

# The Freethinker

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[Introductory note. In the historical evolution of Christianity prior to the Reformation, the activity of the monastic Orders played an important role while, since the Reformation, the Jesuits have played an important part in modern European and world history. In the ensuing series of articles, I propose to consider the sequential evolution of monasticism with particular reference to the four major religious Orders, viz. Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans and, last but not least, Jesuits.]

MONASTICISM IS, OF COURSE, much older than Christianity.

It is found, for example, in such Far Eastern religions as Hinduism and Buddhism several centuries before the Christian era. Both Buddha and Shankara, the founders respectively of Buddhism and of (modern) Hinduism are represented as living lives that are essentially monastic in character. Buddhism later became the religion of monasticism, *par excellence*, and even today the Buddhist Sangha, or church, is primarily monastic in character; the monks living together in a community and practising the three essential monastic rules of poverty, chastity, and obedience to their religious superiors. Since Buddhism was certainly known in ancient Egypt, where Christian monasticism originated, it is possible that one at least of the sources of Christian monasticism may be sought amongst Buddhist missionaries to that country. For the early Christian Father, Clement of Alexandria, refers to Buddha by name in one of his writings.

## The Origins of Christian Monasticism

In its present form, there are no references to monks or monasteries either in the New Testament or in the earliest writings to emanate from the Christian Church. The earliest form of monasticism of a definitely Christian character appeared in Egypt where, apart from possible Buddhist influences, there seems to have been a native tradition of a kind of Pagan monasticism in the desert. The earliest Christian hermits, led by the famous St. Anthony, traditionally fled from Pagan persecutors during the third and fourth centuries, and founded the first Christian communities in the desert. Salomon Reinach, the great French Freethinking historian of religion, describes this phase in Christian Ecclesiastical evolution as follows:—

“During the Decian persecution (3rd century) many Egyptian Christians had withdrawn to the desert where they formed themselves into communities. Thus arose Christian monasticism which indeed, had precedents both among Jews and Christians.” Reinach then goes on to cite the Essenes, etc. “Monasticism reached the West about the end of the 4th century. Here, conforming to the temperament of the people, it assumed a less contemplative and more practical character. St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-543) has the credit of having imposed poverty and manual labour upon the monks, together with a severe discipline; the monastery founded by him on Monte Cassino, became the model of Benedictine monasteries where, according to a famous formula, ‘Whosoever works, prays.’” Civilisation, adds Reinach, owes to the Western monks, the cultivation of a part of Europe and the preservation of Latin literature.

(S. Reinach, *Orpheus*, pp. 280-81).

## The Benedictine Order

The still existing Benedictine Order appears to have been the first Western monastic order to have acquired a more than merely local character; an historic destiny which it seems to have owed initially both to the organising talent of St. Benedict himself, who was a member of an old Roman aristocratic family dating from the days of the Roman Republic, and to the proximity of Monte Cassino to Rome itself, the headquarters of Western Christianity. Nowadays, the Benedictines are mainly a scholastic and educational Order but, in their early days, they combined sheep-farming with missionary

work. It was the Benedictines who were mainly responsible for the conversion to Roman Catholic Christianity of the Pagan German tribes who had overrun the decrepit Roman Empire during the 5th century: e.g. Gregory the Great, who sent Roman missionaries to Anglo-Saxon Britain at the start of the 7th century, was a Benedictine. Pursuant on their founder's injunction to combine work with prayer, the Benedictines were very active in agriculture, where their activities ranged from brewing the liqueur that now bears their name, to sheep farming, where the ruins of their monasteries in English and French country districts (e.g., the West Riding of Yorkshire) testify to their former activities in that connection. They appear to have played an undeniably important role in laying the foundations of the agrarian civilisation of the Middle Ages, which succeeded and stabilised the preceding chaotic conditions of the Dark Ages. One can, I think, suggest that the Benedictine Order played, on the whole, a progressive administrative and cultural role in the savage Europe of the Dark Ages between the collapse of Rome (and of Western Latin civilisation) in the 5th century, and its revival during the 12th: when Europe began to be re-civilised as a result of its contacts, via the Crusades, with the more advanced culture of the Muslim East. Throughout this era, the Benedictine Order probably represented the most powerful ecclesiastical force in the Catholic Church. They were the reformers of the corrupt Papacy of that dark age. It was from their monastery of Cluny, in France, that there eventually arose the reforming movement in the 11th Century, which raised the monk, Hildebrand, to the Papal throne as Gregory VII.

## The Benedictine Order and The Church

Each of the four major religious (monastic) Orders which have successively arisen in the Roman Catholic Church has possessed or shared the leadership of the Church in a particular era. Broadly speaking, one may say that it was the Benedictines who largely effected the historic transition of the Dark into the Middle Ages whereas, after the Crusades (12th Century) their influence declined: they were superseded, first by the Franciscans and Dominicans, and then, after the Reformation, by the Jesuits. These four still-existing Orders represent different types of monasticism.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## The Great Religious Orders: The Benedictines

By F. A. RIDLEY

The Benedictines, for example, are a stationary Order, rooted in definite monasteries which they make the centre of their work. The Franciscans and Dominicans move about much more. It was as wandering preachers that the later Orders made their mark. Indeed, in the case of the Jesuits, founded in 1540, it is doubtful how far they can really be styled a monastic Order since, unlike the others, they neither live in monasteries nor discharge routine monastic duties. In Catholic phraseology, of course, the monastic clergy are the "regular" clergy, since they live under a "Rule" — Latin *Regula*, as distinct from the "secular" or parochial clergy who are *in secula*, "in the world."

#### The Order Today

The Order of St. Benedict has retained its separate identity, and is today mainly a teaching Order which has, in

modern times, produced scholars of eminence like the Italian Muratori, and the English Cardinal Gasquet. But the combination of manual and intellectual work persists. In England, since the repeal of the penal laws against Catholics, several Benedictine monasteries have reappeared, notably Downside, near Bath, where there is a well-known public school; and the present Abbot often appears on BBC Brains Trusts. Unlike the highly centralised Jesuits — with whom current relations are said to be none too friendly — the Benedictines live in autonomous communities which elect their own officials. But the "heroic" age of the Sons of St. Benedict was during their early centuries. Today, though probably the most learned and least superstitious of the major Catholic Orders, they are probably the least influential of the four.

[Next Week: The Franciscans]

## Letter from a Schoolgirl

By COLIN McCALL

WHEN THE REV. EMMETT McLoughlin left the priesthood, he was inundated with letters from Roman Catholics: warning, threatening, appealing letters, as well as some that encouraged him in his chosen course. He printed examples of different kinds in his sincere and enlightening book, *People's Padre* (Peter Davies, 1955), and I was reminded of one of them the other day. It was the letter from a precocious Catholic schoolgirl of 13, written "to remind [sic] you if you know what you are doing by quitting the priesthood, it is a great gift from God to have become a priest being able to hold the host which is God himself"; telling Mr. McLoughlin to "think it over why you are quitting"; asking him if he was "giving a good example to those who are not Catholics"; and urging him to "remember the oath you took." Mr. McLoughlin rightly commented that the letter showed the hold of the Roman Catholic Church on children.

It was an anonymous letter sent to THE FREETHINKER office that reminded me of the above. It is likewise from a Catholic schoolgirl and, although the age is not given, it has the same precocity; indeed, cocksureness. It is not, of course, addressed to an ex-priest, so the subject matter is different, but the attitude is indistinguishable. The Church may legitimately boast that our English Catholic schoolgirl has been conditioned in exactly the same way as Mr. McLoughlin's American one. And if I wanted to be as rude as the former, I could say that there was room for considerable improvement in her knowledge of English grammar, particularly in punctuation and the use of capitals. Examples will be noticed by the reader, for I shall quote complete with errors. But I am not trying to score points. The main interest of the letter is to the student of religion and its hold over the child mind.

"Yes Sir," it begins, "Science and Education have tried to Eliminate Christ's teachings. As a Catholic schoolgirl I say Faith is the most wonderful thing in the world. It enables you to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed." It would be useless to tell the young lady (even if she were likely to read it) that a satisfactory revelation would require no faith and permit of no doubt; that it would be clear to all. And it is perhaps a little unfair for me logically to criticise the work of a schoolgirl. At the same time, I can't avoid saying that a little of the much-vaunted Christian humility would not come amiss to the miss!

Parts of the letter are understandably childish. "Adam thought he knew better than God," she writes. "Some Scientists to day are telling God What to do with his world

his food and his people." But the Catholic arrogance is not long absent. "Imagine Gods World and the scientist are telling him how to run it. The sooner we get back to sanity the better for the whole world." And, "History to me is Repeating itself."

The girl has a dog and a cat, but she tells us that she can't carry on an intelligent conversation with them. "I could talk all day and they wouldnt answer." All right: she recognises the rather obvious limitations of dog and cat intelligence. But, oh dear! why can't little girls recognise the limits of their own intelligence? "When I visited a Maternity hospital to see a friend's new baby I didnt see any dogs with pups or cats with kittens yet you say we are just like an animal. Here is were we differ sir I think God in creating humans raised us to his own likeness to the animal he gave no soul but to us he did." (Remember, errors in the original.) And then, not satisfied, she indulges in childish abuse, viz: "Evolutionists say We sprang from monkeys I say some of us didnt spring far enough our mentality is so low."

However, she "will go through life with the following words in my heart and you would do well to ponder over them Who made you? God made me. Why did God make you? God made me to know him love him and serve him in this world And to be happy with him for ever in the Next"

The tragedy is, if I may borrow from my schoolgirl correspondent, that history is repeating itself in her own case. She is a so-very-typical Catholic schoolgirl. What hope is there of influencing one so thoroughly indoctrinated, so arrogantly sure? Very little on the surface. Indeed, I can see only one hope. The arrogantly certain are, I have often found, really less sure of themselves than the quietly confident. This is because arrogant certainty, such as that of Catholics like this, is rarely a thought-out attitude, but an emotionally charged one: a kind of defence neurosis, in fact. And, like all neuroses, it is marked by instability. Quiet confidence, I feel, comes, by contrast, when a question has been carefully investigated and weighed in a manner anathema to Roman Catholicism but indispensable to Freethought.

The letter is, I repeat, fundamentally tragic. Though it reads comically at times, one couldn't laugh at it. The antics of priests are ludicrous, those of the worshippers are pathetic. "This world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel." Horace Walpole's words — from a rather different letter — seem particularly appropriate here.

## Nasser's Arab Nationalism

By PADRAIG KRINKILL, D.LITT.

ONE IS GETTING RATHER TIRED of that "Arab Nationalism" which President Nasser is proclaiming *via* the Press and radio. Even the British Labour Party is mouthing that slogan. So far as the cry appertains to Iraq and Jordan, and even Saudi Arabia, the claim would be perfectly legitimate, but the noisy demand of Egypt is simply farcical in the face of Egypt's history. When 'Amr ibn al-'As attacked Egypt in the year 639 with his 4,000 marauding Arabs, later to be reinforced to 15,000, he was able to defeat a Roman army which, at that time, occupied the land. Egypt then had a population of six millions, — for the greater part Christian. In other words the Arab intruders were but *one* to every *six hundred* Egyptians. The latter — from sheer force of numbers — could have driven the Muslim invaders into the sea. Unfortunately the Copts — who were the original racial descendants of the ancient Egyptians — refused to unite with their fellow Christians of the Jacobite and Melchite churches to resist the Muslim intruders. That doctrinal rift between the rival Christian Churches suited the Muslim Arabs admirably, and the latter played upon those sectional disputes among the Christians to the greatest advantage.

Three years after the Arab-Muslim conquest, the conquerors were able to force £6,000,000 out of their Christian subjects in taxation, which meant that some eight million Christians were being filched of their wealth. Strange as it may seem, the Copts were being employed as civil servants by their tyrannical masters, for the simple reason that the ignorant Bedouin Arabs knew as little about administration and accountancy as they did of English. Yet in spite of their valuable service to the body politic, those Copts had to bear the brunt of the vilest anti-Christian persecution. The next Arab Governor, 'Abdallah ibn Sa'd, soon made the Copts feel the weight of his iron heel. Following Muslim procedure, he made those Christians understand that they were a conquered people, and as non-Muslims had no legal rights. They were forbidden to wear the burnous — a hooded cloak — whilst their monks were forced to display badges; and to be found without one was a sufficient excuse for plundering their monasteries. In the year 722 the Caliph commanded the wholesale destruction of the religious pictures in Christian churches. A Coptic uprising resulted, but it was suppressed ruthlessly. When their Patriarch was flung into prison a few years later, a Nubian army of 100,000 marched into Egypt, which was only persuaded to return after the release of the Patriarch.

After that, persecution grew by leaps and bounds over the centuries; not a moment's peace being granted the Christian community, who were cowed by a brutal Berber, Turkish, and Sudanese soldiery in the pay of the Egyptian caliphs and sultans. Eventually the Christian Copts — the *real* Egyptians — were forced to bend their necks into submission. The Egyptian Caliph Al-Hakam humbled them further. The Christians were then compelled to wear black; and so as to break what little national and religious spirit that was left to them, the demolition of their churches and the confiscation of their property proceeded at a steady rate for five years (1007-12). Then came the crowning mercy of the Muslim tyrants. The Copts were offered the choice of conversion to Islam or total banishment. Needless to say, crowds of terrified Christians were forced to yield and were "converted." That is the way in which the descendants of a few thousand marauding Arabs, with the later help of Turkish and Berber hirelings, reduced the

original majority of *six hundred* Christians to *one* Muslim, to something like an even level. Yet with the encouragement of Muslim settlers from other lands, the Christians were soon outnumbered.

Two centuries later, when King Louis of France defeated the Muslims at Damietta, the latter destroyed 115 Christian churches in revenge. Not satisfied with having forced a religious and racial majority by fire and sword, the Turkish Mamluk rulers in 1301 were still prodding the Christians so as to degrade them still further. The latter were now compelled to wear blue turbans, so that a tentative crowd hostility could be worked up against them. Nor were the Jews forgotten in that frenzy of intolerance. They had to wear yellow turbans, and neither they nor the Christian dare ride a horse: whilst as pedestrians they were compelled to yield "right of way" to the Muslim, *i.e.*, they were forced into the gutter. Verily the Muslims remembered the words of Muhammad when he said: "When ye meet one of them, force him towards the narrowest place." Further, to ring a bell, or raise a voice above a conversational tone, was to court disaster.

Yet in spite of centuries of the most dastardly oppression, there are still over a million Christian Copts in Egypt today, and they *alone* have the racial claim to be Egyptians. To them may be added some 150,000 Greek, Italian, French, and Lebanese Christians. Against the Christian total, however, there stand 23,000,000 Muslims; but the real point is, "How many of the latter are Arabs racially?" Obviously, a goodly few must be the Muslim descendants of those six million of Copts who were forced into conversion as Muslims, to say nothing of the descendants of hordes of Turks, Kurds, Circassians, Berbers, Nubians, and Sudanese, for whom Nasser claims "Arab nationality."

Even if these people could be termed "Arabs," should not Nasser consider himself extremely lucky to be in Egypt at all at this time of day? The Arab conquerors of Persia were driven out by its inhabitants in the 9th century. In Syria, a land in which Aramaic was spoken before the Arab conquest, the latter were defeated by Saljuq and Ayyubid Turks. The Arab rule in North Africa came to an inglorious end in 1056, when the Berber Almohades took control of their rightful heritage, although Nasser tries to woo them as his "Arab brothers."

Finally, let it be clearly understood that "Arab nationality" could not have counted for much in Egypt in the year 868 when the Turkish Tulunid dynasty took control. The same must be said of the Ayyubid irruption of 1169, who were Kurds. Where was "Arab nationalism" then? Where was it in 1252 when the Turkish Bahri Mamluks claimed dominion in Egypt? Where was it when the latter were succeeded by the Circassian Burji Mamluks in 1382? The Ottoman Turks conquered Egypt in 1517, and their Khedives ruled there until the 20th Century, when it was the hated British and not "Arab nationalism" that gave Egypt its freedom. Obviously there were not enough self-conscious "Arabs" in the land over those centuries to make their voices heard. Yet Nasser pretends that the hotch-potch of Caucasian peoples, whose descendants occupy Egypt today, *plus* the handful of Christian Copts, are the descendants of a Semitic race that emerged from the Arabian peninsula. It may be too silly for words; but there are quite a number of silly things that become dangerous, even to those who delude themselves and others to believe in them.

## This Believing World

**Mormons in England can consider themselves** lucky that the Christian religion has in these days become somewhat civilised through the determined and salutary influence of Freethought. Think what would have happened to Mormon missionaries say, only 300 years ago, if the true Christianity which prevailed then had persisted now, and if the 16 ministers who recently warned the inhabitants of Crawley in Sussex against Mormonism had had their pious way. The Mormons have actually made 100 converts in that (perverted?) city, but perhaps the prospect of a little lawful — and religious — polygamy may have had some influence in the conversions. Of course, polygamy is, we are told, no longer practised by Mormons, but they can and do backslide . . . !

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**Should a man marry his deceased wife's sister** or, if he is only divorced, should he be allowed to marry his wife's sister? Or should a man be allowed to marry *only* if, as Paul so gallantly and reverently put it, because "it is better to marry than to burn," and not because he is in love? Or should we be allowed to marry in a purely secular way in a register office, or with all the pomp and circumstance of a church ceremony? In life, marriage is a never-forgotten landmark — but oh, how the Churches hate to see us married without their permission and their rituals. So far, in the clash between bishops and parsons and priests, the *people* have almost always got their way. There is little doubt that on the question of a man marrying his deceased, or his divorced, wife's sister, in spite of the protests of the Archbishop of Canterbury — or the Pope for that matter — the people will win again.

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**For some reason which we have never been able** to fathom, believers in "white magic," that is, in the current religion (whichever it is) hate almost ferociously "black magic" — though, as far as "magic" is concerned, there isn't anything to choose between them. A *News of the World* reporter went recently "to investigate a strange story of 'black magic' near Cambridge," and of course, he discovered that a "witches Sabbath" really means "worshipping the god and goddess of fertility." In this the girls who take part "undress round a black altar, anoint themselves with oil, and dance naked." This kind of "black magic" does not require a witches Sabbath — similar scenes can be discovered in at least a few very prosaic Soho clubs.

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**That what are now called "fertility" rites** still persist in many out-of-the-way country districts all over the world is well known to all students of anthropology, and they probably do far less harm than the literal belief in Hell and its Devils taught first by Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, and later by all good priests. But Christianity has never brooked a rival, hence the savage persecution through the ages of heretics and infidels, and hence its more than savage determination to exterminate all "witches." There may well have been fertility rites, but there never were any "witches."

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**As a change from the usual exhortations** to come to Jesus for everything, and particularly when you want something very badly, ITV put up a show on its "About Religion" programme the other Sunday aimed at telling us what a religious "retreat" really was. We were taken to one run by Jesuits, and shown a group of men, mostly young, who wanted a rest, and also time for some kind of religious "meditation." They were also preached at by a priest —

the one we were allowed to hear tried to prove that God really existed which, considering that everybody there, including the ITV interviewer, was an out-and-out believer, seemed rather superfluous.

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**Apart from all this, the atmosphere** in the "retreat" looked uncommonly like that of an innocuous boarding house at the seaside, except that the absence of women, young and old, made the place unutterably dull. A flash of a bikini now and then would have livened things up — but there, what can one expect when true religion believes in the most rigid segregation of the sexes. Woman is still the sinful tempter in the eyes of the Roman Church.

## The Minister at the Lynching

By PETER SINCLAIR

ALMOST A YEAR HAS PASSED since Mack Charles Parker, a 23-year-old Negro truck driver, was lynched by a mob of white hooligans in Poplarville, Mississippi.

Parker, you may recall, was arrested on a charge of raping a white woman — which is probably the worst thing a Nigger can do in God's Own Country — and was incarcerated in Poplarville gaol pending trial.

A posse of local men (sic!) decided, however, that there warn't gonna be no trial. We ain't gonna have no Nigger lawyer cross-examining a white woman, said those racially pure gentlemen, so they advised the local Deputy Sheriff where they could find they key to Parker's cell.

Then the men, all nine of them, dragged Parker screaming from his cell and set about him with sticks and fists. They then pushed him into a car and drove off to a secluded spot on the banks of the Pearl River.

Mack Parker was still alive when they arrived there so one of the men, a Christian Minister wearing his collar back-to-front, fired two bullets into the already mutilated body.

Parker was dead then. Very dead indeed.

They threw the corpse into the river, but not before the Man of God had said a short prayer . . .

This story was unfolded during last month by United States attorneys before the Grand Jury called to consider the atrocity. I am reliably informed by an American friend that lynchers, if convicted, are liable to nothing more than a 1,000-dollar fine and/or a gaol sentence of one year. (Perhaps the authorities are leaving the *real* punishment to the Lord for, after all, in every U.S. courtroom the legend, "In God We Trust" is inscribed for all to see.)

Final word from another of the Lord's poor servants, a Poplarville Church Minister. This reverend gentleman told reporters: "Not a single member of my congregation has mentioned this thing to me, and I haven't mentioned it to them. We are involved only in spiritual matters."

### HAVE YOU . . . ?

Have you made a "Soul" more happy;  
All the better, for your birth?  
Have you added any flower  
To the garden of the earth?  
Have you, for the Truth, stood firmly,  
Struck a blow, to banish lies?  
Done a deed, the Right upholding,  
In the face of calumnies?  
Have you sown a thought, uplifting,  
One that will effective be,  
As a link in chain eternal;  
Play its part in Destiny?  
If you have, whate'er befall you,  
As through Life you journey on,  
Whate'er your creed or colour,  
Truly, you have earned "WELL DONE"!

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

# THE FREETHINKER

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

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

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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 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. ARTHUR.

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 28th, 6.45 p.m.: G. BRIDGEN, "Monarchy and Militarism in the Modern State."

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 28th, 7.15 p.m.: D. HENDERSON, "Psychiatry, Maturity and Religion."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Tuesday, March 1st, 7.15 p.m.: Mrs. A. WALKER, "Mental Health—III."

Glasgow Secular Society (Central Hall, 25 Bath Street,) Sunday, February 28th, 3 p.m.: J. QUINN, "World Without War."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate,) Sunday, February 28th, 6.30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Is Freemasonry a Religion?"

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (formerly West London Branch) (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, off Edgware Road, 3 mins. Marble Arch Station) Sunday, February 28th, 7.30 p.m.: G. CORNES, "Religious Institutions."

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street,) Friday, March 4th, 7.30 p.m.: J. W. CHALLAND, "Belief and Unbelief."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street,) Sunday, February 28th, 2.30 p.m.: J. PECK, "Which Way Labour?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, February 28th, 11 a.m.: Miss K. NOTT, "Academic Philosophers and Moral Issues."

## Notes and News

WE ARE GRATEFUL to Mrs. B. Cartwright of Leicester for a short report of the lecture, "Charles Bradlaugh, 19th Century Radical," by Mr. J. F. Dixon, M.A., of the University of Leicester Extra-Mural Department, February 15th, and announced in THE FREETHINKER on February 12th. Mrs. Cartwright travelled from Leicester with her

## A Challenge

MOST PEOPLE are aware of the enormous publicity given to Mr. Douglas Johnson's B.B.C. T.V. seance. The National Secular Society, which denies Mr. Johnson's claims to get in touch with the spirits of the dead, makes the following public challenge:

We are prepared to organise a public meeting in London at Mr. Johnson's convenience, at which he should attempt contact with the "other world" (the sitter to be chosen by arrangement between the two parties) under the critical supervision of a small group of Freethinkers to be nominated by us. All expenses would be borne by us.

husband, and considered the trip well worth while. The talk, she says, was impartially and finely delivered, conveying "the tremendous courage of Bradlaugh in hostile conditions that we can scarcely imagine." And when she looks around the House of Commons today, Mrs. Cartwright sadly confesses that she cannot think of a single member who would "so persistently fight for a cause which he held to be right and just." Mr. T. M. Mosley participated in the discussion after the lecture, and recalled the Bradlaugh Centenary Celebrations in 1933.

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THERE HAS BEEN SOME DISCUSSION lately in *The Guardian* on the way we can use our empty cathedrals: musical recitals, etc. But, "Surely the reason why so many cathedrals are sparsely attended today is their over-concern with 'the very best Church music' and sermons with a 'high degree of academic knowledge'," wrote Mr. M. L. Stevens of St. John's College, Durham (13/2/60). There must be, he suggested, "a radical change in both music and sermon matter, so that both meet the needs of ordinary people in their everyday lives. And let us not be afraid even of evangelistic addresses on some occasions . . ." But these are mere incidentals. It isn't highbrow or lowbrow music or even highbrow or lowbrow sermons that govern attendance at cathedrals or churches, it is belief. It isn't the clergy's fault that the churches are empty: the fault lies with Christianity itself and there can't be "a radical change" in that.

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YOU HAVE TO HAND IT TO THE METHODISTS; they certainly try to bring their brand of Christianity to the people, even if the people don't want it. Last December the Rev. Ronald W. Frost of Plymouth toured the coffee bars of the city and he intends to do so again. He will "engage the youngsters in conversation, seek out their problems and difficulties, and give them — in his own words 'something to think about'." (*Western Evening Herald*, 10/2/60). He sincerely believes that this is "the best way to bring Christianity into everyday life" and "Unless the Church is willing to do work of this kind, to understand and be with the younger generation, then it will pack up." We think it should do just that and if we were in Plymouth we would tell Mr. Frost — just to give him "something to think about."

### NEXT WEEK

## THE T.V. SEANCE

By H. CUTNER

# Turgot

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

TURNING OVER SOME OLD BOOKS and pamphlets, I came across recently a little volume inscribed "Miss Bradlaugh with affectionate wishes from Papa" and initialled on the title page "M.H." This booklet was *Turgot, his Life, Times and Opinions* by W. B. Hodgson. It had been given by Charles Bradlaugh to his daughter Alice in 1871, and she had taken it to school in Paris with her, where it had been initialled by the English mistress, Miss Hamilton, as "permitted."

Anne Robert Jacques Turgot was a remarkable man in a remarkable age. He was born in 1727, four years after Adam Smith. His father was a leading citizen of Paris who, as Provost, had been responsible for the construction of the great city sewer on the right bank of the Seine, and of other valuable public works. The youngest son was destined for the Church, and studied with this end in view at the Sorbonne. A classmate, Abbé Morellet, who later published a translation of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, relates that he was much respected by his comrades for his character, his acumen and his prodigious memory; he could repeat by heart most of Voltaire's fugitive verse, and many passages from his tragedies. This does not suggest the budding priest. Nor did he blossom into an abbé, as did Morellet. His intellectual curiosity was insatiable; in 1748 he wrote a reply to Buffon's theory of geological changes; in 1749 a letter on paper-money; to be followed by a paper on The Origin of Languages and another on Berkeley; also translations from the poets Klopstock, Ossian and Gessner. When, after all this, he expressed a repulsion for the ecclesiastical career for which his father destined him, there was no opposition to his wishes, though his friends pointed out to him that in France at that time it was quite possible to enter the Church and yet be a magistrate. Even the hint that a bishopric might be an available prize could not change young Turgot's determination. The Church was not for him; evidently he had learned more than poetry from Voltaire. It may be noted here that Adam Smith was intended for the Church, but also refused to bind himself to a profession, the dogmas of which he could not support.

Turgot became a public servant, devoting his leisure to the study of Law and Finance as part of his work, and to Science as a hobby. For the *Encyclopedia* (1756) he wrote articles on several subjects, including Existence and Etymology, as well as Fairs and Markets. In 1760 he visited Voltaire at Geneva, and the latter wrote of him: "We have here just now M. Turgot, who is worth a whole bar. He has no need of my instructions; he is fitter to instruct me. He is a most lovable philosopher." On his return to Paris, Turgot was appointed Intendant of Limoges, then one of the poorer districts of France. Here he worked for 13 years, making it his constant endeavour to lighten the load of taxation on the poor and to distribute it more evenly. He found his district over a million francs in arrears, which represented several years' contribution. He was able, nevertheless, to see to the construction of roads, of barracks for the soldiers instead of billeting; he encouraged agriculture, especially the cultivation of the potato. A terrible famine in 1770-71, if it brought frightful suffering, at least enabled Turgot to obtain the power to levy a tax without distinction of person; it must be borne in mind that nobles and clergy were normally exempt from taxation. All the same when, in 1774, Turgot was appointed State Secretary for the Marine, Limoges was over four million francs in arrears of revenue: Turgot complained to his superiors that it was

impossible to extort the current taxes without ruining the taxed.

After five weeks in his new office, he was raised to the supreme position of Controller-General. To the young king, Louis XVI, he set out the principles which would guide him in his new work, "no bankruptcy, no increase in taxation, no borrowing, but careful and strict economy." The King's own generosity, he declared, was a source of danger; he must beware of his own goodness and remember whence came the money which he thought of distributing among his courtiers. There must be no bribes, no exemptions and no privileges. "It is to you personally," he wrote, "that I devote myself, to the just and good man, rather than to the King." His first edict was signed on September 13th, 1774, for free trade in corn. For this he aroused the enmity of those trafficking in corn, particularly as there was in that year a bad harvest. However, Turgot showed great firmness and was loyally supported by the King. In January 1776 he presented his Six Edicts, which included the suppression of the corvées, the obligatory labour and supplies which bore very heavily on the peasantry, and the suppression of the guilds, which enjoyed many privileges. He also indicated that he would tax the nobility. These proposals raised a storm; the attack was not merely open, but took the form of most venomous intrigue. Forged letters were laid before the King, which contained offensive expressions against both Louis and his Queen. These led to a breach between the King and his minister, and on May 12th, 1776, Turgot received the notice of his dismissal — as, it is said, he was in the act of drawing up yet another revolutionary edict. "My successor," it is reported that he murmured, "will finish it." His successor who finished it, was the Revolution. Turgot addressed a dignified and moving letter to King Louis. Great was the rejoicing of his enemies at his fall; but Voltaire wrote to D'Alembert, "I see only death before me since M. Turgot is dismissed"; and he addressed to Turgot his *Epistle to a Man*. Later, in 1778, when Voltaire made his triumphal return to Paris, he publicly embraced Turgot, saying, "Suffer me to kiss the hand which has signed the redemption of the people."

Turgot died, aged 53, in 1781, having devoted his last years to study. There are two essays he wrote which are of particular interest to Freethinkers. In 1775 he addressed a memoir to King Louis on "Toleration" to induce the King not to take the oath for the persecution of heretics, which contains these words: "To follow his own conscience is the right and the duty of every man, and no man has the right to make his own rule for another." "The second deals with Education, in which he declares "The moral instruction of the people ought to be absolutely distinct both from theological opinions and the ceremonies of worship. The morals of all nations have been the same: and almost everywhere they have been corrupted solely by being mixed with theology. The truth of the principles of morality is shaken by connecting them with opinions which are either openly controverted or rejected in secret by a considerable number of men, and especially by those men who have the greatest influence on mankind. Faction duties are mixed with real duties though often opposed to them; and the latter are, in the meantime, often sacrificed to the former . . . real duties are evaded or violated on the plea of practising some imaginary virtue . . . a national education . . . ought to be one of the first duties of those who govern a nation; and they ought above

all to be careful not to abandon it to the management of priests, whose direct influence over the morals of the people is incompatible with the good order of society."

Readers may like to note that a national education, though made legal by the Republic and planned on a majestic scale by Napoleon did not become a fact in France for another 60 years, or in England for a century. To preserve the schools from the clergy is today a major political issue in France. Readers know what is done in England.

## Liberty

### AN ODE

(After Alexander Pushkin)

Run thou, oh, hide thee from the curious eyes,  
Tsaritza weak of soft Cythera's isle!  
Where art thou, menace stern of monarchies,  
Proud singer of man's liberty? Sing awhile!  
Come, snatch thou from my head the poet's crown,  
The laureate wreath; break my too-tender lyre . . .  
Come, Freedom, for I would the world inspire  
Enthronèd crime, fiercely, to batter down.  
Reveal to me the noble, quag-set trail  
On which has passed exalted the brave Gaul,  
Whose songs courageous evil kings assail  
E'en now, as when mischance did France befall,  
Pupils of destiny's capricious heart.  
Tyrants of all the world! Tremble! Naught can save!  
Listen, despondent serf, and fallen slave:  
Rise, and take courage, wheresoe'er thou art.  
Oh, woe! Alas! Where'er my gaze I throw  
I see the whip, the fetter, iron chain,  
And laws disgraceful, that all men should know,  
While helpless, hopeless tears to heaven complain:  
All where unjust and arbitrary power  
In superstition's darkness thick doth dwell,  
For credulous belief, slavery doth spell;  
There too must glory's fatal passion lour.  
One spot on earth there is, one land alone,  
Where justly lies upon the monarch's head  
No charge that he for misery atone  
Because his people much have suffered.  
That is the land where union is strong  
Twixt laws enforced and sacred liberty;  
Where shield and sword, in firm fidelity,  
Over all equal, choiceless, moves along.  
For there this sword is striking from on high  
With upright swing at every public crime,  
Wielded by hands that one can never buy  
With niggard greed, or fear, as in old time.  
Lords! Rulers! learn, for ye the throne and crown  
By law is given—not the gift of nature—  
Ye stand above the people's lowly stature;  
The highest law eternal is. Bow down!  
Where the eternal law doth heedless sleep,  
Callously slumbering among the tribes,  
Where kings and subjects rule the law, all weep;  
Sorrow the people know, oppression, bribes!  
Martyr to mistakes, to glorious errors,  
Thou, who laid down beneath the knife thy head  
For kingly ancestors a long time dead,  
I call as witness to those lawless terrors.  
Louis the scaffold mounts his death to meet,  
Viewed by silent, wondering posterity;  
His uncrowned head the monarch bends to greet  
The bloody block stained with all disloyalty.

The law is silent—silent are the folk,  
The axe of crime upon his neck then falls . . .  
And thus, above the new-enchainèd Gauls,  
Men saw spread out the evil purple cloak.

Autocratic Evil! Doer of great wrong!  
I loathe thee, monster, and thy bloody throne,  
With cruel joy I see, and put in song,  
Thy ruin, and the death in which thy children groan.  
The people on thy forehead read thy worth,  
The mark of murder, called the Brand of Cain;  
The terror of the world thou art; I say again  
Thou art the great reproach to God on earth.

When on the River Neva's gloomy tide  
The midnight star shines mirrored on the deep;  
When carefree head on pillow doth abide  
Heavy in calm repose and dreamless sleep,  
The pensive singer at one spot doth look.  
He sees a palace shadowed in the mist,  
A place of menace, which the heart can twist,  
A tyrant's monument—by men forsook.

He hears Muse Clio raising horror's cry.  
Behind the awful terror of those walls,  
Caligula's last hour—for he must die,  
That vivid vision his moist eye appals.  
He sees, in ribbons and with stars, appear,  
Drunken with wine and drugged with wickedness,  
The secret murderers, who onward press  
With daring face, and in the heart great fear.

Silent there stand the bought, disloyal guard,  
As silently the drawbridge is let down,  
In darkness open gates in palace-yard  
By paid hands working treason to the Crown! . . .  
Oh, shame! Oh, terror of our woeful days!  
Like beasts invade suborned janizaries! . . .  
Inglorious thrusts the watching singer sees . . .  
The crownèd tyrant for his evil pays.

To-day, O kings, this lesson ye must learn:  
No punishment severe, no great reward,  
Can ye protect from that which ye did spurn,  
Nor prison-roof, nor altars rising skyward.  
If first in true law's shrine ye kings bow down,  
Concord will come and evil days will cease:  
The people's freedom and enduring peace  
Will be the guards eternal of the Throne.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### TOLERANCE

I was mildly amused at Mr. A'Hara's exhortation to more tolerance; unfortunately he made it to the wrong address. It struck me as something like a reproach to Jews for disliking anti-Semites.

Mr. A'Hara's plea would have made sense had he called upon the radio and TV authorities, for example, to be tolerant and stop gagging Freethinkers. If we had equal opportunities — wrote a reader in the December issue of the *New Zealand Rationalist* — scientific materialism would easily prevail. However, that is exactly why they would never give us a "free run" (apart from staging, here and there, a fake show for the sake of "democracy"). So long as we have to clamour for our right to equality, so long is it naive and puerile to preach to us the virtue of tolerance!

P. G. ROY.

### THE IRISH HORSES

Just a word of appreciation for Eva Ebury's article, "The Pope and the Irish Horses." All humanitarians, whether supporters of our National Secular Society or not, must condemn this traffic for the evil it is; and the Pope, by his failure to denounce it, cannot escape heavy censure.

G. I. BENNETT.

Much impressed by Eva Ebury's article. It was forthright and challenging, and cannot be too extensively broadcast.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

**HOTCH POTCH**

In his article, "Exit the Thirty-Nine Articles?" (5/2/60), Mr. Ridley says: "Incidentally, the obvious fact that the thirty-nine are empirical, rather than logical formulas, will not worry the vast majority of the members of Dr. Matthew's own Church, for the English are a notoriously illogical race. Look, for example, at that glorified hotch potch of all ideas, the Labour Party!"

I should like Mr. Ridley to answer two questions arising out of this subject:—

1. What does he mean *exactly* by "At that glorified hotch potch of all ideas, the Labour Party?"
2. Which political Party in this country is not "A glorified hotch potch of all ideas"?

D. A. CAREY

[Mr. Ridley writes: *The Labour Party is a hotch potch of ideas. In it you will find dogmatic Marxists attached to NCLC; dogmatic Catholics who are in the Party only to push Socialism out of it; right-wingers whose point of view is so similar to the Tory Party it would take a microscope to see the difference. Not to mention a miscellaneous crowd of Christian Pacifists, Pacifists who are not Christian, and many others. As regards other Parties, it is no doubt true that the same lack of logic applies. But there is a basic difference between left- and right-wing Parties. The latter are held together principally by self-interest, whereas the former require ideas.*—Ed.]

**DETERMINISM**

Mr. Meulen has again misrepresented Determinism by saying it states the "why" of events: this is totally wrong, as it merely states, in Meulen's somewhat awkward phrasing, the "how" of events. Determinism merely asserts the law of causality in all events — it is a way of describing the universe, and cannot therefore have a purpose, for it is inanimate and indeed does not really exist in its own right. I congratulate Mr. Meulen on his subtly misleading symbol HE for Determinism; it enables him to use the personal pronoun and thus imply personality. Furthermore, he now accuses Determinists of being hypocrites, as if they had a creed which must be rigidly adhered to. But people live perfectly normal lives firmly believing or assuming causality in natural phenomena, and Determinism is merely an extension of this law to human behaviour. It depends entirely upon our individual characters as to how we are affected by the corollary that human behaviour is determined. Mr. Meulen continues to baffle me with phrases like "bend, turn, twist my mind," "restless surge of will," "no two events are exactly alike," etc.

Mr. Meulen seems to place great importance on the fact that he "feels he can choose" and therefore rejects Determinism. But this is irrelevant, for psychoanalysis has abundantly proved that the feeling of choice is only apparent and that there is really no choice at all.

Science has always made certain generalisations in describing nature which are termed "laws": that is, like causes produce like results. For example, when 2 atoms of hydrogen and 1 of oxygen combine, the result is invariably water. But all these laws assume the axiom of the sequence of cause and effect: it is the very basis of all science. What is the point in trying to describe the sequence of phenomena if events are sometimes haphazard and sometimes not? I was cheered to see that Mr. Meulen himself implied causality in his statement that "observation gives us the sequence . . . of events." This is exactly Determinism. Although Mr. Meulen still has not given me any examples of "spontaneous desires" I admit that there are events of which the causes are as yet unknown, e.g., the behaviour of the atom, but I maintain that in view of the development of science this is because our knowledge of those events is lacking. When the causes of disease were unknown it was believed that demons inhabited the body — this has been disproved with advancing knowledge.

However, even after Darwin's theory of evolution there persists an irrational belief that the "mind" is distinct from the body. This, of course, is totally fallacious and has not a particle of evidence to support it. If then the "mind" is only the brain, human thought is subject to the law, which Mr. Meulen continues

to doubt, of causality. Because human behaviour is vastly more complicated than natural phenomena and because the opportunities for studying it are limited, modern psychology and psychoanalysis can only explain it in an imperfect way; but their knowledge is continually increasing and the whole basis of their work is the axiom that events are not haphazard (nor, according to Mr. Meulen's impossible system, half-haphazard and half-caused) but are arranged in logical sequence, and there is no reason why there should be any exception to this rule.

C. A. P. BINNS.

**OBITUARY**

VICTOR CHARLES WAGNER, who died on January 31st at the age of 75, was born in Paris, but had lived in England for the last 37 years though retaining his French nationality. He was a member of the National Secular Society, Rationalist Press Association, and South Place Ethical Society, and was among the first members of the Sutton Humanist Group, although, as the Group's Chairman reminds us, Mr. Wagner never tired of saying, "What is all this humanism? I call myself a freethinker, a rationalist." He never hesitated to express his support for atheism, vegetarianism and non-smoking and was vigorous in both body and mind until his illness of the last year or so.

In the presence of French relatives, Mr. Michael Lines conducted a secular service at the South London Crematorium on February 4th.

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