchaikowsky).

"Ruslan and Ludmilla" (Glinka).

"Boris Goudunov" (Moussorgsky).

"The Golden Cockerel" (Rimsky Korsakov)

Resembling Shakespeare (Sonnet 81), and Burns ("There was a lad"), Pushkin was modestly aware of his unique powers. A few months before his death, he wrote his prophetic poem, *My Monument*, in which he foretold his future fame. One stanza from this is engraved on his statue in Moscow:

I shall be loved—and long the People will remember
The kindly thoughts I stirred; (my muse's brightest crown).

How, in this cruel age, I fought for Freedom
And begged for Love to those cast down.

Alexander the Great earned his title by the prowess of a bloody sword — but his triumphs were transient. Alexander Pushkin used his *pen* for obtaining enduring benefits for his countrymen.

Peace hath her victories
No less renowned than War.

Furthermore, his courage was not the flashy sort exhibited in brief moments of battle; Pushkin's bravery extended over a matter of years, and showed the arduous moral courage of an unselfish idealist. It led him, for most of his adult life in exile "to scorn the delights and live laborious days". The valiant poet-reformer did this to enable the improvement of the lives of millions of unfortunate people who were less well off than himself.

I would call him "Alexander the Greatest".

[N.B.—Messrs. George Allen & Unwin, 40 Museum St., W.C.1, publish a useful little book, *Pushkin's Poems*, by W. Morison, 5s. 6d. post free. This includes a short biography.—A.P.]

BBC Seance

"FANTASTIC" TV SEANCE says Woman in BBC 'Test' " headlined the *Daily Mirror* (4/2/60). It was referring to the "Lifeline" programme in which medium Mr. Douglas Johnson fingered a watch belonging to a "Mrs. Smith," and got an "impression" of a woman who had passed over after an operation. He suggested the complaint was cancer and Mrs. Smith said her mother had died of cancer. So, it was her mother, of course, and she had been lively and youngish when she died suggested Mr. Johnson. Obviously no, so he then hazarded 60. No, she was older than that said Mrs. Smith — very late 60's. Ah yes, but she was young for her age, Mr. Johnson said.

And so it went on. Did the name Doris or Dorothy mean anything to Mrs. Smith? Yes it did. It turned out to be her own name, though Mr. Johnson didn't vouchsafe this. A penny; Mr. Johnson felt the impression of a penny. Did Mrs. Smith know someone called Penny? Yes, she did: her niece in Australia. Splendid; that fitted in with some waves that Mr. Johnson had seen earlier — either across the sea or the sea shore, he hadn't been sure which. Now he was — it was the former. As for some hills he had seen, Wales or the West Country came to him, but Mrs. Smith denied association with either. Hills yes, though Lancashire, as it turned out. So, Mr. Johnson made it clear that the name "Wales" itself hadn't come to him (it would have done, you can bet, if there *had* been an association) just the hills, etc. However, he was all right; Mrs. Smith's mother had had a still-born child while on holiday in Wales (which Mrs. Smith didn't know at the time of the seance) so that was another success for the spiritualist.

Altogether, Mrs. Smith thought it was "fantastic"; and so, no doubt would many viewers, not to mention *Psychic News* — we can hardly wait to see that! In fact, it was merely a skilful performance by Mr. Johnson, marred by one deplorable omission. "Mrs. Smith" turned out to be the wife of Dr. D. Stafford-Clark, the BBC Consultant Psychiatrist who introduces the "Lifeline" programmes. Strange that the dead mother should have neglected to tell

the medium that, wasn't it? Mr. Johnson looked flabbergasted and lost his composed mien for a second. Not that it would make any difference to those who wanted to believe. Nor would the many loose ends that remained after it all.

And Dr. Stafford-Clark, concluding the programme, listed four possible explanations of Mr. Johnson's performance: (1) He was a fraud and in collusion with Mrs. Smith; (2) It was a coincidence; (3) It was telepathy; (4) Mr. Johnson's claims were true. But number 1 should be subdivided. We think Mr. Johnson is a fraud, but we don't say he was in collusion with Mrs. Smith. She just naturally encouraged him and interpreted him in the way that mediums want.

C. McC.

A Muslim Reformer

By PETER SINCLAIR

UNORTHODOX MUSLIMS are about as easy to find as Reds in the Vatican. Most followers of Muhammed adhere very strictly to the beliefs of their ancestors, and I have in the past found it extremely difficult to move one of them from the position of belief in the literal interpretations of the Creation, Noah's Ark and all the other fairy stories which go to make the Holy Bible and the (equally Holy) Koran! Javaid, however, is different. His revolutionary theories are enough to make all the *Molvis* in Mecca turn in their graves.

Whilst remaining a Muslim, retaining his belief in Allah the Almighty and accepting Moses, Jesus and the rest as prophets sent by the Lord, he has rebelled against many of the antiquated dogmas preached by his Elders.

For examples, Javaid gets very annoyed whenever he hears a fellow Muslim reading the Koran, the Holy Koran, in Arabic. Why? Because most ordinary Pakistanis do not understand the Arabic language!

He believes, however, that it is very necessary for a good Muslim to read the Koran. In his opinion, if a person continuously reads the Holy Book he will begin to live a good life; for the Koran contains Allah's strictures on How To Lead An Exemplary Existence. But how on Earth, says Javaid, can a Muslim learn from the Koran if he is directed to study it in a language he doesn't understand? Yet the majority of Muslims continue to read the Koran in Arabic. The reason? Because God, in presenting the Book to the Arabs through Muhammed said: "I give you this book in Arabic that you might understand what is contained therein." This is the word of the Lord, so older Muslims (and most younger ones) would not dream of straying away from it, and their children are compelled to waste hours reading the Ten Commandments, etc., in Arabic.

Javaid is one of the first to rebel against this outworn, non-common sensical idea. And, though he is no Atheist, we should welcome his progressive move. After all, when more Muslims discover some of the things contained in their Holy Book there could quite possibly be an influx of Pakistanis into the National Secular Society.

CORRESPONDENCE

REPLY TO CRITICS

The criticisms of recent articles of mine on Islam and Pope Joan do not appear to be very relevant. In relation to the survival of Islam, I based my contention in favour of this upon the surely obvious fact that, as compared with Christianity and/or Hinduism, it has reduced mystery, magic and miracles, to a minimum, and accordingly, accommodates itself to the demands of an era of scientific knowledge and rationalistic criticism like ours, much easier than its religious rivals. This is surely obvious; there is, for example, no Trinity, Transubstantiation, sacramental system,

or sacerdotal caste in Islam; nor was the Khalif, the Viceregent of the Prophet, endowed with anything in the nature of Infallibility. Your correspondent's citation of Averrhoes, Avicenna *et al* as Muslim metaphysicians, is quite incorrect. It merely indicates his own lack of acquaintance with the evolution of Muslim theology. For, since Al-Ghazali, the most famous of Muslim theologians, denounced Avicenna and Co. as "Kaffirs" — i.e., infidels — they have been regarded as outside the pale of Islam and cannot accordingly be cited in connection with it. Any metaphysical influence which they may have had, was on Catholicism (via Aquinas and Scholastics) not on Islam. The recitation of the Koran in Arabic only, certainly does not disprove the cosmopolitan character of Islam. But nonetheless, it can hardly be denied that it represents a rather curious survival of what Muhammad probably intended to be originally a purely Arabic religion.

With regard to the legend of Pope Joan; all that I tried to do in my article was to indicate the probable historical source for the genesis of this curious story set in the darkest of the Dark Ages. I suggested that the admittedly false story of the woman Pope very probably originated in the actual position held by the Papal concubines of the period, who came near to assuming Papal honours. Presumably a legend of such definite character must have had some kind of origin in the factual circumstances of that time. Neither of my critics upon this theme appears to produce any viable alternative theory. Mr. Peter Moore merely argues that Pope Joan could not have existed — which we know already and which, incidentally, I had already noted. But he advances no alternative clue as to what actually was the historical source of the bizarre story of a woman Pope; which I did. Whereas, while my second critic, Mr. S. W. Brooks, does so, his ingenious supposition of Papal homosexuality as its historic start, appears to break down on a vital point. Pope Joan, so the story runs, was finally detected when she gave birth to a child in the course of a public ecclesiastical procession. I have heard many hard things said about homosexuality, but I have never yet heard that it was responsible for increasing the statistics of illegitimacy! With all respect to Mr. Brooks, I think that the historical origins of the story had better be sought, as I sought them, in the feminine entourage of the Papal Court, so notoriously licentious in that era in which the story of the female Pope is located. I must conclude by stating that I think most chroniclers of this episode are very ungallant in their usually harsh references to the Lady Pope. If she was anything like as learned as depicted, she would certainly have been far superior to the male morons and monsters who held the Papal Office during this tenebrous era. I think that Pope Joan might even be cited as a *bona fide* feminist argument for a female Pope in the future!

F. A. RIDLEY.

APPRECIATION

I must express my appreciation of the splendid articles you are giving us in THE FREETHINKER.

T. M. MOSLEY.

[We print the above valued opinion of Tom Mosley, representative, we are glad to say, of many received.—Ed.]

RATIONALISM OR HUMANISM?

Allow me to express my appreciation of Mr. Colin McCall's article "Rationalism or Humanism?" in THE FREETHINKER of 18th December, 1959. It certainly upholds the policy of the paper adopted by the writers of articles of 60-70 years ago — the policy that has kept THE FREETHINKER afloat through many times of stress.

"The basic attitude remains. It remains because it is sound" is a powerful phrase.

My best of New Year wishes.

C. HOLMES. (Australia).

PUSHKIN

I was particularly interested in Adrian Pigott's article on Pushkin. Avrahm Yarmolinsky, in his introduction to his *Works of Alexander Pushkin* (Random House, New York), reminds us: "Through his mother he [Pushkin] was descended from 'the Negro of Peter the Great,' Ibrahim Hannibal, who seems to have been the son of an Ethiopian princeling. Hannibal married a Balto-German gentlewoman, by whom he had eleven children, one of them Pushkin's maternal grandfather. The poet was rather proud of his six-century-old lineage, and he also liked to refer to his African origin, on one occasion speaking with sympathy of the fate of those he called 'my brother Negroes.'" We may forget that there is an aristocracy on the "coloured" side of our human race — an aristocracy of talent and gift and grace.

J. HUTTON HYND.

STAR OF BETHLEHEM

I was much interested in H. Cutner's comments on the Star of Bethlehem programme put out on BBC Television by Patrick Moore.

Of course the fable is pure fairy story, as Mr. Cutner says. It is amazing how people may believe otherwise. Yet it is true that

at the date in question, Biela's Comet came to periastron. Crossing the ecliptic at the First Point of Scorpio, it entered the intra-orbit of Mars and was reported by various contemporary historians, such as Sulpicius. There is nothing surprising in all this. The comet was seen many times later until 1852, when it disintegrated.

As this was not brought out in the programme concerned, it is worth reporting, though it makes little difference to the general argument.

R. T. FISHALL

(H.D. Observatory, Montevideo, Uruguay.)

OBITUARY

THE FUNERAL TOOK PLACE at Sunderland Crematorium on January 27th, of Mr. John Rawson, of Sunderland, who for some years had been a militant advocate of Freethought on the North East Coast, and previously at Sheffield, where he was a close friend of Mr. Samms, for many years Secretary of the Sheffield branch of the National Secular Society. He was aged 56. It was typical of Mr. Rawson's strength of conviction, and his determination that there should be no misunderstanding about where he had stood in the matter of religious opinion, that he left a poem of 19 verses to be included in his Secular funeral service. The wish was carried out by his daughter, who handed the poem to Mr. F. J. Corina to read as part of the service. It is called "The Convert," and traces the development of a boy from religious belief to scepticism under the influence of scientific knowledge.

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