

The Freethinker

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THE NOMINATION for President of Senator Kennedy by the Democratic Party has aroused widespread interest, not only in the political perspectives envisaged by this choice, but to a perhaps even greater extent by the concurrent religious perspectives involved. For, as everyone knows by this time, Senator Kennedy is a Roman Catholic and, should he manage to win in November, will actually be the first President of the U.S.A. to rank as a *bona fide*

member of the Church of Rome. The particular prospects involved in such a novel departure from traditional American practice, have already been widely canvassed both here, and in journals of a more popular type. But over and above the immediate prospects

aroused by the nomination of Kennedy, there are also wider perspectives to consider. For, as readers of THE FREETHINKER, at least, are aware (as also we hope, many of our Protestant friends), the Vatican is just now engaged upon a world-wide counter-offensive; it would hardly be any exaggeration to term it a new "counter-reformation" (like that in the 16th century) to recover a largely sceptical world to the dominion of the Vatican.

Catholic Prospects in England

So obvious has now become this counter-offensive, even in a traditionally Protestant land like this, that even the popular press, which is not on the whole noted for its indulgence in long-term perspectives, is now beginning to take some notice of the new religious tide that is in full flood and pressing confidently forward with the objective of ultimately submerging the Protestant landmarks set up at the Reformation. In which connection, the weekly magazine, *Today*, recently (13/8/60) published an informative and important article under the provocative title, "Could Britain have a Catholic Premier?" Without directly answering his own question, Michael Viney, the author of this article, gives many interesting facts about the current growth of Roman Catholicism in Britain, as also about its methods of organisation and propaganda. The net effect produced by Mr. Viney's facts and figures, which relate to Britain alone, is certainly alarming and the issue in question should most certainly be read by those still apparently numerous people (including, it would appear, both Freethinkers and Protestants) whose effective motto seems to be "It can't happen here". The facts and figures here quoted are the more alarming when one relates them—as *Today* does not—to the virtually world-wide offensive at present being launched by the Vatican.

The Church Of England Sees The Red Light

It is not only THE FREETHINKER and The Protestant Alliance that nowadays is seeing the red (or rather black) light: even the decorous and traditionally slow-moving Church of England has seen it—or at least some of its more perspicacious clerics have. Mr. Viney quoted Archdeacon Eric Tracey of Halifax, who recently issued this notable warning to his parishioners and, one assumes, more generally to his Church at large: "By 2000 A.D. I

fear the Anglican Church will no longer be the Established Church. A nation with a predominantly Roman Catholic population will have taken steps to have the Constitution of the country changed". "The cathedrals and the ancient parish churches will be made over to the Roman Catholics. The king or queen of this country will be crowned by a Roman prelate". And the Archdeacon went on to give a useful piece of advice which, though intended primarily

for his own Church, might be taken to heart by all those irrespective of their personal beliefs who hold, as I for one, most assuredly do, that the victory of Rome represents the major menace (only excepting the menace of nuclear war) to the future of any human

scientific and ethical culture. Archdeacon Tracey sagely observes to his co-religionists: "The future of the Church of England is not guaranteed by Divine authority. If the Romans are planning for the future—then we must plan too". True enough, and not only for Anglicans.

Mixed Methods—And Marriages

Today describes the various methods adopted by Roman Catholicism to implement its hitherto somewhat premature dedication of England to the Mother of God—so often alleged to be the real Deity of the Roman Catholic Church. Mixed marriages appear to play quite a leading role in this nationwide strategy: this, as is well known, is always accompanied by conditions of unvarying stringency: e.g. the children must always be brought up as Catholics and the Catholic partner is under a moral compulsion to work persistently for the conversion of the non-Catholic spouse. This method appears to be yielding results, since we read that in the Catholic diocese of Leeds, 38 out of every 100 Catholics marry outside their Church; nor of course, must it be forgotten that birth control is still rigorously forbidden to the Catholic laity, and more rapid increase in numbers is consequently likely *vis-à-vis* the non-Catholic population. (The present Catholic birthrate is about 120,000 a year.) Mr. Viney informs us that the Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham recently promised to baptise personally, the eighth child in each Catholic family born in his diocese. He was soon kept busy

Propaganda—Old and New

It was in the Vatican that the word "propaganda" first saw the light in the (still active) *College De Propaganda Fide*, and in Britain in 1960, clerical propaganda is still working overtime. The Church now claims the annual conversion of 14,500 converts. (There is, no doubt, also a substantial leakage; but as McCabe pointed out long ago this, however large, is never allowed to affect statistical surveys in the Church of Rome). As is here emphasised, the consistency of Roman Catholic propaganda, gives it a marked advantage over the often contradictory utterances of its Protestant competitors. At present, and in addition to such already well-established agencies as Catholic Action and the Catholic Truth Society, a new institution (with headquarters in Hampstead) is now

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Roman Catholic Prospects in Britain

By F. A. RIDLEY

extremely active. The Catholic Enquiry Centre pursues an energetic campaign of conversion through the post. For six years it has now advertised "The Truth about the Catholic Church" in newspapers and magazines. In which time we learn 153,000 non-Catholics have replied and of these, about 83,500 have taken a twenty-one week postal course of instruction. Some 6,000 people have told the Centre that the course has led to conversion. Add to which, a formidable schoolbuilding plan designed to indoctrinate the next generation, which runs to £87,000,000 "leaning heavily on the government's 75% grant". For Rome has never forgotten the maximum of her greatest leaders, the aphorism of St. Ignatius of Loyola, that "If you give me a child until he is seven, you can have him for the rest of his life". The earliest impressions are the strongest.

Mr. Cutner and the Exodus

By R. W. MORRELL

THE ARTICLE, "On Controversial Questions—1", by H. Cutner, opening in a general tone, soon develops into an attack on my views regarding the Exodus. To call Mr. Cutner's article a reply to me would be stretching truth a little far, if anything the article is even weaker than those of P. G. Roy. The writer sets out from the first to create the opinion that I fully accept the account as given in the Bible: "If the story were not in the Bible, would even Mr. Morrell (who stoutly believes it) defend a word of it?" This misrepresents my position, what I did argue was that the story could be based on actual events, it does not follow from that that I am defending the Biblical account. Of course Mr. Cutner fully understands my position and soon contradicts his earlier statement of me "stoutly" believing the story when he remarks that I do my "utmost to show us that his 'exodus' is not at all the Biblical one". Mr. Cutner should make his mind up as to where he considers that I stand; I made my position clear enough. It is one thing to argue that the story has a basis in fact, it is another to argue that the account as given in the Bible is correct word for word, but that is the impression Mr. Cutner attempts to put over as being mine, when he asserts early in his article that I "stoutly" believe the story. Regarding his point that followed directly as to whether I would defend the story if it did not appear in the Bible, I would suggest that there are many events regarded, even by Mr. Cutner, as historical fact that rest on far less evidence than is available to bring forward in support of the Exodus as an actual event.

Great play is made on my use of the terms Jews and Hebrews, these do not appear in the Biblical account says Mr. Cutner. Well, if my use of them upsets him so much, he has my unconditional permission to use "children of Israel" or "Israelites" in their place. What I mean by the affinity between Hyksos and Hebrews—or as Mr. Cutner would rather have it, Israelites—should be clear to him. They were both nomadic peoples but this no more makes the Hebrews (Israelites) into Hyksos any more than it makes the Hyksos into Hebrews. But Mr. Cutner in his concern for truth attempts to create the impression that I asserted that it did. A quotation from Edward Naville to the effect that no 18th dynasty monuments are to be found in the Delta, is given, what this is supposed to prove heaven only knows, but perhaps Mr. Cutner is unaware of the fact that very little excavation has been undertaken in the Delta, as Professor H. W. Fairman pointed out in 1950. The quote from Naville is dated 1887. In view of the Aswan High Dam it would

Whither England?

The above facts and figures, and many others equally noteworthy, will be found in *Today's* survey of current Catholic ambitions and activities. But where will it all lead? From the point of view of the Vatican and its local representatives, there is no ambiguity about its present line of march or its ultimate destination. The aim is the conversion of England. "In fifteen or twenty years time the Catholics may well call for a religious census in England and Wales as a first step in a long term campaign for a decision that the Anglican Church is no longer the official State-Church". And then? A restored Roman Church in Britain might go slow at first, but it would gradually eliminate its rivals. It would proceed irrevocably on this course until England was once more a totalitarian theocracy as in the Ages of Faith. Present-day Spain shows us what to expect from a Catholic Restoration here.

appear that the Delta sites will have to remain unexcavated for quite a while. Mr. Cutner is wrong when he asserts that the 17th dynasty covers the Hyksos period, it covers the last stage yes, the period proper extends from the 13th dynasty and is known as the Second Intermediate Period.

In dealing with the Exodus, Mr. Cutner adopts the theory that if a great mass of direct evidence is not available then the story is a myth. He is, in effect, little, if any, different from Billy Graham who argues that it is all true as given in the Bible. Both positions have little to commend them; the truth is probably a synthesis of both. There are too many small details in the Exodus account which suggest that the writer had a very good acquaintance with the Egypt of the period in which the story is set, in my opinion the latter end of the 18th dynasty (as Mr. Cutner has little to say regarding the facts brought forward in support of this contention I need say nothing further on it). Hence I once more suggest that the Exodus story as related in the Bible could be based on an actual event, and while we find no detailed descriptions of it on the walls of Egyptian buildings or in any official documents that have been discovered, this does not mean that the story is pure mythology. For example, for many years it has been thought that certain stories that are part of the Egyptian religion were myth now this is being questioned; scholars have postulated that they are based on actual events from pre-dynastic times. There is no vast collection of archaeological facts or documents (writing had not been invented) to back these assertions, but none-the-less they have been made, and evidence brought forward in support, evidence which to a large extent is derived from the stories themselves: material which fits in with known factors from the period in which the scholars postulate that the story had its factual origin. For a brief discussion see *Ancient Egyptian Religion* by Professor Jaroslav Cerny. But if we all adopted Mr. Cutner's approach, we would never dare postulate such heretical ideas, fortunately few people are so narrow minded. Thus Mr. Cutner may deride me for holding that there are grounds for suggesting that the Exodus is based on an actual event, but before he has any sort of a case he has first to show that the evidence brought forward can be reinterpreted to fit his own theory and secondly to give good cause why anyone should invent such a story. The story of the Exodus as given in the Bible has much that cannot be accepted, on the other hand there are details in it which clearly indicate that it had its origin long before the time when it was incorporated in the Jewish sacred books as we know them. It is these facts, some of which I advanced in my article which force me to conclude that the story is based on fact.

Parapsychological Piffle

By COLIN McCALL

Mr. H. CUTNER last week drew attention again to John Scarne's exposure of the appalling credulity of Professor J. B. Rhine in connection with Mrs. Fonda's "mind-reading" horse, "Lady", later—as her fame spread—"Lady Wonder". Mr. Cutner mentioned, too, the physically tough, but mentally soft, police captain who solemnly thanked the horse for answering his question on the whereabouts of some robbers, by pushing forward the letters CHI for Chicago. I share Mr. Cutner's admiration for the debunking skill of Mr. Scarne, whose book I reviewed in *THE FREETHINKER* some years ago, and I recalled it after reading an article by Peter Michelmore, in the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* for August 11th, 1960. "Can crime be halted by thought?" asks Mr. Michelmore—the question being directed this time, I hasten to add, not to a mind-reading horse, but to the *Evening Dispatch's* readers. How many of the latter will fall for the piffle that he writes about, I don't know. Thor Heyerdahl has said that *aku-aku* is by no means confined to the natives of Easter Island and parapsychologists and extra-sensory perceptionists thrive on *aku-aku*.

Mr. Michelmore seriously states that "the American Society for Psychical Research is collecting a growing file of phenomena that does give substance to a mystic realm that embraces such eerie things as telepathy, clairvoyance and poltergeists". Society members, he informs us, "are conducting inquiries on anything and everything that cannot be immediately explained by science, even to recent reports of 'weeping Madonnas' and the miracles at Lourdes". (Note that "immediately": the members are going to be pretty busy.)

Who could keep Joseph B. Rhine out of such an article for long? Not Mr. Michelmore, anyway. The "head of the respected Parapsychology Laboratory at North Carolina's Duke University" (I am quoting and appropriately italicising, C.McC.) agree with Dr. Nandor Fodor, "a top New York authority on psychic phenomena" (ditto, C.McC.) about "the stunning potential behind the ESP mystery". You will be able roughly to gauge what it takes to become such a "top New York authority", when I tell you that Dr. Fodor is "convinced that a new, hard look at the world of the occult is urgent in this space age", and says that ESP "may be the means through which we may communicate with . . . space life". The only favourable comment I can make on Dr. Fodor is that he does, at least, employ "may" twice in the latter quotation, suggesting that he "may" not be quite as "convinced" that he can communicate with space life by ESP, as he apparently is about the urgency of that "new, hard look" at the occult.

Restraint is hardly the dominant feature of the Rhine make-up, however. "The effect", he says, "would be to turn the searchlight on *all secrets of man and nature*". Again the italics are mine—a tribute, if you like, to respectability. But if you suspect hyperbole, pause and listen to the voice of Duke University parapsychology a little longer.

If the mind, limited as it is now, can identify a specific card in a deck located a thousand miles away—and this has been done—what would prevent any knowledge, hidden anywhere in the world, from being reached by such an ability? The consequences for world affairs would be literally colossal. War plans, and crafty designs of any kind, anywhere in the world would be watched and revealed. Every secret weapon

and scheming strategy would be subject to exposure. The nations could relax their suspicious fears of each other's machinations.

And just another moment, please, for Dr. Rhine hasn't quite finished wishful thinking:

Crime on any scale could hardly exist with its cloak of invisibility thus removed. Graft, exploitation and suppression could not continue. No lurking disease, no impending epidemic, no obscure source of danger to society could hide from the extrasensorial insight directed to discover it.

I hope you are as impressed as Mr. Michelmore. "This is a breathtaking report", he gasps ("report" hardly seems the right word for this effusion, but let that pass) "but then ESP are dynamic initials. They mean telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition (knowledge of future events), and psychokinesis (mind over matter, like making dice turn up the number desired)". And the Rhine high-pitched note is maintained. "It staggers the mind," says Professor Gardner Murphy, director of research at the famous Menninger Foundation. "We are standing on the threshold of a huge, unknown world." "Right now," says Mr. Michelmore, taking over again, "scientists are delving into psychic depths, trying to cut through the specific individual, cultural and historical layers to find some answers to ESP and other psychic phenomena". Here I must pay tribute to the *Evening Dispatch* compositor who cocked an appropriate, if unintentional, snook at this solemn nonsense by setting "layers" as "lavars", which may mean washbowls, ablutions or seaweeds.

Then Mr. Michelmore himself is (perhaps unconsciously) humorous. "Several parapsychologists", he says, "visited the home of Edgar Jones, in Baltimore, where it was said pottery pitchers blew up, sugar bowls jumped into the air, tables fell down stairs, and kindling wood exploded". But the laugh is still to come: "The PSI men [parapsychologists] do not suspect trickery". Not likely! "Somewhere, they *feel*, is an answer that will open another door in their probe of the occult". This time, my italics emphasise Mr. Michelmore's uncommonly precise language.

He goes on to tell us that, "With open, *eager* minds, the PSI men inspected the weeping Madonnas in homes on New York's Long Island earlier this year. . . . Chemists could not liken the liquid to any they had known, but found it contained only a trace of chloride. Tears have a heavy chloride content". I go on italicising the revealing word. Eager, indeed they are, these parapsychologists, these extra-sensory perceptionists! And they seem virtually to have taken over the Psychical Research societies. At any rate they get by far the most publicity, and a little lack of chloride in a Modonna's tears isn't likely to deter them.

Whether the public prefers "mysteries" to solutions of them, I don't know (the popularity of the detective story would seem to suggest otherwise) but the press is convinced that it does. A poltergeist and sugar bowls: he hit the headlines with his pitchers and sugar bowls: an exposure, rarely. So it is with ghosts in general, Lourdes "miracles" and faith healing, not to mention telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and the rest.

How far Mr. Michelmore believes the rubbish he writes about is not clear. There are some indications of scepticism. He talks of the "outrageous high-jinks" of

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This Believing World

A rather lugubrious tract by a Dr. F. H. Ferris has reached us, and we find in it how terribly "distressed" he is because "98% of the world's population is unsaved". He is distressed also because, after travelling 75,000 miles, and meeting "thousands of missionaries and pastors, visiting hundreds of churches", he did not find "one pastor or missionary who lived and taught the Gospel as Jesus and Paul did!" Dr. Ferris, in fact, did not even find "one nation, city, town, village, that was predominantly Christian". No wonder the poor chap is both distressed and depressed. So would the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope feel horribly depressed if they found the same awful conditions prevailing. What could they think if about the only gentleman in an area which required 75,000 miles to explore, to find in it that the one Christian, that is, a real, genuine, kiss-my-heart Christian, was Dr. Ferris?

Moreover, he is even more distressed because he wants to save you—"I am" he laments, "vitaly interested in your salvation, happiness, comfort, and welfare". If, he despairingly adds, you are not "a member of His Church", it is, "Beloved, really tragic!" We are fairly certain that if this heart-rendering and pious appeal does not touch you, he will cease calling you "Beloved!"

ITV provided another religious "soap-box" orator for us the other Sunday—this time not Dr. Soper, but the Rev. N. Calvin. The usual studio audience asked him the usual (more or less) fatuous questions, but all who composed it—white and coloured—appeared to be as thorough believers as Mr. Calvin himself. One question seems always to turn up—the union of all Christian Churches. What does "our Lord" think of all this "disunity"? That is, in this year of ours, 1960, a crowd of people can still be found who believe "our Lord" is still living!

One of our leading authorities on witches, Dr. Margaret Murray, recently claimed that "when witchcraft was at its best it worked for good and not for evil", for "witches knew a great deal about herbs and midwifery, and often proved useful members of the community". We wonder whether Dr. Murray would have said this when witchcraft really was believed in? The Christian communities then followed the express teaching of the Bible, and tortured and burnt alive thousands and thousands of poor old women who were no more "witches" than is Dr. Murray.

There never were at any time "genuine" witches—that is, women who could fly through the air on broomsticks, cause tempests and shipwrecks, kill people with curses, and so on. It was Christians who took the Word of God literally, and fastened an obnoxious epithet on perfectly innocent men, women—and children. Not only were children burnt to death for witchcraft, but animals. And all through the Precious Word of God.

Three states which have achieved independence have celebrated their freedom by suppressing or trying to suppress if possible the freedom of the press. They are Ghana, Ceylon, and Cyprus, and there is nothing which can secure slavery as much as shackling the free expression of opinion. The Blasphemy Laws can still be appealed to in this country—and some of our religious citizens would like nothing better than to evoke them now and then. To change one of La Rochefoucauld's aphorisms a

little—"With what perfect equanimity and delight can we Christians bear the sentences imposed on blasphemers!"

A "Special Correspondent" of the "Rhodesia Herald" no doubt angry that the Bible account of our Earth makes it as flat as a plate takes nearly half a page to prove "that the Earth is round". Well, of course most things can be proved from the Bible by claiming that after all it is not a work of science, or philosophy, or the Divine Words have not been properly translated—the favourite way—or God Almighty couldn't make a mistake, and so on.

So when Job tells us that "The Lord hangeth the Earth upon nothing", this proves that after all the Bible is right in every particular. Unfortunately, the Earth does not "hang" upon "nothing"—a perfectly stupid statement. It spins round the Sun through the force of gravity, and neither Job nor any Bible writer knew anything whatever about gravity. We are also told that "it is he [God] that sitteth on the circle of the earth"—a verse which is even sillier than the other. How in the name of common sense can even a God sit upon the circle of the Earth? The Bible writers looked upon the Earth as a flat plate, and to get over this nonsense Moffatt's translation has, "He sits over the round earth"—which in the ultimate is just as fatuous as the AV translation.

As far as any advancement in science and modern physics is concerned, we cannot expect much in Rhodesia; but this particular article could have been written in the eighteenth century, for it teems with what can only be described as appalling ignorance. We are actually told "There are hundreds of ways archaeology has corroborated the accuracy of the Bible showing without doubt that the Bible is not a man-made book but a divine guide". It may well be "divine", but as a guide for anything but crass ignorance and credulity it would be hard to beat anywhere else in the literature of the world. There is not a scrap of contemporary archaeological evidence whatever for any Bible hero—not even for Jesus. As far as heroes like Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, and many others, archaeology is absolutely silent.

PARASYCHOLOGICAL PIFFLE

(Concluded from page 291)

poltergeists; this puzzle being "unsolved"; that one "unexplained"; and he ends with the remark that "Anything supernatural is meat and drink to the psychic researcher". But he repeats Rhine's ridiculous claim about the card identification a thousand miles away; talks, as we have seen, of "substance" being given to a "mystic realm"; and he (or his paper) gives general acknowledgment to ESP. How many of his readers will know that Rhine is quite hopeless as a scientific investigator—as credulous as a child, perhaps more credulous, because a child sometimes asks awkward questions? How many can be expected to know, when he and his "respected" laboratory receive such enormous publicity, and when criticisms of him receive such little notice? When people like Dr. D. J. West can critically examine eleven Lourdes miracles in exemplary fashion and declare them unsatisfactory, yet accept Rhine's totally inadequate experiments at face value?

—NEXT WEEK—

A CLERICAL MUNICH?

By F. A. RIDLEY

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.; Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. MILLS and WOODCOCK. (Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria statue.)

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.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

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, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Sussex Branch N.S.S. (Peace Statue, opposite Embassy Court, Brighton), Sunday, September 4th, 3 p.m.: D TRIBES.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, September 11th, 6.45 p.m.: S. M. CAINES, "The Negro and Nationalism".

There will be a meeting of the North London Branch, N.S.S. on Sunday, September 11, 8 p.m. at the "Carpenters Arms", Seymour Place (2 minutes from Marble Arch), to discuss donation to Building Fund and Conference Report.

Notes and News

MANCHESTER READER, Mr. N. Cassel noticed the following on the board outside Platt Chapel, Wilmslow Road, Manchester: "A Hypocrite is the real Atheist". The average passer-by might easily misconstrue this rather tricky saying, Mr. Cassel points out, to mean that Atheists are hypocrites. He therefore sent a letter to the minister in charge of the chapel. At the time of writing, he had received no reply.

★

MR. ALASDAIR SANDY JENKINS, of 35 Priory Park, Finaghy, Belfast 10, would be very pleased to hear from other Free-thinkers in Belfast.

★

WITH ITS JULY ISSUE, recently to hand, *The Westralian Secularist* reaches a "round dozen". It was an admirable idea of Collin Coates, F. A. Law, and others to start this duplicated newsheet for private distribution among the scattered Freethinkers of Western Australia, and we wish it many happy returns on this, its first, birthday. Delightful social gatherings have also been held periodically in Perth

with an intermingling of age levels. A lady attending for the first time summed one of these up well. "What a happy party!" she exclaimed. Now, having successfully performed its primary function of linking its readers together, the *Secularist* is considering developing its propaganda side.

★

PITY THE POOR VATICAN; it does have its trials! And, after Communism, women are surely its biggest worry. Just imagine what might happen if a Roman Catholic priest should see comely women athletes running and jumping at the Olympic Games. God knows what might happen to his celibacy! So the Pope's Vicar-General, Cardinal Micara has banned all women's or mixed sports. Then, according to the (Scottish) *Sunday Express* (21/8/60), following a recent Roman Synod, at which Pope John presided, priests have been told to refuse Holy Communion to women "too free in the use of make-up", or improperly dressed. And the Vatican City magazine, *Osservatore Della Domenica*, had very nasty things to say about some women visitors. "We can find them flapping their wings over the majesty of our monuments, clucking around the holiness of basilicas and washing themselves in the innocence of fountains". "Submerged by the invasion of these exotic hens", it went on, "we don't know how to defend our summer and our streets, our politeness and our civilisation".

★

RATHER BELATEDLY, from a *Bournemouth Echo* cutting dated July 4th, we read of a census taken "in a new housing estate near Cambridge recently . . ." It was found that out of 5,000 people only 14 were regular churchgoers".

★

A BELFAST READER recounts some interesting autobiographical details. "I was brought up a Presbyterian", he says, "but became sceptical in 1943 as the result of an unhappy love affair with a genteel young lady who claimed to be 'saved', and who lived by, with, and for Jesus only. However, this did not stop her from suddenly dropping me and running off with a much more well-to-do chappie than myself. Funnily enough, just before we parted, I was on the point of being converted myself." Becoming agnostic in 1945, our reader is now an atheist. But, he tells us, practically everything in Belfast, "almost every phase of living is conditioned by the hypocrisy and superstition of some branch of the Christian religion". "You'd hardly believe it unless you lived here and experienced it." he adds.

Theatre

"THIS IS NO MORE A PICTURE of Stepney than those Shaftesbury Avenue entertainments were true of life in the ancestral homes." So wrote one newspaper critic. I can't say, never having lived either in Stepney or an ancestral home. What I can say—and this is much more important—is that *Sparrars Can't Sing* is alive. To me the characters seem to come from Stepney (the set almost certainly does) and as this is a play of character rather than plot, it had authenticity. Surely the people of Stepney say these things—perhaps not so readily or so wittily—and do these things! In short, Miss Joan Littlewood has once again shown that the Theatre Royal, Stratford, London, can present a slice of life like no other theatre in England. And again her Theatre Workshop Company does her splendidly. I can only name two: Amelia Baynton as Grannie Miggs, and Barbara Ferris as her granddaughter—oldest and youngest, and both superb.

C.McC.

Indifferent Honest

By EVA EBURY

A BOOK CAME TO THE OFFICE for review with the intriguing title, *Indifferent Honest*, by Frank Halliday, (Duckworth, 18s.). Not being very conversant with contemporary authors I mistook him for another Halliday, Stephen. I mused on the happy proposition that this work was the Confessions of a Deluded Traveller, perhaps, on a second visit to Franco Spain, the prisons did not appear so rosy, such homes of rest and rehabilitation; and anti-Catholic and anti-Franco propaganda did not appear to be encouraged by a benevolent government; and foreign investigators not so heartily welcomed!

Frank Halliday, however, is not a religionist, he holds that all the creeds are outmoded, outdated and a mass of lies for the credulous.

He sees through the God whose promises fall far short of his practice, who demanded a human sacrifice as the price of man's redemption, and who is jealous, blood-thirsty and revengeful.

He sees Jesus as a man who could have been a more useful educationalist, who could have taught a correct astronomy, geology and descent of man. "If Jesus had said such things, he would perhaps have hastened the period of his passion, but at least it would have been convincing evidence to after ages that here indeed had been a revelation from God. It is scarcely reassuring to find that the Cosmology of Jesus was that of the Old Testament". He sees the falsity of the facile diction that there can be no conflict between science and Christianity. He understands that belief in personal survival is a natural and very primitive form of wishful thinking, but that there is no more evidence to support it than there is to support the fantastic doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

He knows that it is only childish credulity and a feeling of guilt that keeps good men from doubting the authority of ancient religions. He knows the Christian Church has much to answer for, "For in addition to its record of persecution, intolerance, cruelty, corruption, rapacity, and the fears inspired by its doctrine of Hell, there is its abuse, whether deliberate or not, of its doctrine of Heaven".

Halliday, himself a schoolmaster, says, "the schoolmaster who admits that he could not teach scripture with any conviction will not find it easy to get a job. Even a mild agnosticism brings a whiff of Russian brimstone". Yet he calls Atheism "as arrogant a tenet as the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church", and sighs for the substance without the trappings of religion. For "Christianity is so noble a way of life that any man indifferent honest, is, or tries to be, a Christian in his conduct". And "this imperfect world would have been morally poorer without Christianity and probably politically and socially as well". He thinks the Creator is pure mind. "When man himself has a real mind instead of a muddle of instincts and residual superstitions, when he can think without prejudice and reason without confusion . . . he may begin to understand these mysteries and the nature of the Creator". Halliday tells us that mathematics never were his strong point, doubtless neither is logic.

A window on the past, but what a near past, for it must have been about 1921 that Halliday sought to enter for Cambridge, and found he had, in common with all applicants, to cross the bridge of Paley's *Evidences*. "A view of the Evidences of Christianity, published in 1794, survived the import of Darwin's discoveries, and no doubt it was to counteract the sequent scepticism and agnosticism

of Huxley and others that the University insisted on a knowledge of it as a qualification for admission. If religious tests were to be abolished, as they were in 1871, and non-conformists and even worse, admitted to full membership—except of course to the headship of colleges—they should at least have a knowledge of orthodoxy and the evidences of Christianity".

But Paley was only to bring Halliday to formulate some of the evidences *against* Christianity, or rather against its foundations. His adolescent mind was already indelibly imbued with the "Spirit of Christianity" and the blind optimism of Browning through the schoolmaster he revered and whose friendship he retained, until Moral Rearmament and Frank Buchman led the teacher to pastures new. A far cry from the child who had honestly wailed in church when the Vicar preached the imminent end of the world—on Tuesday in fact.

In his foreword, Mr. Halliday states clearly the purpose of his book. "We do not know what to believe, for science has so shaken the foundations of religion that, though some cling all the more desperately to their faith, some retreat into a private mysticism, others advance an arrogant atheism while the majority drift without either creed or philosophy that suggests any purpose in life, or reason for moral behaviour. It is to suggest such a purpose, to supply such a reason, that I have written". Perhaps Mr. Halliday is right; perhaps this is the tragedy of bewildered mankind, to need a "something" to fill the aching void of lost belief! A Yugoslav friend of mine, a staunch militant atheist, voiced a similar opinion to me on his return from Czechoslovakia where, despite the efforts of the government to preserve the mind of the young from religion, it nevertheless appeared like a cankerous growth. He said that Freethinkers were trying to get rid of religion by reason, but that religion was purely emotive and fed on emotion, and it was only emotion that could fight or replace it. One thinks of the dictum of Tom Paine, that to argue with a man who has renounced the use and authority of reason is like trying to administer medicine to the dead. Yet I doubt if Mr. Halliday's sugar-coated pill of refined Christianity could have any more effect.

Despite nostalgia for his own schooldays and confusion of thought, and whether it pleases him or not, Mr. Halliday shares one vision with the "arrogant atheist". For, speaking of a philosophy based on the observable phenomena of the physical world, he pleads, "And I think of what might be. Schools where education is really creative; where these things are taught instead of the superstitions of the centuries of ignorance; where co-operation, friendship and love are shown to be the natural outcome of evolution; where it is realised that it is no longer necessary to shackle morality to a primitive religion, and enforce it by fear, but that ethical behaviour follows naturally from knowledge; and where children of all ages are encouraged not only to make things, but to appreciate things well made, the aural, visual and tactile qualities of the multifarious objects that make up our everyday physical environment".

OFFICE REDECORATION

What with the summer holidays and the intensive work in re-decorating our new offices. We hope readers who have sent in orders for literature will forgive any delay. We are doing our best to cope with our very necessary office work.

Marcus Aurelius

By G. I. BENNETT

"The virtue of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus was of a severer and more laborious kind (than that of Antoninus Pius). It was the well-earned harvest of many a learned conference, of many a patient lecture, and many a midnight lucubration... But his life was the noblest commentary on the precepts of Zeno. He was severe to himself, indulgent to the imperfections of others, just and beneficent to all mankind."—Edward Gibbon in the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

FOLLOWING THE PUBLICATION OF MY ESSAY, "Thoughts on Stoicism", a reader saw fit to make some unflattering references to the ancient Stoics. Well, the Stoic creed was never more than a minority creed, and it has always had its critics. That does not invalidate it. Ethically, it expressed something vital and meaningful, it had a fortifying message, for men who lived long ago. As then so now, it still has meaning and significance for some, among whom I would be counted. But I should not wish to be misunderstood. I am not saying that one should make oneself a martyr to Stoic principles. The wise man will take from Stoicism what appeals to him and what with profit he can incorporate into his own life. If I venture to suggest that there's much that can be incorporated, much that may make for a better, more balanced and tranquil life, I am not implying that Stoicism is for everybody. I am well aware that there are many to whom it appeals not at all. But it should, by its nature, make greater appeal to freethinking men and women than to any others. It is the creed of the man who would be governed by reason in the pursuit of knowledge and in the regulation of his own life. It is the philosophy of self-discipline and self-reliance. It has a vision lifted above pettiness and parochialism, an outlook of quickening social consciousness. It is for him who "would not be a tyrant over his fellow-man, and will not be a slave".

The words I have just quoted are Marcus Aurelius's, and they come from the John Jackson translation of the *Meditations* published in the World's Classics series. This little work, though its fame endures, is on the whole sadly neglected by the reading public. Yet there is no other like it; and it has often seemed to me a shame that when people in our western world are called upon to think of a book that superlatively uplifts, ennobles, and inspires, they almost inevitably choose the Bible. Speaking for myself, I cannot remember anything worth-while that I ever obtained from this uncritically venerated book. Ban it or destroy it I would not do; there are tastes other than mine. I am told that it should be a part of every child's general education. I am not at all sure about this; but what I am quite sure about is that it should never be presented as an ultimate source of moral authority, a *vade-mecum* of the good life. Actually, of course, the Bible speaks with many voices, which would vitiate any moral appeal it might have as a book of sacred, plenary truth. As against this, the *Meditations* is the product of one mind and personality, not always sure of itself, but always high-souled, honest through and through, and possessed of singleness of purpose in the largest degree. I don't think it is on first sight an easy book, nor is it immediately attractive. Its rough, broken sentences and unpretending style do not readily charm. Its hesitations, its occasional failure to say yea or nay to a question discussed, do not commend it to a mind eager for certainties. And it is a book that would be cast aside with impatience and scorn by the bumptious and the arrogant who have not the quality of humility that comes of maturity.

Those who talk about the Stoics as "wealthy playboys", spent by age and love's excesses, know very little about them and nothing about Marcus Aurelius. This studious prince, devotee of the simple life, attained to imperial rulership at 40 upon the death of his much-loved uncle, Antoninus. The husband of a woman to whom history and legend have attributed vivacious beauty, Marcus neither before nor after his accession lived gayly and dissolutely. He wouldn't have known how! Unlimited power may be a very strong temptation to corruption, as Acton in a famous phrase observed; but he whose youth has been a schooling in rectitude does not find it easy to change the pattern of his life in later years. Marcus Aurelius made one great mistake as a ruler charged with the task of safeguarding as far as possible the future well-being of the Empire when he elected his execrable son to succeed him. This may well have been an error of judgment—the pious hope of a fond father that his boy will turn out well. But in his personal conduct, in the example he set to the world, he was, as historians are generally agreed, an irreproachable monarch. And he was a philosopher of a type I much admire—he applied in his own life the philosophical principles he professed. But always to live "as on a mountain", in the manner of his self-counsel, is lonely. Marcus at considerable cost to himself somehow seems to have managed it; and he has a place occupied by very few in the history of the great as a secular saint as well as imperial ruler. The common people were poignantly aware of this on the day of his death. There were extraordinary manifestations of sorrow. "Such was the affection they had for him", says Renan, "that they never called him by his name or titles. Each one, according to his age, called him 'Marcus, my father, my brother, my son'. On the day of his obsequies scarcely any tears were shed, all being certain that he had only returned to the gods who had lent him for a moment to the world . . ."

The *Meditations* is a work of rare ethical value. It confronts personal problems with which Marcus had to contend, and in this connection I doubt whether there is a man for whom it has not meaning, who could not profit from reflection over its pages. There are men who are able to write or preach with eloquence on the duties of life, but they don't inspire for long because one senses that they are, after all, simply writers or preachers with a pretty turn of phrase. Marcus was not one of these. He writes sometimes graphically, sometimes colourfully, sometimes crudely, occasionally obscurely, but always with absolute sincerity. His object was to make a better man of himself, to "pass every day as though it were the last of life". Salvation, he believed, is to be looked for and found in life here and now. And the aim and purpose of a worthy man is "to do the right and speak the truth", and to "add one good deed to another so that not the briefest interval is left bare of good". In Book XII of the *Meditations* he puts it pithily thus: "If the act become thee not, do it not! If the word be false, say it not!" And earlier, in Book V, there is this interesting passage:

It is the nature of some men, when they have behaved especially well to a fellow-creature, to sit down and cast up on the spot the debt of gratitude due to them. Others are not quite so premature, yet, in their hearts, look on the benefactor as in some sort their debtor, and are perfectly conscious of what they have done. Then comes the man who, so to say, has no conception that he has done anything whatever,

but may be compared to the vine that bears her grapes and seeks nothing more when once she has done her work and ripened her fruit. A man who has done a good deed should be like a horse that has run its race, a dog that has tracked its game, or a bee that has gathered its honey. In other words, he ought not to proclaim it from the house-tops, but go seek (another) opportunity to do likewise; just as our vine proceeds once more to bear her grapes in the season.

(To be Concluded)

Points from New Books

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

THE TRAVEL BOOKS of Alexandre Dumas are being re-translated, re-edited and re-printed, and the latest to appear is *Adventures In Czarist Russia* (Peter Owen, 18s.). It is very amusing, I think, to read the great French author's report on the picturesque clerics in Holy Mother Russia:

"There are five grades in the hierarchy of the Russian church, the two lowest, *diatshek and diakon*, being known as 'white clergy'. Then comes the 'black clergy', the *jerei*, or parish priest; the *archjerei*, or bishop, and finally the *Mitropolit* or archbishop. The parish priest, with little or no education, teaches the children what he knows—usually nothing; a few such teachers may be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic, the really erudite know something of sacred history and discourse upon it. A promising novice may win a place in a seminary, where he learns grammar, logic and swearing. A Russian priest has a more fluent command of profanity than a French sneak-thief, a German horse-faker or an English boxer! The 'black clergy' are notorious for drunkenness and gluttony, not to mention other more venial depravities . . ."

There is a spirited attack by Indro Montanelli on the dangers of "the idiot box" which Sir Richard Rees quotes in *For Love Or Money* (Secker & Warburg, 21s.), and it should be of considerable interest and concern to free-thinkers.

Signor Montanelli reminds us that Television and Gallup Surveys and the rest are instruments, whether intentional or not of the new imperative or claim which society presumes to impose: "namely to induce the individual to make public, and thus surrender, his personal opinions and to accustom him to living in a house with walls of glass in which he will gradually be reduced to a collective life—that is to say, a life lived under the eyes and under the control of the entire community".

Interviewers are becoming more inquisitorial every day, thanks to the docility of the victims who show an ever greater propensity for public confession. Now the value of freedom to men is above all in its guarantee of the right to keep their own secrets. "When there are no secrets", the Church is not and never can be a liberal institution, Signor Montanelli writes, "liberty is useless. The Catholic because of the confessional; and a man who goes to confession no longer feels the need of liberty".

When one sees the aeriels above the houses, one knows that the outlook is grim!

One can distract oneself, however, with Sylvia Beach's book about her famous Paris bookshop, *Shakespeare and Company* (Faber, 25s.). Miss Beach tells us how she published *Ulysses* because conventional publishers were afraid to risk the outspoken comments in James Joyce's masterpiece. Miss Beach's courage landed her in a great deal of trouble, although it brought her many friends and her share of immortality.

One unexpected event particularly cheered the book-seller-publisher in the most difficult days. While *Ulysses*

was being "burnt in the King's chimney" by puritanical censors, an admirer of Joyce's genius hid a copy of the book under his coat when he was received in audience by the Pope. Inadvertently, the Pontiff blessed one of the most famous banned books of our time. The occasion was good for a laugh among the secular population as well as for a headache among the "corpse women" (dead to the world and feminine to the godhead), the priests of Rome.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHRONOLOGY

Some time ago it occurred to me that if archeologists cannot date anything before 2,000 B.C. with any accuracy it is incredible that the Jews can date their calendar 5372 (or whatever it is). This is more unbelievable because the Jewish Church and community are of much more recent foundation.

I have asked many Jews about this, and none gives any reasonable answer. One says "It is the date of the creation of the world!"

Does anyone know what this date is supposed to signify?

INFIDEL.

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