

# The Freethinker

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## — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

### *The Vatican and The Summit*

By F. A. RIDLEY

AFTER A LONG PERIOD marked by diplomatic horse-dealing and political manoeuvring, it seems that some kind of a Summit meeting between the heads of what used to be called the "Great Powers" is due some time in early Summer, perhaps in "the merry month of May." To describe such a meeting as important would be actually a ludicrous understatement, for upon its ultimate issue there may very well depend peace or war. Obviously such a fundamental issue was always a momentous one. But nowadays, in view of the technical revolution which has entirely transformed the character and aims of war itself, the proximate meetings at the political summit are now beyond any reasonable question, the most important events likely to transpire this year. For the question of peace or war has now become one of the survival of human culture, if not indeed, of the human race itself.

#### **The Continuation of Politics**

The classical definition of the past role of war as a sociological institution was, until recently, that laid down rather more than a century ago by the Prussian war strategist, General Karl von Clausewitz, namely, "The continuation of politics by other means." When normal diplomatic intercourse fails to solve the problems at issue between rival States, war—organised violence—is invoked as the final arbiter. However, it is now obvious that the incredible increase in destructive power in the atomic era, has entirely invalidated the definition. For a future war between the major atomic powers, a conflict presumably waged with H-bombs, not to mention devastating forms of bacteriological warfare, will not *continue* anything. Our civilisation today, is built on a volcano; once sprung into the air, only a Dark Age is likely to ensue. To be or not to be — that is literally, the question!

#### **The Churches and the Summit**

What is the present-day attitude of the Christian Churches towards the Summit meetings? As far as the Protestant Churches are concerned, I think that one must state in fairness that most of them realise the gravity of the situation and the desperate need for some permanent solution to emanate from the forthcoming talks. This certainly is the case with such socially-minded clerics as Dr. Donald Soper (Methodist), and Canon John Collins (Church of England). There are, it is true, some discordant voices, notably of that atavistic survival, the Archbishop of Canterbury, but in general, most Protestant spokesmen seem to take a more sensible view. Many Protestant clergy now describe themselves as "Humanists"; an assumption hardly compatible with Dr. Fisher's readiness to contemplate with equanimity the extinction of the human race.

#### **The Vatican and the Summit**

To all this, however, there remains one notable exception, a most important one not only in the specifically religious field but equally in the political arena that impinges more directly upon the mountain slopes which culminate in the eventual summit. This exception is constituted by the

Vatican, by the Roman Catholic Black International. By, in particular, the active and aggressive intervention of Catholic Action, of what may be described in more general terms as "political Catholicism," a very powerful force in both the Old World and the New. Ever since 1945, Rome has been both the major foe of Russia and of everything that appertains to "the spectre of Communism" and equally the principal advocate of an atomically conducted Crusade — against the Communist East and all that it represents. For a period of nearly 40 years under the astute leadership of Popes Pius XI and XII (1922-58), Rome ceaselessly intrigued with every anti-Russian force in turn successively, Fascist and Democratic, to bring about the long-hoped-for "Holy War" for the conversion of Russia and the Communist East, by the same time-honoured methods which proved so successful against the Albigenses in the 13th century. If no such Crusade has so far transpired, that is not the fault of the Vatican!

#### **Rome and Russia**

It is not usually remembered that when the original Russian Revolution took place in 1917, the news was received with marked approval in Rome, for the Tsars had been not only temporal rulers, but Heads of the schismatic Orthodox Church. As such, they were "Anti-Popes" in the eyes of the Papacy. But the victory of the atheistic Bolsheviks soon changed all that. From 1922 onwards, Pope Pius XI, who had been Papal representative at Warsaw during the unsuccessful Bolshevik attack on that city, committed the world-wide Black International to a fierce anti-Communist line, a policy continued with even greater vehemence by his successor, Pius XII after 1939. Up to the accession in 1958 of the present Pope, Rome had been the major advocate of a Third World War, and the major obstacle to anything in the nature of a Summit meeting in order to outlaw war and to put co-existence between the present Eastern and Western blocs on a permanent footing.

#### **Rome at the Crossroads**

What is going to be the positive attitude of the Vatican towards the Summit meetings between the political leaders of the rival power-blocks in our contemporary world? Fortunately the advent of the present Pope, reputedly a political liberal by at least past Vatican standards, appears to have produced at long last, some relaxation of the intransigent attitude of the two previous Popes. John XXIII has even made some cautious pronouncements in favour of the projected Summit talks! However, the eventual attitude of the Vatican still seems to be in doubt. For a powerful group of Cardinals, worthy disciples of the late Pacelli, are still bitterly opposed to any advances to the hated Communists. The leader of this group, Cardinal Ottaviani (now Head of the Holy Office, one of the key positions in Vatican administration), recently preached a sermon in Rome (*a propos* the Italian President Gronchi's then pending State visit to Moscow) in which he fiercely denounced all approaches to the Communists as "shaking hands with



Cain." (The ecclesiastical equivalent of shaking hands with murder.) Ottaviani seems to have been the present Pope's chief rival at the last Conclave. He is a much younger man than Roncalli and may still wear the Triple Tiara. Evidently the Vatican is on the horns of a dilemma, the precise dilemma being the choice between peaceful co-existence with its formidable Communist rival, or an atomic war in which, as it becomes clearer every day, the Vatican and its occupants, have as little chance of surviving as has its rival, the Kremlin. We do not doubt that this formidable dilemma is, just at present, causing severe headaches in the Vatican. Pope John will need all his Infallibility to solve it!

## National Secular Society's Dinner

OUR YEARLY SOCIAL EVENT began very happily with many old friends meeting again, and many new ones being welcomed. The Pavlovs Arms was brilliantly lighted and therefore easily found on the evening of March 26th by the many guests who attended the popular function; among them we noted in addition to Guest of Honour Mr. Hector Hawton and Mrs. Hawton, Mr. Peter Cotes and Miss Joan Miller — both so famous in the theatrical world — Mr. Adrian Pigott and Mr. and Mrs. G. C. Dowman.

The Dinner, as usual, was excellent, and there is nothing like a good meal to put people in a good humour. When it was over, the Chairman, Mr. F. A. Ridley, who was at his best and wittiest, began by pointing out that the evening, like Caesar's Gaul, could be divided into three parts — the first, eating; the second, the speeches; and the third, the dancing. In the course of his speech he referred to the great changes which were taking place in the world due to space travel and our increasing knowledge of the Universe. But we still had a State religion, and the Roman Church was still making desperate efforts to gain its former supremacy; and though all the Churches had suffered heavy defeats, our task was still great. Mr. Ridley then introduced the Guest of the evening, Mr. Hector Hawton, so well known as the Editor of the *Humanist*.

Mr. Hawton began with his appreciation of being chosen Guest of the Society, feeling that this was not merely choice of person, but acknowledgment of the Rationalist Press Association, which he represented and the Humanist Council on which he served with members of the NSS and the Ethical Union. He recalled his very light "swordplay" with Mr. McCall over the word "Humanism"; there was, he said, very little difference in outlook between them. Humanism was chosen for the Council because it seemed a good word, but also because it was different from Secularism, Rationalism and Ethical, the ones of the component bodies. But we all had secular aims in the Freethought movement. The speaker then touched upon a variety of subjects all with good humour and discernment. Mr. Hawton felt that we must do our utmost to adjust ourselves to the great changes taking place in our own time. Our bond of unity must be Truth, we must approach our problems with clear thinking, and we must not allow such a phrase as "We can't trust Atheists," used so often in our relations with Russia, to go unchallenged. Above all, on the question of religion, we must ask for *evidence*. Mr. Hawton then proposed the Toast to the National Secular Society which was heartily applauded, and responded to by Mr. F. A. Hornibrook with a spate of good stories from his almost inexhaustible repertory. Mr. W. Griffiths then sprung a very pleasant surprise on the guests by referring to the engagement of our very popular Secretary, Mr. Colin McCall, to Miss June Goodhew, and the generous response by the NSS Branches and individual members to present them with a suitable wedding gift. This took the form

of a cheque for £50. After some well-chosen words to mark the occasion, Mr. Griffiths read out a poetic appreciation by Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, the oldest member of our Society, who was now over 90 years of age, and "still going strong."

Mr. McCall, in a moving little speech, thanked all concerned for their kindness and generosity.

It was then the turn of one of our youngest and latest members, Mr. D. H. Tribe, to propose the Toast to "Our Guests" which he did wittily — and he hoped that all of them would take away the message of Freethought. To this, Mr. Peter Cotes responded, pointing out that our principles had been enunciated by Bradlaugh, and developed by G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen, and he was certain that even if our numbers were still small, we had influenced many. After which, Mr. Ridley thought that, as the second part of the evening was now over, we could "get on with the dance."

The music of Bill Shipman and his Band soon attracted the dancers, many of whom were no doubt pleased that some of it recalled the dance music of 50 years ago, and provided a very happy change from "rock-'n-roll." A raffle in aid of THE FREETHINKER Fund resulted in the ever-popular Mrs. Ruby Seibert winning a handsome box of chocolates, and the evening closed perhaps with regret that we must wait another year for another such Dinner.

Those hard workers "behind the scenes," Mrs. Seibert, Mr. McCall, and others, and the MC, Mr. Griffiths, were responsible as usual for the smooth working of everything and they all deserve our thanks.

H. C.

Gran Hotel,  
Camp de Mar, Majorca.  
28th March, 1960.

The Editor,  
Sir,

The splendid hospitality accorded to us at the Annual Dinner of the NSS should not pass by without further recognition.

The hour was late, and several of the other speeches were lengthy, when I rose to respond to the toast of "The Guests," last Saturday evening. Otherwise, I would have touched further more lovingly upon one aspect of the evening which particularly touched me. It was to see so many friendly faces in that gathering, those of people who have helped to guide my thinking down the years: Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Douglas, Bayard Simmons and, not least, those two fine friends and two stalwarts of the Movement, Fred and Nina Hornibrook, made the evening for us not only a pleasure and a privilege, but also an honour; and if, in my haste to bring the talk to an end, and make way for the dancing which followed, I omitted to acknowledge my indebtedness to such good folk and our pleasure in seeing them again, then I hope this letter will help to repair the omission.

Yours truly, PETER COTES.

### OFFER DECLINED

WE REPORTED (1/4/60) that the Catholic Truth Society had decided "after careful consideration" that it wasn't possible for it "to take advantage" of our offer of space to reply to Mr. F. A. Ridley's article, "Agadir — and God" (18/3/60). It has not, however, been content to leave the matter just like that. Not the Catholic Truth Society! It has invited Mr. Ridley to join. "After careful consideration" he has decided it isn't possible to take advantage of the offer.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE CROSS

By H. CUTNER



# Religion and Adoption

By COLIN McCALL

I HAVE JUST RECEIVED a copy of an article, "Is Our System of Child Adoption Good Enough?" by Robert Walker, which appeared in the Canadian magazine, *Macleans*, on September 26th, 1959, and which claims to be a national report on adoption methods in the Dominion. As the happiness of a great many children, not to mention would-be adoptive parents, depends upon the methods employed, we do well to know something about them. The fact that religion seriously interferes with the successful placing of children makes it the more so a subject of concern for Freethinkers. In some respects, adoption in Canada may differ from here, but this tragic religious aspect is common to both countries — and to others as well.

Tragic, yes; but cruel too! Every social worker Mr. Walker met "deplored this imbalance" caused by religion, and Miss Marion Murphy, of the Canadian Welfare Council in Ottawa, herself a Roman Catholic, told him "about a nun she knew who was so distressed by the surplus of homeless Catholic children that she said wistfully, 'If only we could sort of *suspend* religion for a while — until we placed all the children — and then go back to it.'" If only! But no wonder the nun was wistful: she must know that in this, as in other matters concerning human happiness, Catholicism puts religion before humanity.

Consider the adoption figures for Canada, as given by Mr. Walker. In 1958, Canadian judges signed final adoption orders for 11,641 children and, when Mr. Walker was writing, it was thought that the figure for last year would be about 12,000. About a quarter of these would be privately arranged. Orphaned children, for example, might be adopted by relatives, and "An illegitimate child may legally be located for a couple by a doctor or a lawyer . . . as long as he accepts no money — although professional social workers frown on this practice." The other three-quarters — 9,000 placements — are made by "provincial departments of welfare" or 140 of the "semi-private" but "recognised" agencies, most of them children's aid societies descended from philanthropic organisations of voluntary amateur workers. Nowadays, all workers are paid, and private philanthropy is inadequate to meet the costs involved, so they usually receive "grants from community chests and from municipal and provincial governments."

The Canadian Welfare Council cannot definitely state how many children are in care in institutions or foster homes at any given moment, but the figure is estimated at 25,000. How many of these are adoptable? The definition, says Mr. Walker, has widened enormously in the last ten years to include children previously considered too old or too seriously handicapped, but most applicants want healthy infants, and about 10,000 of these are available.

Ten thousand available; 9,000 placed; long waiting lists of parents. It sounds absurd, and it is absurd. "But most available babies are Roman Catholic and most applicants aren't. By law or by tacit understanding, depending on the province, adoptive parents must have the religion of the child's natural father, or its mother if she's unmarried." So, "Except in the Maritimes, where the balance is a little better, four Protestant families apply for every Protestant infant. Catholic agencies have four children for every home they can find. For every Jewish child there are 20 applying couples."

"If only we could sort of *suspend* religion for a while," exclaimed the nun. And Roland Hennessy, adoption supervisor for the Catholic Children's Aid in Toronto, said: "As

a professional, I believe a child is better off in a home, as long as the home teaches some religion, than in the best of institutions." But he added: "As a Catholic, I perfectly understand the Church's position."

Here we have the great tragedy — the schizophrenia — of Roman Catholicism stated once again. All his experience, all his humanity tells him one thing: his Church tells him another. And he follows his Church!

Mr. Walker cites an adoption trial in Boston "years ago" (he is no more precise than that) when Judge Walter Conside laid down that "Not even the (natural) parents have the right to deny an immature child who has been baptised a Roman Catholic the privilege of being reared in Catholicity." And even where it isn't recognised by official statute, this principle is observed in practice by Canadian agencies. In Ottawa in 1958, though, "an unmarried Catholic mother consented to have her child adopted by a Jewish couple because she knew the baby would wait a long time for a Catholic home." This was perfectly legal, and Mr. Walker asked William Bury, director of Ontario's Child Welfare Department, if he thought the case would be a "persuasive precedent." Mr. Bury's reply was terse: "Not a hope in hell." Protestant and Jewish agencies with nothing like enough children to go round; Catholic agencies unable to find parents. Four Protestant families for every Protestant child; four Catholic children for every Catholic family. Every social worker deploring the "imbalance," but not a hope in hell of anything being done about it. No province will break the "traditional religious barriers."

How long shall we stand for it? And I say "we" advisedly, because a similar situation prevails here. How long shall we go on accepting that sprinkled water and mumbled Latin gives a new born child the "privilege of being reared in Catholicity" — in an institution — but deprives it of the privilege of a family life that even Catholic children's aid societies know will be better for it? How long will the Mr. Hennessys rest content in their schizophrenic state, complying with a teaching they may "understand" but don't, in fact, believe? The great alternative is not God or mammon, but God or man, and it is time Mr. Hennessy — and the rest of us — decided to put human happiness now, before imaginary privileges bestowed by baptism.

Would-be adoptive parents are turned down on various grounds; if they have heart-disease, tuberculosis or cancer, for instance, "people over 40 aren't usually considered . . . except for an older child"; by law in most provinces, candidates must be at least 25, and so on. In Quebec, there is a callous law that only allows adoption of illegitimate children if both parents are insane or dead. There are many difficulties and many unfairnesses associated with child adoption—in Canada, as elsewhere—and Dr. Daniel Cappon, an associate in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto, says the agencies "have no sensible criteria" for deciding the fitness of prospective adoptive parents. "A better, more equitable system would be simply first come, first served . . . An agency's judgment in rejecting couples is exactly like the sentence of a court, with one unhappy difference. There's no avenue of appeal."

But Dr. Cappon "allows that the agency's problem arises from something it can't control — 'religious discrimination for the illegitimate unborn child'." It seems to me that this is the very factor that governments could most easily control, and I am firmly of the opinion that they should do

(Concluded on next page)



## This Believing World

We wonder what would have happened to the Archbishop of Canterbury had he lived in 1877-78 when the Bradlaugh and Truelove prosecutions took place, and almost the whole of Christian England shuddered with horror that the two defendants were actually propagating birth control. One of the truly Christian Societies of the day furnished itself with the magnificent title of "The Society for the Suppression of Vice," and it was responsible for the trial and sentence of poor old Truelove because he had the hardihood to publish Robert Dale Owen's *Moral Physiology* — which had been sold unmolested anyway for 40 years or so.

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Yet here we have now Dr. Fisher telling the world that "Family planning is a positive Christian duty"! It was in the Ages of Faith in the latter part of the nineteenth century in England, that contraception was looked upon as a vile sin — possibly a sin against the Holy Ghost — and the sellers of birth control methods and appliances were hounded down with the fullest rigour of the law. If to employ these methods now is "a positive Christian duty," why was it not so then? Perhaps we shall eventually be told that, after all, Jesus was the greatest Family Planner the world has ever seen.

★

Robert Tee in the "Daily Mail" asked recently whether it was a coincidence that, as church attendances dwindle, "the fashion for consulting the soothsayer grows." Well of course the fashion for consulting soothsayers, palmists, astrologers, mediums, and many other "fortune tellers," has never ceased, and the more religious one is, the more he or she believes in "foretelling the future." One of the best seances ever described is the one the Witch of Endor framed for King Saul (in the Bible) and proves that even in Biblical times these ladies had a "familiar spirit" guaranteed to foretell future happenings all gleaned from the spirit world.

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The truth is that the more one believes in religion — true religion, not the half-baked ones — the more one believes in foretelling the future and in the whole bunch of "foretellers." Mr. Tee naturally proves his case by the usual number of stories from sceptics who go to consult the "big-business" fortune tellers, and they invariably come away absolutely convinced that they all are literally genuine. As a matter of simple fact, it is the very religious people who consult fortune tellers. Unbelievers rarely if ever get anything from them except peurile nonsense.

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After Fatima, Lourdes, La Salette, and other wondrous shrines which the Virgin honoured with her Divine Presence in the past, it is quite a relief to find her helping a Roman Catholic family in Stevenston, Ayrshire, to fame. Nine-year-old Rabbie Guiney went upstairs and (God be praised) saw a vision — the Holy Virgin Mary in a glass panel in a door. Since then, we are told, "there has been pandemonium," and many old residents in the district "have been deeply moved," one of them piously insisting that the vision "has an amazing resemblance to Our Lady of Fatima."

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As was the case at Lourdes, the local priest, the Rev. J. Maxwell, thought it was a "freak," but decided to go and see for himself; while a newspaper photographer failed trying to make a vision appear in the glass panel. If he had succeeded, he sadly admitted, he could have made "a fortune." It wasn't the "vision" but the money he lost

which he was so sorry for.

★

However, crowds have been to see if they could also spot the Virgin in the glass door, and not being able to do so. Provost Forde "pooh-poohed" the idea of the Mother of God coming in a glass door for the benefit of a small boy and the inhabitants of Stevenston. Perhaps he hasn't tried the infallible method of bringing sick people to the shrine and roping in a few miracle cures. That would do the trick — or would it?

## The Murder of the Innocents

HEROD THE GREAT is one of the most widely hated men in all history because of the report in Matthew 2.16 that he killed all the babies under two years of age in the city of Bethlehem ("and in all the coasts thereof"). According to this account, Herod was trying to kill the child Jesus (but of course there is no secular report of any such incident. We are entirely dependent on Matthew for it).

I know of no meaner crime than to abuse and murder little children. It is a most repulsive act. Childhood typifies innocence, and murdering the innocent is abhorrent to all civilised people. All murder is murder, of course, but the murdering of helpless babies is the lowest form of fiendishness that I can imagine. The brutes of the field would not kill needlessly in such a wholesale manner. All who are Christians, then understandably hate Herod. Let us go along with the concept that it is hideous, and so inhuman to murder anyone, but especially to murder infants. Surely no one would quarrel with it.

But I wonder where Herod got his idea from — if he did in fact have any such idea. Most concepts are copied from earlier experiences or accounts. Perhaps Herod had a good example for his action?

I turned to Exodus 12.29. According to the Jewish Bible, the Lord God of the Jews slew all of the first born in Egypt. Of course, according to the account, Moses and Aaron were in on the deal, but it was the God of the Jews who did the killing of all the first born throughout Egypt. Not a house in Egypt was without a death so the Book records. And this was the doing of the Lord God of the Jews. A precedent, it would seem, for Herod.

But, as I have said, there is no secular confirmation that Herod ever killed the babies in Bethlehem. Nor do the reputable Egyptian histories disclose that the Jews ever induced their god to kill all of the first born in Egypt, or for that matter, that the Jews ever escaped from Egypt as reported in the Jewish Bible.

Had it occurred, the slaughter of the first born throughout Egypt would create fear that would never be forgotten, and the histories of the country would have recorded it. Indeed, had its supernatural cause been known, many Egyptians might have been terrified into joining with the Jews in worshipping a god capable of slaughtering so many in one night. Others, however, may have courageously said: "Let the Jews keep their god!"

And I would be with them. To me he is loathsome; not a god but a demon. I would prefer to go to hell (if there be such a place) than to be in heaven with such a god.

N. E. S. WEST (U.S.A.)

## RELIGION AND ADOPTION

(Concluded from page 115)

so. That they should not only "suspend" religion, but abolish it where these children are concerned. That, in short, they should be treated simply as children for adoption, not labelled "Protestant," "Catholic," and so on. It would mean a good deal more happiness for many of them. And surely we owe them that.



# THE FREETHINKER

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103, Borough High Street, S.E.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.

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. A. ROGERSON: Please give publisher, date of publication and, if possible, price of books cited, as we invariably get requests for these details.

## 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 April 10th, 6.45 p.m.: G. CORNES, "Religious Institutions."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate.) Sunday, April 10th, 6.30 p.m.: B. HAYLETT, "Progress in Psychology."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, April 10th, 11 a.m.: JOHN LEWIS, PH.D., "Man Against Death; the Affirmation of Life."

## Notes and News

WE THANK THOSE PEOPLE who send us copies of letters they have sent to the BBC, ITA, and various newspapers. From the large number received lately, it is clear that Free-thinkers rarely miss an opportunity publicly to express their views in writing. And we consider this very important. True, only a very few are published (though in some places like Barnsley, Leicester and Slough, for instance, the local papers are very fair in this connection) but published or no, they are worth sending: they have some effect. Keep up the good work. At least let the editors know they have plenty of Freethinking readers.

THE FRENCH MONTHLY MAGAZINE, *L'Action Laïque*, devoted most of its February number to the law of December 31st, 1959, contravening the principle of *Laïcité*, the separation of Church and State, and the National Petition organised against it by Le Comité National d'Action Laïque. Among the bodies that comprise the National Committee are Radical, Socialist and Communist Parties, National Union of Students, League for the Rights of Man, the Grand Orient Lodge, the Rationalist Union and the French Freethinkers. Among the many distinguished supporters may be noted former President Auriol, Deladier, Mendès-France, Thorez, countless scientists, men of letters

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged £67 17s.; W. Kirkwood, 5s.; J. Arkell, 5s.; J. B. M. £1; Miss I. Barnes, £1; Anon, 1s. 2d.; W. J. Edmunds, 6s.; G. Swan, 2s. 6d.; J. W. C. 6s.; Anon, 2s.; Wm. Dzus, 14s.; C. Cullen, 7s. 6d.; A. V. Peries, £1 5s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1 1s.; W. Steinhardt, 7s.; I. Barr, 10s.; F. Muston, 2s. 6d.; B. B. Pinder, 10s.; J. Ward, 5s.; M. L. Baring, 5s.; R. Atherton, 2s. 6d.; H. G. Bluett, 5s.; Proceeds N.S.S. Dinner Raffle £4.; Total to date April 1st, 1960, £80 19s. 2d.

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Readers are asked to note the new address of: -  
 THE FREETHINKER,  
 THE PIONEER PRESS (G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.)  
 THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY and  
 SECULAR SOCIETY LIMITED will be  
 103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1.  
 We regret that no telephone number will be available for several weeks.

and barristers, while another supporter, the famous cartoonist, Jean Effel, has illustrated the petition. His drawing shows Marianne in school, her cockade having fallen from her *bonnet-rouge*, writing on the blackboard: "Do not divide the children! One school only, open to all French children."

★

MISS SHEILA MASON of Form VI of Waverley Grammar School (which we take to be in Birmingham, though we are not sure of this) is also the Secretary of her School's Senior Section of the Student Christian Movement. In the school magazine, *The Arch*, Sheila is rather critical of a fellow student who gave a talk that "was exhaustive but would perhaps have been more inspiring if cast in a critical rather than expository form." Sheila cannot really complain, then, if we are in turn critical, can she? She ought to know that the Church of England has 39 Articles, not 49! Still, Sheila tells us the interesting news that the "scientifically minded Sixth Formers" at Waverley cannot be "persuaded of the possibility of physical resurrection."

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THE UNSIGNED REPORT of the Junior Section of the Student Christian Movement in the same copy of *The Arch*, laments that, though the attendance at meetings reached about 20, "we have not yet persuaded boys to come."

★

UNDER THE HEADING "The Secular Approach," the *South London Press* (25/3/60) reported the formation of the South-East London Humanist Group, and quoted Miss Barbara Smoker: "Humanism is the outcome of rejecting doctrinaire systems based on supernatural revelation, and demands no ultimate reality beyond human purposes and values." Among other activities, the Group is hoping to arrange hospital visits along the same lines as some National Secular Society Branches. We wish it every success.

★

THE PEOPLE (27/3/60) had "some splendid news for sensible citizens." It reported that last year the Lord's Day Observance Society spent £1,050 more than its income. At this rate, it said, "it shouldn't be long before Harold Legerton and his band of fanatics are bankrupt." "That would be a splendid day for the widows, the orphans and the sick," it went on, for then it will be possible to stage Sunday football and cricket matches and concerts to raise funds for them. But *The People* acknowledged that "Loony" Legerton, as it called him, can only prevent these because the law is on his side. It is a law that "not one sane citizen in a hundred supports"; and this Government, like others, promised to review it. But, like others, it hasn't done so.



# Science News

By JACK GORDON

IT WAS REPORTED to the American Physical Society meeting in Pasadena recently that astronomers at Mount Wilson and Palomar Observatories had discovered a star cluster in our own galaxy which appeared to be 24 thousand million years old. This is more than twice the age of any previously known celestial object. Should this figure stand up under further investigating, one or two results should emerge: either a further major revision of astronomical distances will be necessary, or the argument in favour of a steady-state universe as against the "big bang" idea will look much more convincing. This is because no object could be 24 thousand million years old in a universe which had reached its present state as a result of expansion from a super-dense core "created" some 4 thousand million years ago.

Astronomical distances had to be revised by a factor of 2 only a few years ago. Overnight, the galaxies became twice as far away as previously calculated. It would be embarrassing to astronomers to find themselves compelled once more to revise their measurements by a further factor of 2! The present situation is interesting, too, in that it emphasises the conceptual nature of Science, particularly the physical sciences.

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BRAINWASHING HAS BEEN in the news lately; at least, the word "brainwashing" has made the news lately. The activity for which it stands is nearly as old as psychiatry itself. The goal of the brainwasher is to develop a technique whereby a determined, and usually courageous individual with definite ideas about himself, can be made to relinquish those ideas and accept and act upon an entirely different set of ideas more acceptable to the operator. The goal of the practising psychiatrist, also, is to treat an individual holding certain definite convictions about himself, with the object of forcing him to relinquish his sincere but mistaken ideas in favour of others more acceptable to society. It is beside the point to argue that the aim of the brainwasher is "evil," while that of the psychiatrist is "good." Value judgments depend upon the social culture one lives in. Differing cultures produce values which are virtually self-cancelling. The real difference between psychiatry and brainwashing is that the psychiatrist tries to implant a new mental orientation without impairing the judgment centres of the brain; the brainwasher implants the new orientation by suspending the judgment centres. This can be done quite simply by injecting novacaine behind the eyeball. This paralyses the nerve trunks leading to the judgment centres in the brain, and the patient can no longer exercise censorship over his answers to questioning. The old time-wasting methods of brutal physical torture have become a thing of the past. In future, spies and captured suspects will talk when required to talk and no amount of prayer, bracing of the "will," etc., will have the slightest effect. Moral qualities become meaningless at the biochemical level. The brain is a biochemical machine and, like all machines, it needs the right kind of fuel to work on. By means of judicious interference here and there, the brainwasher can induce modifications in the brain's working to suit his purposes. As yet, the brainwasher has been merely tampering; for brain chemistry is still only in its infancy.

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TALKING ABOUT BRAINS, some readers will have read of the American plan to survive an all-out nuclear war by building a great underground refuge for some 9,000 selected indi-

viduals, who would live far below the earth in their Survival City, for generations if need be. After all other life on earth had been wiped out, the remote descendants of the original 9,000 would eventually emerge to the surface of a devastated world to begin anew the laborious task of rebuilding "civilisation." The underground community would be regulated and looked after by a giant electronic brain which, it is stated, would require 2,000 personnel to maintain it! This scheme (which might have come straight from a science-fiction author's nightmare) has one drawback not so far mentioned. A giant brain intelligent enough to perform all the functions demanded of it might well be intelligent enough to question the wisdom of protecting a mere handful of a species which was sufficiently *unintelligent* practically to wipe itself out. A species which would no doubt attempt suicide again, given a second chance. The Brain might think it better to get the whole thing over quickly and trigger off its own destruction and that of the dependent community. That would be *one* underground explosion which would never be recorded!

## My Conversion

I FEEL QUITE HUMBLE when I read of unbelievers who saw the light through studying anthropology or medicine, or some other branch of science about which I know very little. My own anti-religious feelings came to be in a very unscientific manner, although I can perhaps be proud that they came to me much earlier in life than to most.

God and I became estranged when I was just five years old. At that tender age I renounced prayer for all time and began to disseminate anti-God propaganda among my schoolmates.

It all began one Summer afternoon. Lessons were over, and it was time for prayers. The teacher gave the order: "Hands together, eyes closed," and led off with "Our Father, which art in . . ."

I raised my hand at this juncture. "Please Miss," I began.

"Yes boy, what is it?" asked the teacher irritably.

"I want to go to the toilet."

My teacher was extremely religious. She gave me a look calculated, no doubt, to stifle my natural desires, and said "Wait!"

"But Miss," I replied, "But Miss . . ."

It was too late. A large puddle appeared at my feet. I blushed and the kids began to giggle. I ran from the room with soaking trousers and a burning resolve to do all in my power to "get my own back" on God, the teacher, and Noah, who was the only Biblical character we had yet learnt about.

My learned colleague, F. A. Ridley, might scoff and accuse me of basing my Atheism on unfirm foundations: I don't care. I vow that from that day on I did all in my power to ridicule God and angels and the rest . . . although I must admit that reading Chapman Cohen in my teens did influence me a little bit.

Incidentally, whenever I pass a church nowadays I think of laboratories; I wonder what a psychiatrist would make of that

PETER SINCLAIR

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THE FREETHINKER FOR 1959

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# Random Reflections

By ALASTAIR C. F. CHAMBRE

SOME SIXTY PER CENT. of the children born in this country are, according to a recent news item, baptised in the Church of England. Taking other denominations into consideration it would appear that very few children escape from this religious ceremony. If parents are sincere believers in the dogma of their Church they cannot, however misguided we may consider them, be criticised for taking part in its ritual — but how many are? The majority are, as is obvious from church attendance figures, apathetic towards the religion to which they nominally belong but cannot, possibly because of an inability to undertake critical thinking, bring themselves to make a clean break. Others may be atheist or agnostic in outlook but indulge in these, what must be to them, meaningless practices merely because they have been conditioned to social conformity — or, perhaps, because they have not the courage of their convictions. (The same phenomenon can be observed in the attitude of many freethinking parents towards religious instruction of observance in schools — a topic already discussed at some length in this and other journals.)

An analogous case to that of baptism, in a non-Christian community, is that of the freethinker of Jewish extraction who although he has rejected the theology of his ancestors nevertheless insists on his son being circumcised in spite of the evidence of the psychological trauma and the frequency of harmful physical sequelae which may result from this operation.

For one who has rejected the basic assumptions of orthodox religion to continue to participate in its ceremonies is, surely, not only illogical but also blatant hypocrisy. The ritual of baptism is only one example. There are also atheists who get married in church.

Certainly only a small minority of "freethinkers" are guilty of such ambiguous behaviour but a greater number would appear to be freethinkers only to the extent that they have succeeded in rejecting the fundamentals of religion. Their attitude towards other aspects of life continues to be influenced by orthodox opinion. For example, whilst we can be proud of the fact that freethinkers have played and continue to play a major part in the improvement of social conditions there are far too many whose attitude towards such movements is as reactionary as the most orthodox Christian. They may, of course, have reached their point of view by independent thought, but only too often it is obvious that pressure from conventional opinion has played a major part. Frequently ignorance is a major factor—and ignorance breeds fear.

Many of the tragedies of human history are the product of this fear which has been bred by ignorance. For instance, to cite only three examples, racialism arises from ignorance about other peoples, persecution of homosexuals is the product of fear arising from ignorance, cruelty (particularly mental cruelty) to children is often the result of ignorance about child behaviour and the consequent fear that any expression of individuality on the part of the youngster will have disastrous results.

The child in a non-religious family, free from hypocritical attitudes, has, certainly, a better chance of satisfactory adjustment than that brought up in a religious environment but there are, unfortunately, many aspects of life towards which, as was said above, some freethinkers continue to adhere to ideas based on centuries of orthodox teaching — attitudes which can have adverse effects on the youngster's development. One obvious example is the parental attitude towards sex. Whilst, in general, the atmosphere is con-

siderably healthier than it was only 20 or 30 years ago, far too many parents, and this includes freethinking parents, still exhibit the repressive attitude created by the anti-sexual Christian tradition. Children are still, in many families for instance, prevented from attaining completely satisfactory sexual orientation by such ideas on the part of the parents that any overt expression of childhood or adolescent sexuality such as masturbation is harmful. As such activities are normal during certain stages of development and as, furthermore, masturbation is frequently the only means by which tension can be relieved in the adolescent, the guilt feelings which arise if attempts are made by the parents to suppress the practice, can have disastrous consequences in later life.

It is, indeed, surprising how many freethinking parents, independent in their views about other subjects, still exhibit puritan ideas about sex. Parents who would never consider allowing anyone to practise a skilled profession without previous training and practical experience will, nevertheless, expect their children to get married without any previous sexual experience. Fortunately, most youngsters today do not come up to expectations in this respect, but the secretive atmosphere in which most of their experiences have to take place is not conducive to a satisfactory outlook.

Much juvenile (and adult) delinquency is undoubtedly due to unsatisfactory parental attitudes towards the sexual side of life. The double standards of morality, so frequently exhibited by adults, can be particularly harmful. If we could free ourselves from the Christian tradition and evolve a morality in keeping with present-day knowledge and conditions, many of our current problems would undoubtedly be solved.

One conventional outlook which still persists, even amongst some freethinkers who take a rational outlook towards other topics, is that there is something indecent about the human body. It is surprising how many adopt a hostile attitude towards, for instance, the increasingly popular practice of nudism, an activity which if carried out in the right surroundings is not only exhilarating but beneficial to both mental and physical health. Children, in particular, love it as any member of a sun-club knows. And such lucky youngsters are being helped to grow up without many of the complexes with which their less fortunate contemporaries are saddled. It is, surely, irrational to wear clothes for such pastimes as bathing or sunbathing. Even many games become doubly enjoyable when played without the restriction of clothes. But even in this enlightened(?) age many parents still insist on their children, even toddlers, being garbed in ridiculous pants or costumes when playing in the sun or in garden, beach or park.

Probably no "freethinker" is without preconceived attitudes towards some field of human activity. One or two examples have been given above, but the list is inexhaustible. However, if the name is to be fully merited, it is, surely, only reasonable that the same critical attitude should be applied to, say, politics as to religion. If the individual is aware of his own ignorance, half the battle is won.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### SOCIAL PURPOSE

E. G. Macfarlane seems to believe that he is in possession of some sort of truth which is valid not only for our own time, but for all time. We can all no doubt agree on the abstract truths of mathematics, physics and chemistry, but it does not necessarily follow from this that we can all agree upon some ultimate social purpose. In the realm of history it is the passions and actions of



men that hold sway, and he who does not understand this does not understand history. Architects must agree to a certain extent about the purpose of the structure of a building, but no set of architects with any intelligence would claim that the building that they decided to construct the plans for would suit the tastes of all sorts of peoples living in different climates and different cultures. So it seems that Mr. Macfarlane's idea rests on a very bad foundation, and is related more to the realm of literature, rather than to that of history.

R. SMITH.

**THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM**

Mr. H. Cutner appears to misunderstand my recent references to the above. All that I did was to quote the well-documented opinion of Ernest Renan Circle, perhaps the most scholarly group of Freethinkers to be found nowadays. They expressed the view that the recorded visit of the Mithraist King, Tiridates of Armenia to the Emperor Nero (AD.66) accompanied by Magi, may well have suggested the similar Gospel story in Matthew, the more so as the return of the royal party is described in the same expression, "by another road." I do not see that there is anything improbable in such a supposition. There were probably Christians in Rome by AD.66 and, in any case, the story must have originated somewhere. Whether there was or was not an historic Christ is totally irrelevant. The early Christians certainly believed that such an event occurred, consequently, if a rent veil had been carried in triumph by the Emperor Titus through the streets of Rome after the Fall of Jerusalem, it could quite easily have given rise to the legend — which again must have originated somewhere — that the veil had actually been rent by divine wrath during the Passion. Mr. Cutner ought not to imagine that the early Christians were all confirmed sceptics and mythicists like himself. N.T. was not written by H.C.!

F. A. RIDLEY.

I too heard Patrick Moore's broadcast about the Star of Bethlehem, and have followed the interesting and important comments by R. T. Fishall and Alan Bandon. I have been carrying out some research of my own, in various libraries, and the correspondence in your columns has given me some further ideas which seem to bid fair to account for this fairy-tale once and for all.

In the Grattan archives I have been able to consult the very rare work by the 15-century Dutch writer Huizenaas, the English title of which would be *Comments upon Ancient Scientific Lore*. Huizenaas refers to the comets mentioned by Fishall and Bandon, and adds the following significant passage: the translation is due to myself and could probably be improved, but at least the meaning is clear. Here, then, is what Huizenaas says:—

"Lo, this then is the famed Starre. In this year was seen the Comet of Biela as it sank to the Eastern Heavens. It was described as a Fiery Blade, and yet it was but a normal Comet as hath been seen both before and since many times. As it moved in transit through the Groupes of Starres in Quadrans Muralis, Equuleus and Eridanus, it passed before the brilliant Starre, Achernar. It is said that the Unscrupulous Writers of the time seized this chance to pretend falsely that the Comet was a Divine Sign, and round this was built the famous Mythe or Legend which we are told is the *Starre of Bethlehem*."

Huizenaas gives some further details which do not, however, add greatly to the force of his statement. It seems, then, that if the Dutch author is right then the whole myth takes the aspect of deliberate fraud, and this is a plausible enough explanation. I must add that in my own researches the reliability of Huizenaas seems to be established, despite the criticisms of Hulpo published in *Die Sterne* for 1957.

(Dr.) Q. COMBER.

(Fulch Physical Laboratory, Cambridge)

**GENTLEMEN AND CADS**

Mr. Robert H. Scott, of the U.S.A., complains that God is no gentleman. If to be a "gentleman" is to share the shrinking, languishing, old-maidish temperament displayed by Mr. Scott, this would appear to be one up for god! I find Mr. Scott's personality rather trying. His aristocratic disdain, like that of Nietzsche, whom he cites, has a neurotic unhealthy aspect.

It occurs to me that his real reason for denouncing God as a cad is that "God" has been inconsiderate enough to form Mr. R. H. Scott, that very superior person, in the same mould as common people like poets and peasants and prime ministers. Common folk may consume beefsteaks and beer, may marry and give in marriage may regard death and dissolution with stoical fortitude; the aesthetic is superior to all this, so he must scream and fuss about facts no-one can alter anyway!

Life is what it is and human beings are what they are. If we all suddenly were converted to Mr. Scott's views, and found our existence to be "revolting" "nauseating" and "disgusting" the result would be mass suicides.

For the sake of the future, then, we may thank "God"(!) that most of us are coarse, insensitive, ungentlemanly cad!

S. W. BROOKS.

**SNAKE-BITE**

In his article "What a Hope" in THE FREETHINKER of 25/3/60, Mr. McCall is quite wrong in stating that the effects of venom on the viper's prey can actually be countered by the administration of anti-toxin by a hypodermic syringe very similar to the snake's fangs. The existence of an anti-toxin has never been proved. The so-called "anti-toxin" is the blood serum of an animal into whose body snake venom has been injected.

Mr. McCall seems to be quite muddled in his understanding of the subject, as it is not clear whether the snake's fangs are similar to the syringe or to the anti-toxin (serum). In fact, of course, they are similar to neither.

Would Mr. McCall suggest that a teetotaler should take sufficient alcoholic drink to make him drunk on the grounds that he could avoid its intoxicating effects by receiving an injection of blood serum obtained from a habitual drinker of alcoholic beverages, who was able to take a similar quantity without becoming drunk—due to an acquired tolerance of alcohol? I think not! Yet this is the alleged *modus operandi* of so-called anti-toxin.

An effective *antidote* for the viper's venom and, indeed, the venom of all or most snakes of other species, is permagnate of potash.

J. T. EGERTON.

(Mr. McCall writes: It is Mr. Egerton who is muddled if the meaning is not clear to him of "administration of anti-toxin by a hypodermic syringe very similar to the snake's fangs". I am surprised that he cannot see a similarity between the needle-like hollow fang of the viper, through which venom is injected into the prey, with a hypodermic syringe. I am not surprised at his attitude towards snake-bite serum, but I refuse to be drawn into alleged parallels or into a general discussion on inoculation etc. I consider the efficacy of serum treatment for snake-bite to be well established, and so do the majority of experts.—Ed.)

**DEATH OF PETER F. MOORE**

We deeply regret to announce the death, on Monday, April 4th, of Peter F. Moore, former member of the N.S.S. Executive. A Secular Service will be conducted by Colin McCall at Golders Green Crematorium on Friday, April 8th, at 12.50 p.m.

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