

The Freethinker

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RELIGION IS THE WORST NEUROSIS of mankind. And the Roman Catholic variety is the worst of religious neuroses. Catholicism is, in fact, a horrible, nauseating creed. It sets out to pervert humanity, and all too often it succeeds. The more one looks, the more one realises it: but one doesn't have to look all that closely.

Consider the Catholic child. Start with the two main symbols he will be taught to adore: the emaciated, bleeding figure on the cross, and the Virgin. The former, hardly the best beside companion for a sensitive child, will be regularly presented to him (in compact, though not quite tablet form) for eating; the latter will be extolled in clotted bosh about immaculate conceptions. This, that and the other will be blessed with water that, by magical formula, has reached a state of holiness.

Normal?

And who will be his mentors? Normal men and women? One needn't be sex-obsessed to realise that priests and nuns live unusual lives; one needn't be a psychiatrist to know that they will have unusual outlooks in consequence. The bikini doesn't, to normal eyes, signify the collapse of Western civilisation! But then, priestly eyes are trained to see evil everywhere, and see it they do, even in the child.

"Those of us who understand the tendency to evil which exists in all of us because of Original Sin will understand how harmful it may be to let the evil instincts of a child have full play in its earlier days." So said Cardinal Godfrey to an audience of boys at the Guildhall, Plymouth recently (*The Faith*, Malta, March 1960). "Speak to your girls of the dangers of modern life," he told an audience of Catholic mothers in Manchester the other week. "Keep them aloof from the immodest exhibitionism which is so often a part of beauty shows and other displays which, far from enhancing, degrade the dignity of womanhood" (*Sunday Express*, May 8th, 1960)

Degrading

Let me give an instance of what I consider to be degradation of womanhood. And not just degradation, but cruel exploitation of immature womanhood too. I turn to the *American Age of Reason* magazine (April 1960) quoting from *The Miami Herald* (February 13th, 1960); to a report of the largest and most unusual "wedding" ever performed in Miami. More than 2,000 people were present in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral when "twelve teenage girls attired in bridal gowns, took vows 'wedding' them to Christ". The girls were "postulants who received the white veil and black habit of novices in the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine in the noon ritual". They had taken the first step towards becoming nuns. The habits were blessed by Bishop Coleman F. Carroll, who also interrogated the girls as follows:—

Bishop: "What do you ask, my child?"

Candidate: "I ask for the habit of the Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph of St. Augustine."

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Religious Neurosis

By COLIN McCALL

Bishop: "Are you fully resolved to wear it with devotion and to live and die in the exact observance of the rules prescribed for the Sisters who wear this habit?"

Candidate: "Yes, Most Reverend Bishop, I am fully resolved on it."

Bishop: "In order to become a true Sister of St. Joseph, you should, my child, die to the world, to your parents, to your friends and to yourself and live alone for Jesus Christ."

Candidate: "This is what I desire with all my heart, that the world be nothing more for me and Jesus be my only possession."

Bishop: "Do you desire at once to renounce the world, its vanities and its pomp and to take the poor

habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph?"

Candidate: "It is a long time that I have ardently desired and I beg of you, Most Reverend Bishop, not to defer it any longer."

Bishop: "I am satisfied to do so, my child, and I wish Mother Superior to receive you into the Congregation, to divest you of the vanity of your worldly dress in order to put on the poor habit you longed for with such ardour, and at the same time to clothe you with Jesus Christ. Go then, my child, to receive the holy habit."

The candidates went out of the church to be dressed in the habit. After they returned:

Bishop: "Behold, now you are dead to the world, my child. Are you satisfied?"

Candidate: "Yes, I am quite satisfied. I experience the most perfect joy of heart."

Bishop: "You have reason to be satisfied, as at this moment, by a special favour of God, you begin to have in a most particular manner St. Joseph for your Father, the Most Blessed Virgin for your Mother and Jesus Christ for your Spouse."

Candidate: "I value, above all the goods of the world, these glorious advantages which enable me to leave with joy my parents, my friends and the vanities of the world. And, I implore of God the grace of perseverance unto death in the profession of the life of the Sisters of St. Joseph, which I have so long desired, and which I, on this day, commence to embrace in having received their holy habit."

Bishop: "May God be praised, Sister, for the good sentiments which He gives you and I beg He may accompany them with His gracious benediction. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

"Die to the world, to your parents, to your friends and to yourself and live alone for Jesus Christ;" "Clothe you with Jesus Christ"; "St. Joseph for your Father, the Most Blessed Virgin for your Mother and Jesus Christ for your Spouse".

Vocations

These girls—or others like them—misled to believe in the glorious advantages of a celibate life, will be entrusted with the education of the young. In turn they will advocate

renunciation of a world they never had the chance to know; of vanities they never had the chance to gratify. Along with a similarly celibate, and for the most part similarly ignorant, priesthood, they will encourage the young to "Be a Flower in God's Chosen Garden". That was one of the slogans used in a Vocation poster contest held at St. Joseph's Elementary School, Cleveland. And most appropriate too, since the school, staffed by the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate and two lay teachers, describes itself as a "Seed-bed of the Future". Other posters (illustrated in *Byzantine Catholic World*, Pittsburg, April 3rd, 1960), urged, "Pray Over Your Future", "Don't Gamble—Work and Pray", and "Give God Time and God Gives Eternity"; and showed that Dollars wouldn't "Buy Your Way to Heaven", and that "Prayer is the Key to Happiness". But two of special significance read: "Is Holy Orders for You?" and—this illustrated by an owl—"Be Wise—Choose Now".

"Choose Now": that is, before you leave school; before you can assess the implications of your choice. This, in fact, is what happens in most cases, with deplorable consequences that Emmett McLachlan, perhaps better than anybody, has described in *People's Padre*. McLachlan admits his narrowly limited outlook; his strictly controlled reading, before he broke away from the Church.

Welcome to Birmingham

By T. H. R. JAMES

THIS GREAT CITY, second capital of England, and workshop of the world—where fifteen hundred trades are carried on—is the assembly base for this year's Annual Conference of the National Secular Society. Since the days of Elizabeth Tudor, Birmingham has played a not unconsiderable part in the making of British history. But what special interest has it for Freethinkers?

Joseph Priestley who discovered what Lavoisier later named "Oxygen", lived and worked for many years in the city, and was a dissenting minister, rejecting the atonement, the virgin birth, and the inspiration of the Bible. He was sympathetic towards the French Revolution, and was the author of *The History of the Corruptions of Christianity* which was publicly burnt by the hangman. An infuriated mob attacked his house and attempted to kill him, and George III recorded his pleasure that Priestley was made to suffer.

John Baskerville, the famous printer, who gave his name to a popular typeface, lived in Birmingham, and produced editions of Milton, Virgil, Lucretius, Greek texts, the Bible and Prayer Books. Lord Macaulay called the Virgil edition magnificent. John Wilkes, who visited Baskerville, was shocked at his infidelity. Baskerville designed his own coffin and wrote its inscription, namely: "Stranger beneath this cone in unconsecrated ground a friend to the liberties of mankind is inurned. May the example contribute to emancipate thy mind from the idle fears of superstition and the wicked arts of priesthood?" His Will, in the custody of Birmingham Reference Library, expresses the utmost contempt for Christianity. Until about two years ago it was on show, but now it is only accessible upon application at the counter. It would be interesting to know who was responsible for the new arrangement.

Many well known Freethinkers have lived, worked, lectured and struggled in Birmingham. George Jacob Holyoake was born in Birmingham (there is a tablet to his memory on the building of Birmingham Co-operative Stores in High Street) as was his brother Austin. But

Failure

And the same issue of *Byzantine Catholic World* reported that "Catholic high schools are failing to prepare their students for the facts of day-to-day living among their Protestant neighbours". Brother Celestine Luke, Associate Professor of Theology at Manhattan College, New York, was responsible for this admission and he added: "An intelligent non-Catholic with training in philosophy or history often can answer the arguments of a Catholic high school graduate of an apologetics course because of the former's superior education". Urging a general course in dogmatic theology to replace the traditional high school course in apologetics, Brother Luke concluded: "If a Catholic high school student comes to feel the reality of his Faith, he may not be able to out-argue an atheist college-professor, but he will be able to appreciate, explain and keep his Faith intelligently".

Nobody can "explain" or "keep" the Roman Catholic faith "intelligently". Trinities, Immaculate Conceptions and Virgin Births cannot be explained intelligently; god-eating cannot be indulged in intelligently. The only way an intelligent man can keep his Catholicism and his reason is by practising the former mechanically and thoughtlessly. All too often, for the thoughtful or the sensitive, it causes neurosis. And who can be surprised?

neither of these needs any introduction to readers of THE FREETHINKER.

Another notable champion was Josiah Mason, a poor lad who made a fortune in the city. He built an orphanage and a science hall, laying it down that no religious teaching should be included in the activities of either institution. This condition was overridden after his death. And one of Robert Owen's Socialist lecturers, Dr. Frederick Hollick, was born in Birmingham in 1813.

George Eliot, sceptic, and one of our greatest novelists, was born within a few miles of the city. And there are many others, but these will serve.

A moment, though! A list of distinguished Birmingham Freethinkers should surely include Dr. William Barnes, one time Bishop of Birmingham.

INFORMATION WANTED

A FRENCH FREETHINKER, M. Aimé Delrue, 61 Rue du Port, Clermont-Ferrand, Puy-de-Dôme, France, is assembling information on religious relations and frictions in different colonial and ex-colonial countries in Africa. He would welcome any information from FREETHINKER readers on such frictions in British parts of Africa, and particularly East Africa.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

RECEPTION AND SOCIAL

The N.S.S. Executive Committee cordially invites delegates and friends to the above at the

IMPERIAL HOTEL,
TEMPLE STREET, BIRMINGHAM
at 7 p.m., SATURDAY, JUNE 4th

THE CONFERENCE (for Members Only)

will be held at the
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at 10.00—12.30 2.00—4.30. Lunch at 1 p.m.

AN OUTDOOR DEMONSTRATION WILL BE HELD
ON SUNDAY EVENING, P.EL D.M.

Venue to be announced.

Suicide

By ALAN O. SNOOK

Deus non sibi potest mortem consciscere si velet, quod homini dedit optimum in tantis vitæ pœnis.—Pliny.

SAILING ONE DAY on the Lake of Como, Pliny and a friend drew near to a house, a feature of which was a chamber projecting over the water. In this house had lived a man and wife, the former suffering from an incurable and agonising complaint. At the woman's suggestion the pair made a suicide pact, both being convinced of the man's inevitable and early death. Binding themselves together, the couple threw themselves from the chamber overhanging the water: both were drowned. Pliny is reported to have expressed his entire approval of the episode.

To quote Pliny again: "To choose between life and death according to the guidance of reason is the mark of a great mind."

In the March *Humanist* it is laid down that Artificial Insemination, Birth Control, Abortion and Euthanasia should be approached in a rational spirit. I am totally at a loss to understand why Suicide was not included as a suitable subject calling for a rational approach. I am convinced that practically every human being has contemplated self-destruction, some daily, many frequently, others at rare intervals. The death-wish is something inherent in humanity, and is likely to increase as the world progresses towards universal suicide.

Suicide in Britain is not a national industry, as in Sweden or Japan. Nevertheless the number of suicides reported in local papers alone must amount to a very substantial figure in any one year. Today my own local daily reports that a man has been found dead, hanging from the banisters of his house.

That bland rationalist, Hume, was indifferent to death: Johnson, a devout Christian, terrified of it. Both may be briefly quoted on the subject of suicide, although Johnson does not appear to have said very much about it. One sentence of his, quoted out of context, appears to have recommended suicide—"To die is the fate of man but to die with lingering anguish is generally his folly." When a parson, of Bath, suggested to Johnson that this passage was not consistent with the valiant Doctor's religious outlook, the latter replied that read in context it was certainly not a suggestion that suicide was a legitimate way out. Hume, however, had no doubt on the matter:—

... that suicide may often be consistent with interest and with our duty to ourselves, no one can question, who allows that age, sickness, or misfortune, may render life a burden, and make it worse even than annihilation.

It is a far cry from Hume and Johnson to Somerset Maugham, both in time and philosophy. Hume and Maugham have, however, at least one thing in common—their belief in suicide as a proper remedy for hopeless misery. In his *The Summing Up* the modern writer has stated:—

I wonder why so many people turn with horror from the thought of suicide. To speak of it as cowardly is nonsense. I can only approve a man who makes an end of himself of his own will when life has nothing to offer but pain and misfortune.

Speaking personally, the great playwright says:—

... if I found life intolerable, I think I should not lack the courage to quit a stage on which I could no longer play my part to my own satisfaction.

The mass of the people the world over are concerned solely with each day and what they can get out of it. Millions are too preoccupied with the soul-destroying struggle for existence even to have time to contemplate death, although they may subconsciously long for it. The

brutal struggle for money, place and power, the callous indifference shown by the majority to human and animal suffering, the futility of struggling for international decency, the greed for material possessions and the contempt for real values—these things must force the sensitive and compassionate into a state of mind bordering on despair. To the introspective thinker suicide appears to be the only escape from an existence daily becoming more futile and meaningless. Only a thoroughgoing pessimism saves some from suicide; the man who has no hope is at least never disappointed. As for the optimists, their outlook is about on a par with belief in the virgin birth and the resurrection.

In his introduction to *Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, G. M. Young says:—

The injustice of uncompensated pain, the darkening of our hours of happiness by the thought that they too are passing towards Nothing, round these two themes Pessimism revolves in a closed circle. Men of an abundant, active temperament will not often think of them: men absorbed in some intellectual pursuit have little time to think of them. But for the meditative man there is no escape, and no consolation, except perhaps in constraining his temper to such an indifference as the ancient philosophies, Stoic and Epicurean, inculcated.

And if the meditative man cannot achieve a state of indifference, but is bowed down with the weight of the world's misery and tribulation, why should he not put a term to his life? The only legitimate objection to this course is the possible effect upon friends and relations. However, there are thousands of cases where even this objection would not arise. I refer to the thousands of hopeless imbeciles confined in asylums, and to the millions dying of painful and incurable complaints the world over. Some of us who have visited patients in State mental institutions, and seen the tragic and hopeless inmates who are confined for life, will realise that it is nothing less than a hideous crime to prevent these our fellow mortals from ending their indescribably wretched lives. But every precaution is taken to ensure that life is preserved to the bitter end. Even the lavatories are open to the public gaze. There is no escape. That is the pitiful, terrible fact. No doubt the palsied hand of Holy Church inspires policy in this connection. That an inmate of an asylum, living permanently in a state of profound misery, is forcibly prevented from terminating his ghastly existence, is a damning indictment of a so-called civilised—not to say Christian—nation. This writer, at least, cannot conceive of a more hideous crime than that of ensuring that hopeless cases die a "natural" death. In the long calendar of human brutality this careful preservation of useless and unhappy beings takes first place. As for medical cases, hundreds, thousands, can only be described as stinking masses of putrefaction, yet they are kept alive by medical science.

We have advanced somewhat from the days when suicides were buried at cross roads with a stake thrust through their stomachs, a pretty custom prevailing at a period when Holy Church and its tenets were unquestioned. To people of today, still living in the Middle Ages, who claim that human life is sacred, the answer is a short one. 85-87 per cent of births are "accidents" of "Nature." Man's life is thrust upon him. He is not consulted. Surely it is elementary logic that a man should be free to dispose of his own as he thinks fit. The escape from intolerable conditions by suicide is the only way in which man can assert his freedom, spiritual and physical. That largely benighted profession, the medical, strives night and day to

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

According to a reviewer in "News Chronicle" of Farley Mowat's *The Desperate People*, a book about the remnants of an Eskimo tribe, the Canadian Government, no doubt packed with very religious people, was allowing them "to die of starvation". The Roman Catholic missionaries in the district "reassured" the authorities, we are told, with such "asinine" statements as "We figure the missionary goes before the doctor. It's more important (for the Eskimo) to get into heaven than to be cured of tuberculosis". When we are told so often of the marvellous way missionaries bring men and women to Christ—we hope the way they left these poor Eskimos to starve to death will not be forgotten.

★

That stout believer in Roman Catholic miracles, Miss Rhona Churchill of the *Daily Mail*, referring to the way "super-salesmen" are being employed to "sell God" on the doorstep, so to speak, asks, "Is this really the way to help the Church?" and proceeds to point out how much the salesmen are earning, and how much a particular church may be getting out of it. We personally see no difference in any method of getting money for any church. A salesman, persuading a pious churchgoer that it is his duty to part with his money for Christ's sake in weekly instalments, is on exactly the same footing as the vicar himself pleading for contributions in the pulpit.

★

In addition, we do not see why the average churchgoer should not be only too pleased to help "our Lord" in either way. Why should he expect that believing in Christianity should cost him nothing—or very little? His hand should always be in his pocket in gratitude for the way in which Christ Jesus saved him—for where would he be going to after death if the Son of God had not joyously died to save him? Where indeed!

★

Of course, we do not insist that some crimes are due to a belief in Christianity—but it is also true to say that belief does not necessarily mean no crime. For example, a "respected churchgoer" and a "Boys' Brigade Captain", Mr. James Blythe, staged what ought to have been a perfect crime by attempting to change his identity with the aid of a "perfect" disguise. In this, he attacked a lady collecting rents and got away with £247.

★

Mr. Blythe then changed back to his real self—but unfortunately the police found his disguise, and he got three years for robbery with violence. No doubt, he will listen to the jail chaplain, humbly and contritely, and on release become again a "respected church worker". Perhaps he will be also allowed to keep the swag. But what did all this Christianity do for him? And is it not a fact that most criminals of a similar type in prison these days are thorough believers?

★

Whether Mr. Ben-Gurion has ever seen a copy of THE FREETHINKER, or ever heard of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, we don't presume to know; but—according to the *Daily Mail*—he has "shocked Israel" by declaring that the Bible is "wrong" in its account of the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. And of course this means also that the Bible is wrong about the Ten Plagues, and the Red Sea dividing, and the forty years in the Wilderness, and lots of other things.

★

Only 600 people followed Moses, declared Mr. Ben-Gurion, for the bulk of the Hebrews "stayed behind in Canaan",

which makes some of us wonder whether the unbelieving Prime Minister knows the terrific opposition he will receive, not perhaps so much from the Jews, but from Christians. Roman Catholics, Salvation Armyists, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, and Fundamentalists everywhere, all believe in the Exodus exactly as narrated in God's Precious Word; and Mr. Ben-Gurion, in their estimation, is heading straight for the fires of Hell so graphically described by "our Lord and Saviour", Jesus Christ. It is all so piously and beautifully described in the Book.

★

Although the Rev. Billy Graham appears to have very little difficulty in making converts of other Christians, converting Jews is a much tougher proposition. As top "mobster", Mickey Cohen, felt it was time to become a Christian, so he suggested meeting Billy as long as all expenses were paid. Mickey stayed at the Waldorf Astoria and ran up a bill for £190—which might have been all right but for the fact that he eventually decided Jesus was not his Messiah; and now the reverend gentleman wants his money back—no Messiah, no cash. We don't yet know the result of the court case, but obviously there's no turning the other cheek here.

★

The same ebullient American evangelist figured in a picture in the *Illustrated London News*, addressing a huge crowd, predominantly Muslim, in Nigeria. The interpreter may not have put the "message" over with sufficient emotion as the caption concludes with the significant words—"There were few converts".

SUICIDE

(Concluded from page 171)

keep mentally and physically incurables alive, yet animals kept under similar conditions would land their owners in gaol.

Ever since Christianity became the state religion of Rome the Church has bitterly opposed all progress and reform designed to alleviate human misery, both on the spiritual and economic fronts. From the adoption of Christianity by Constantine to recent times the Church has been the direct cause of untold misery and tribulation; bloody wars, bloodier persecutions, burnings, beatings, tortures, and ecclesiastical murders by the thousand. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*. Even in recent years tragic suicides were rigorously excluded from burial in consecrated ground, and today one can imagine the stern Dr. Fisher's reaction to the suggestion that suicide should be legalised. "humanised," in certain cases referred to here. There is no doubt that His Grace of Canterbury would bitterly oppose any reformation suggested by humanitarians.

The four subjects mentioned in my third paragraph, plus Suicide, must inevitably be tackled in a rational manner sooner or later. Humanists must get to the forefront of the battle against bigotry, cant and superstition. To quote the Rev. John Melachlan in the January *Hibbert Journal*—"as a matter of history, great changes are often made by a pioneering minority."

I repeat, and cannot emphasise too strongly, that any country refusing to permit hopeless imbeciles and other incurables to end their dreadful existences is not worthy to be called civilised. Thousands of worthy people not incarcerated in institutions go down to the grave in profound despair: they, at least, are not prevented from leaving this sorry world of their own free will. Many of them do so leave it. But the deliberate keeping alive of imprisoned and hopeless cases of physical and mental suffering is one of the vilest crimes of which man is capable.

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1.

TELEPHONE: HOP 2717.

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, 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.

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 Blairaid Site).—Every week-day, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIT, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 5 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.

INDOOR

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, May 27th, 7.15 p.m. A Discussion.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.) Sunday, May 29th, 11 a.m.: D. G. MACRAE, M.A.. "The Social Functions of Religion Today".

Notes and News

IN AN ARTICLE in the Canadian *Weekend Magazine* (Vol. 10, No. 15, 1960) Mr. Howard Whitman argued that "Happiness Pills Are No Substitute For Faith" and suggested that "Today we have an opportunity to make the acquaintance of God in an era of peace and plenty." Encouraged by Pittsburg scientist, Dr. Dennistoun Ver Pianck's remark, "Finally you have to fall back on faith," Mr. Whitman hailed "a new humility in Western man, a commendable modesty, which, stirs him to reacquaint himself with God. He doesn't consider himself the great know-it-all any more." In fact, scientists, though justly proud of their achievements have rarely been know-it-alls. That role has more often been filled by the theologians and the Church. The scientist displays true humility—before the facts.

FROM ANOTHER Canadian source, the *Vancouver Sun* (8/3/60) we quote Mr. Robert Ruark on missionaries. Mr. Ruark has always admired the work of foreign missions in health and education, but he has always "resented their interference with tribal customs and their exactment of a pound of religious flesh for everything they do in practical uplifting." And he supports the Prime Minister of Northern Nigeria, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, in his warning to Billy Graham: "Keep your cotton-picking hands off other people's religion and other people's politics."

OVER 60 PER CENT of the people in Northern Nigeria are Muslims. "Their God is Allah," said Sir Ahmadu, "and Jesus Christ is regarded as one of his minor prophets. The

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED, £126 16s. 6d.; R. V. Ross, £1 14s. 1d.; S. Jones, 2s. 6d.; Anon, 1s. 2d.; A. S. G. Hamlyn, 18s. 6d. Total to date May 20th, 1960. £129 12s. 9d.

Koran says there is no God but God, and Muhammed is his major prophet." And the Prime Minister's complaint is that missionaries, of which there are some 1,200, were "meddling in elections, and getting their loyal flock to vote only for Christians." As Sir Ahmadu has repeatedly stressed the necessity for Christians and Muslims to get along with each other, his annoyance is understandable.

THE *Catholic Times* (1/4/60) however, finds "the teachings of the Church . . . a real spearhead for the advance of 'backward' people." Many of the new leaders in Africa and elsewhere have been "nurtured only on the mystique of democracy" and "can but represent the passions of unsophisticated masses," whereas, "Catholic leaders imbued with the principles of Christianity can lead their peoples towards a truly constructive future." "As in Europe such men as Dr. Adenauer, General de Gaulle, Signor De Gasperi and others who were and are loyal to the mind of the Church have saved their nations in the most perilous years," says the paper, "so also can the rising statesmen of Catholic Africa, such as Julius Nyrere."

THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND'S Committee on Public Questions, Religion and Morals, painted a terrible picture of Scotland today. According to *The Daily Record* (17/5/60), the Committee considered that the big city has contaminated the country. "Indifference to religion and church-going in the city", it said, "has spread to the country parish. The army of churchless masses is growing". It saw unfaithfulness in marriage ("adultery today was frequent"), "sexual liberties before marriage . . . acquiring a cloak of respectability"; and "gratuitous exhibition of the female form whenever the chance affords". This last indicated "a fundamental preoccupation with sex that is both unhealthy and evil". "Only in a sex-ridden society could it live"—the report continued—"and, as things are, immorality is written all over it". "The country's morals", in fact, "are crumbling", the Committee informed us, as Christian leaders have continually informed us throughout the centuries—and will no doubt continue to inform us in centuries to come.

THE CONGREGATIONAL ASSEMBLY in London also noted the decline of rural religion (*The Guardian*, 18/5/60), and found that "the village chapel is sometimes too large for modern needs, sometimes ill-suited for modern purposes; sometimes neglected, unattractive, even repulsive for lack of reasonable care". This "relic of the old isolation and independence of rural England" was fast passing away, and "Too many churches are struggling on with fewer than fifty members . . ."

A SCOTTISH COURT OF SESSION judge, Lord Kilbrandon, not surprisingly caused a sensation at the annual meeting of the Edinburgh Marriage Guidance Council, when he suggested two forms of marriage, "one in which a couple could get a divorce on demand at a Registrar's office". "It's pretty revolutionary" one Church leader remarked (*Evening Dispatch*, Edinburgh, 10/5/60). "This suggestion is no more than legalised concubinage", said another (*Daily Record*, 11/5/60). But perhaps the most surprising reaction came from the Rev. Dr. H. C. Whitley, minister of St. Giles's, Edinburgh. "Does this mean we will have non-Christian marriages?" he asked.

Exodus — A Rejoinder

By P. G. ROY

WHERE FOR CENTURIES learned experts and Bible-believing scholars have failed, Mr. R. W. Morrell (THE FREETHINKER, May 6th) cannot hope to succeed; every possible avenue to corroborate the—even partial—historicity of Exodus sooner or later leads into a cul-de-sac. And since the highlight of the story, the splitting of the sea—conceived, as my quotations have shown, as a chaos monster—is scripturally admitted mythos, it ought not to have been necessary for me to dot the i's and cross the t's. Today I propose to quote extensively to find better credence.

In -538 Kurush (Cyrus) permitted the resettlement of Judea and a band of idealists and pioneers returned home. It was only after the homesteads had been made habitable again, that in -458 a second batch followed, comprised of zealots and priestly hyenas. Unless "Ezra" is a cumulative name for a group or school, it may have been the name of the leader of this body of repatriates with vested interests. The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia (London, 1959) says:—

The Talmud credits Ezra with reintroducing biblical law after it had been forgotten, and ascribes to him and his entourage many ancient laws as well as the introduction of the square Hebrew characters, the precise determination of the text of Pentateuch and the establishment of the Great Assembly (Kenesset haGedolah). Biblical critics from the time of Spinoza have regarded Ezra as the compiler of the Pentateuch. Many scholars believe the books of Ezra and Nehemiah to have been written by a single hand in the 5th to 4th century.

And the *Dictionary of the Bible* (Scribner, New York), in many instances stresses the composite character of the Old Testament which was "subject to constant revision", when several alterations were made as different sources were welded together. "It will be shown that, in fact, these books are the result of complicated literary processes extending over a long period", starting with Elohist and Jahvist texts overlapping each other, whilst the Priestly Code cannot be earlier than Solomon's temple.

Modern criticism has shown that Hebrew literature, like other Semitic literature, is usually the results of compilation . . . The first attempts to collect these, so as to form a connected written history, probably date from the 8th or 9th century BC and originated probably in the schools of the prophets (*Dictionary of the Bible*).

Joseph McCabe in his *Rationalist Encyclopaedia* says (article "Ezra") that

. . . later writers or "redactors" of the priestly school are supposed to have borrowed his name and worked on the Law and the Prophets until these assumed the shape in which we have them . . . It is plausibly suggested that the zealots among the exiled . . . began to rewrite the Hebrew books so as to pretend that from the time of Moses and Aaron (if they did not fabricate those leaders), there was an elaborate cult of Jahve with a powerful priesthood . . . and the work of reconstructing the literature or incorporating the old Jahvist and Elohist writers in a tissue of historical fiction went on under the name of Ezra for a long time.

Now mind his term "historical fiction", because the authors' aim was homiletic. The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (article "Mishna") enlarges on it thus:

From the Rabbinical standpoint the Bible is a microcosm in which is reflected every move and event of the great universe. A teacher comments: "Turn it, and again turn it, for the all is therein, and thy all is therein". It requires only the light of a great thinker to extract from its compact pages all the esoteric wisdom.

And under "Hexateuch"—

It is, of course, obvious that the Hexateuch as it stands, is not strictly a historical work. It did not need criticism to discover this but criticism makes it absolutely certain.

It therefore stands to reason that—as Mr. Morrell suggests—in its basic traits the story of Exodus "predates

Ezra by quite some time". But that in his time it should have been impossible to know anything about the reign of Akhenaton (1380-1362 BC), because "there is not a scrap of evidence available to indicate that Ezra had access to documents relative to the period of Akhenaton" is an idea I found rather amusing. Exactly around this time Palestine was an Egyptian colony whose governors and vice-roys inundated the Pharaohs with sinister reports of incursions by marauding nomads and Anatolian raiders. One of these letters imploring succour was written to Akhenaton's father, Amenophis III by 'Abd Khipa (Devotee of Khipa the Anatolian sun goddess), King of Urusalim (Jerusalem).*

In consequence of frequent westwards eruptions of Mongol conquerors, an avalanche of displaced peoples gathered; some could come to rest by acquiring ascendancy over indigenous populations in Afghanistan, Babylon (the Kassites), Anatolia (Mitanni and the Hittites) etc. Other waves swept down Syria and invaded the Nile delta, where for over a century they set up their reign. One of their foremost princes, Khian, adopted the title "Hiku-Hasut" (or Hika-shoshu, all with guttural h)—Ruler of the Deserts. After this the whole period has come to be styled the time of the Hyksos. Now this is the title under which all higher Bedouin Chiefs used to be addressed, and Manetho's translation "shepherd kings" is erroneous.

We are not at all certain about the ethnic composition of the Hyksos; there were Semites among them and some of the later rulers had Semitic names, such as one Yequebar, Jacob is Ba'al (hieroglyphic r frequently stands for l) and another called Yequeb-her which is either "Jacob is God(=el)" or the "Crook God". Bedouins and Northern Semites have always been proud if they succeeded to "pull a quick one", so it is not amazing that one of their favourite gods had a name pertaining to this art. We know this crook god from cuneiform inscriptions (Ia^qûb Ilu) before he was made into a Biblical Patriarch,** whose "sons" emigrated to Egypt.

However, we know that the Hyksos carried bronze scimitars and fought from horse-drawn two-wheeled battle chariots; it was they who introduced the horse into Europe and Egypt and this points to the wide Eurasian steppes; and their Indo-Arian inhabitants, the Hurrians of Mitanny, were probably the foremost horse-breeders of their day.

If, as is very likely, members of Hebrew tribes were among the Hyksos invaders, they were quite insignificant; they arrived with the victors and were destroyed with the vanquished. The Egyptians held individual slaves, but there was not any enslaved community there. Moreover, Elohist states that the Israelites lived "in the land of Egypt", with no hint of a special district being assigned to them. The priestly code goes even farther and says "the land was filled with them". They were so wealthy and numerous that Pharaoh decided to curb them by making them work hard in the building of the cities of Rameses and Pithon (Hermopolis).

This can only mean the reign of Rameses II (the Great), of the 19th Dynasty (13th century). The idea that the Great Rameses II—himself of Semitic extraction—could be

* Readers interested in the motives leading to the Tell el-Amarna venture and its failure can find a novel assessment in the *Humanist* of May, 1958.

** Jacob is 3.pers.fut. of Rameses 'aqab = to cheat (literally: to hold somebody fast at his heel, to trip up).

cheated and eventually drowned, is so crazy that even fundamentalists had to drop it very soon. Most important, however, is the scriptural assertion that the Exodus took place 480 years before the erection of Solomon's temple:—

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign . . . that he began to build the House of the Lord (I Kg.6:1),— which carries us back into the 15th century or about the reign of Thutmose III (1501-1447 BC). But at that time there was no place called after Rameses, of course.

Egyptian sources disclosed evidence that Pharaoh Thotmes or Thutmose (Son of the Moongod Thot-Hermes) had been forced to pay tribute to a certain people of the Hittites. Whoever has cared to read C. W. Ceram: *The Secret of the Hittites* must know that the Hittite empire was for centuries a redoubtable competitor to Egyptian power in the buffer states of Syria and Palestine. A body of runaways from the one could therefore easily find protection with the partisans of the other. (This disposes of Mr. Morrell's final remark moulded in the image of Interpol.)

No—the whole story is a pious fabrication in support of the celebration of Passah and the Initiation of Adolescents. The *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Knowledge* (New York) states in the article on "Exodus—

The critics hold that it is a combination of various sources written at different times and upholding various views, the earliest being shortly after the division of the kingdom (10th cent.) and the latest much after the exile (about 3rd cent.). This, I trust, will satisfy my critic.

Cats Through Freethought Eyes

By F. A. RIDLEY

WE LEARN, in the Book of Kings how Sennacherib, King of Assyria, was forced to relinquish his siege of Jerusalem by the celestial intervention of an Angel who "smote the Assyrians". The Egyptian records substitute a more intriguing, if scarcely more credible, version of the episode: a multitude of mice went by night into the Assyrian camp "and gnawed away the bowstrings of the archers". The moral of which story appears clear: the ancient Egyptians worshipped cats because Egypt was plagued by mice. In his new book, *Cats My Line*, Mr. F. A. Corina gives his readers much curious and valuable information about these domestic animals—animals which have been variously described as the "mystics", "rationalists" and "anarchists" of nature. As the author explains, he is professionally interested in cats, having for some years past owned a cattery in Bradford, during which period some 20,000 cats have enjoyed board and lodging under his auspices; an experience which we gather, was mutually pleasurable to all concerned. Mr. Corina assures us that despite the lugubrious predictions of his friends, he is still financially solvent, and we gather that Bradford is still a feline metropolis. *Felis domesticus* has met with very varied treatment from his human would-be master, *Homo sapiens*. He has been greatly admired by many famous men including the Prophet Muhammed. He has also been treated extremely ill, notably by the Christian Churches which often credited him with a satanic derivation. Among the coronation festivities at the accession of the first Elizabeth, a large number of black cats were burned alive in wicker baskets as "imps of Satan". In fairness, one must add that a later English Queen, Victoria, was a patron of the cat, and did much to make puss fashionable in British society. In seventeen chapters packed with detailed information, Mr. Corina surveys the cat from virtually every conceivable angle, and with reference to pretty well every

kind of cat and to every kind of situation with which the professional guardian of cats is likely to be confronted. With one notable exception, declares the Roman Catholic naturalist St. George Mivart, the cat is man's superior, but that exception is significant; the cat has no immortal soul—Mr. Corina appears to concur, for he tells us nothing about it. But about pretty well every other visible attribute of cats, our author has plenty to say in the course of this delightful, illustrated book. It will certainly inform and interest the innumerable fans of this most independent of animals, the domestic cat.

Cats My Line by F. J. Corina—Sunbeam Press, Bradford. 11/6d.

'The Passion Play and Anti-Semitism

AS ALL THE TOURISTS AGENCIES have been dutifully informing us for months, this year is Passion Play year at Oberammergau. And as long ago as last December, THE FREETHINKER revealed something of the lesser-publicised commercial background to the event. We also noted that Anton Preisiger, who is playing Christ as he did ten years ago, is an ex-member of the Nazi party.

The March issue of the American Jewish monthly *Commentary*, referred to other unsavoury aspects of the affair in an article by a Unitarian Professor of English at Columbia University, Robert Gorham Davis.

"In a period of reviving anti-Semitism, brought finally to public attention by the defacing of synagogues," says Professor Davis "the visitors to Oberammergau will see, under highly emotional circumstances, a play in which the synagogue is a rallying point for evil and in which the Jewish people accept gleefully for themselves and their children blood and guilt for the murder of the Christian Saviour".

"What ugly accusations against a play whose main theme is love!" exclaimed Preisiger (*Time*, 21/3/60). And the 70-year-old director, George Johann Lang, who was likewise a Nazi and was jailed for it for two years after the war ("I hoped that the Nazis would bring order into the political and moral chaos that was Germany"—our italics) dismissed any suggestion of anti-Semitism in the play.

Nevertheless, as *Time* reports, "Significant changes have been made in the text". The abbot of a local Benedictine monastery scrutinised it and rewrote ten passages. Here is one example. In the old version, a group of Jews denounced Jesus before Pontius Pilate: "He will be the goal of our eternal hate. We will hate him until the end of time". Now they say: "O Lord, here is a man on trial; bless us and tell us whether he is right". And the words "hatred" and "vengeance", when spoken onstage by Jews, have been deleted with—said one member of the cast—the sacrifice of a great deal of the drama.

Of course, Professor Davis's complaint is not only against the Oberammergau Passion Play which, as he says, falls well within the Christian tradition. The fault lies in that tradition. In St. Matthew the Jews are made to say, "His blood be on us, and on our children" an attitude which, says the Professor, "has been taken as warrant through nearly two millenia, for a series of abominable outrages against the people among whom Christianity rose".

—NEXT WEEK—

THE VATICAN IN 1960

By F. A. RIDLEY

In Italy

THE JOURNAL, *Nord-Matin*, reported the following item:—

During the showing of a news-reel at Trieste on the death of Pius XII, 21-year-old Remo Remi made remarks insulting to the memory of the dead Pope. He has just been sentenced to one year's solitary confinement.

This is truly a very severe sentence. You would doubtless like to know what this unfortunate young man said, when he saw on the screen the hypocritical face of the late and little-lamented Pacelli, known as "Pidouze" (a contemptuous abbreviation of the French form of Pius XII—*Pie Douze*).

One of our Italian correspondents has been good enough to provide us with the details, so we are in a position to print the exact text of the utterances which have brought down upon the head of young Remo Remi the great honour of the Vatican's thunderbolts.

When the face of the great papal play-actor appeared on the screen, he shouted out:—

"There he is, the bandit who supported Mussolini for 30 years.

"The false Christian who authorised the conquest of Abyssinia, who engineered the assassination of the Spanish Republic, who signed a treaty with the revolting Adolf Hitler, who blessed Franco and Petain, gave absolution to Pavelic, Stepinac and other mass-murderers.

"There he is, the old mountebank, the charlatan who had the effrontery to claim that Christ came to talk with him in his bedroom when he was ill.

"There he is, the ----"

At this point the police intervened brutally, and the passionate indictment by the young and courageous Italian was interrupted.

Our readers can judge for themselves. Did his action merit a year in prison? Should he not rather be congratulated on his courageous proclamation of the truth, when we are surrounded by so many toadies and hacks who grovel and lie shamelessly, through self-interest and cowardice?

Bravo Remo Remi! May your act of courage inspire many imitators.
—*La Calotte* (May, 1960).

CORRESPONDENCE

PILATE AND JESUS

In reply to Mr. Vernon Miles—the story *The Procurator of Judea*, shows Pilate in his retreat being interviewed by a young Roman who wanted to know how the Procurator had got on with the Jews. Pilate in reply dealt with a number of his difficulties and the trouble he had with the Jews over all sorts of things. But when he was asked about "Jesus of Nazareth", he could not remember anything whatever about him! That is, he remembered numbers of unimportant and trivial events in Palestine but not the Greatest Trial that ever took place in which he and his wife played such an important part, to say nothing of the Crucifixion, the Empty Tomb, the Resurrection and the Ascension—this in full view of so many people. Pilate hadn't even the vaguest *recollection* of any of these events. If Mr. Miles would read the story again he would see—and understand—the subtle irony of Anatole France who in it proved how thoroughly he disbelieved the Gospels. H. CUTNER.

HAVING US ON?

I should like to make some interesting comparisons between Mr. Robert Scotts original jeremiad and his reply to my criticism of it. He has denounced sex and childbirth as "nauseating" and "disgusting". Now we are informed that he has a wife, and presumably, children! He denounced meat-eating as "degrading". Now he says that he eats beefsteaks! The post-mortem fate of the human body was bewailed as "revolting". Now he professes stoical indifference to this same fate! It would seem that Mr. Scott has been "having us on". His hoity-toity aesthetic and hypersensitive emotions were mere sham and his noble sentiments mere attitudinising. I am alive as Mr. Scott is to the harmful nature of religious neurosis and religious obscurantism. I am unable to see, however, how unbelievers can demonstrate their superiority to believers while matching them in insincerity and

overstatement and "hamming it up" as they say in theatrical circles. Let's leave the "holier than thou" stuff to the religionists. Let's keep our feet on the ground, call a spade a spade, and resist all temptations to appear preternaturally wise and noble!
S. W. BROOKS.

MR. A. D. HOWELL SMITH

I do not propose to argue with Mr. Howell Smith regarding the meaning of the word "Stauros" as I am sure that Mr. Cutner can adequately deal with this; but I am at a complete loss to know what exactly Mr. Howell Smith believes.

I am aware that, like many of us, he is a member of the Rationalist Press Association, and I have his book *Jesus Not A Myth*, but this does not answer my question. When referring to Jesus, he makes use several times of capital letters, i.e. "Babe of Bethlehem", "Founder" and "Master" thereby, I can only assume, offering his opinion that Jesus was God.

I am even more confounded by Mr. Howell Smith's statement in his letter "Even if we concede to certain mythicists that the crucifixion was originally an astronomical symbol or myth, for all early Christian writers it was an historical event." So what?

Were those early Christian writers contemporaries of the event, and if not, in view of Mr. Howell Smith's concession, where does he stand?
C. STANLEY.

OBITUARY

ALBERT CECIL PENFOLD, who died in Brighton on May 11th at the age of 67, was a confirmed Freethinker and a regular reader of this paper. "Penny", as he was known to his many friends, had devoted a lifetime to the service of his fellow men and women, particularly in the Co-operative movement. Employed by Brighton Co-operative Society for 48 years, he was for 35 years Secretary of the Staff Slate Club, and for the last 7 years, Secretary of the Retired Employees Association. He had completed arrangements for an old people's outing on the Monday before his death.

On Monday May 16th, a secular service, arranged by the Brighton Co-operative Funeral Furnishing Service, was conducted in the Downs Crematorium, Brighton, by Mr. J. W. Barker, in the presence of many of Mr. Penfold's Co-operative colleagues and friends. We extend our sympathy to his son.

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