

# The Freethinker

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IN THE COURSE of a recent lecture I gave at the University of Oxford, I encountered that curious phenomenon, the Catholic intellectual—in this case a group of obviously able and well-informed, as well as extremely affable young men. They not only defended what would appear to most reasonable people as primitive superstitions, with massive assurance and an impressive air of pseudo-rationality, but went on to make accusations and alleged statements of fact for which not the slightest foundation exists. More detailed investigation disclosed that most of these Roman Catholic undergraduates had been educated in public schools attached to the monastic foundations of Jesuits and Benedictines, the two main

teaching orders in the Roman Catholic Church. From which it would appear that the old Jesuit maxim ascribed to their founder, Ignatius of Loyola, still stands: Give me a child until he is seven and he is mine for life. Apparently a prolonged stay during the early and impressionable years at places like Stonyhurst, Beaumont, Downside and Ambleforth, can mould even naturally intelligent men (as my Catholic critics obviously were) into the required pattern, though even these hallowed shrines of learning do occasionally send out serpents into the fold. Voltaire, for example was educated by the Jesuits, and products of Benedictine schools such as Downside, do occasionally find their way into Humanist societies. Some even join the National Secular Society and become readers of THE FREETHINKER.

## The Red Bogey

Naturally amongst the charges that Catholics, even, perhaps especially Catholic intellectuals, are fond of hurling against their Rationalist critics, is the always-handly "red bogey" of Communism. Apart from the scarcely disputable fact that only a minority of professing Humanists and Rationalists are actually Communists, the wild charges of religious persecution so glibly made by Catholic hecklers at meetings are both absurd in theory and, usually, ill-founded in fact. In theory, what could be more ridiculous than for Rome, the Church of the Inquisition and of the Index, the self-same Church that has always both taught the legitimacy of religious repression and has practised it wherever possible, to denounce persecution whether by Communists or by anyone else? Surely this is a case, if ever there was one, of the pot calling the kettle black. The Church which produced Torquemada and Ghislieri (Pope Pius V now a canonised saint) and which literally exterminated the Albigenses and Lollards with fire and sword, should be the last institution on earth to complain about religious persecution. If the Russian and Chinese Communists are the really ruthless and systematic persecutors of religion that they are alleged to be, the Vatican and its satellites ought logically to congratulate them upon being such efficient pupils of the Inquisition. Actually however, there does not really appear to be very much foundation for these sweeping accusations.

## Communist Policy Towards Religion

As I have noted before in these columns, I had exceptional opportunities in 1957 when I visited the German Democratic Republic, to investigate this problem at various levels. As a result of interviews with quite a number of Communists (including several high up in the régime, such as the Lord Mayors of Leipzig and Stalinstadt) I was able to get a reasonably clear picture of the current state of things; both on account of its world importance (since after all, something like a thousand million human beings live under Communist régimes) as also because Freethinkers, including non-Communist ones, are regularly saddled by Catholics with responsibility

for fictitious persecution east of the famous Curtain, we think it timely and opportune again to indicate here what Communist theory and practice regarding religion actually are.

## Church and State in Communist Lands

In lands like Russia and China, the régimes have effected a separation between Church and State which (as far as my information goes), is complete in every particular. Both are secular states in the literal sense of the term. In the People's Democracies (including East Germany) this is not yet completely the case. The governments pay subsidies to all the Churches. For the benefit of our Catholic friends, it must be said that this applies in Hungary also, despite Cardinal Mindszenty and the recent Hungarian rising which, whatever its controversial cause, was enthusiastically backed by Catholic Action all over the world. When I was in the German Democratic Republic, the Minister of Church Affairs was a Lutheran, the late Dr. Otto Nuschke, and the Lord Mayor of the all Socialist city of Stalinstadt on the Polish border told me that one of his regular duties was to pay both the Catholic and Lutheran clergy. As for religious persecution, all I can say is that I saw plenty of churches open; and that a contingent of many thousand Catholics from the GDR was present (according to the current West German press) at Cologne during a congress there attended by Adenauer in 1955 at a time when I was myself in Germany. As far as my information goes, the same state of things exists generally throughout the People's Democracies. All religions are legally recognised except those guilty of anti-social practices, e.g. Christian Science, which is illegal in the German Democratic Republic. Parents—or so the régime argues—ought not to have a legal right to refuse medical aid to their children, thus often dooming them to a premature death, as the teaching of this sect dogmatically enjoins. (What rational person could disagree with that?) The only possible exception to the above is China, where there does actually appear to be some evidence that Christians, particularly Catholic missionaries, have been ill-treated. But really this is hardly surprising when one looks at the leading role actually played by missionaries during the infamous spoliation of China by

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## Catholic Intellectuals at Oxford

By F. A. RIDLEY



European Imperialism in the 19th century. The peace at the end of the Opium War (1839-42), negotiated by Sir John Bowring, a famous Protestant hymn-writer, contained two major clauses: (a) Opium must be freely sold in China: (b) The Gospel must be freely preached there. Is it very surprising, in view of such facts, that the Chinese dislike Christian missionaries?

#### "The West Cannot Afford Roman Catholicism"

On the way back from Oxford, I got into conversation with a business man who had recently returned from the Communist East. We were discussing social developments in that part of the world, when rather to my surprise he suddenly remarked, "The West cannot really afford Roman Catholicism". Up to this point, religion had not been mentioned, but my newly-found acquaintance went on to

make a sharp critique of Catholicism, not on theological, but solely on practical grounds, as an inveterate war-monger and as the major obstacle to any viable policy of co-existence, which like most intelligent people nowadays, he regards as the sole practicable alternative to eventual nuclear suicide. What he said is true enough: the Vatican today appears to be the solitary organisation still prepared to view with equanimity the wholesale obliteration of humanity, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Quite apart from its archaic theology and ethics, Rome nowadays represents the greatest practical danger to continued human existence and progress. "The West cannot afford Roman Catholicism." We recommend this notable observation to all human beings whatever their creed or outlook, who believe in the survival and future evolution of their species.

### Mrs Knight in London

NOBODY IS MORE ADMIRED in Freethought circles than Margaret Knight, and her all-too-few visits to London are eagerly anticipated. Such are her charm and her clarity of thought and expression, that we are never disappointed even if—as on the occasion of her recent address at the Conway Hall (October 23rd)—we disagree with her fundamental assumptions.

Speaking on "How Europe Became Christian", Mrs. Knight began from a historical Jesus and an empty tomb. There were, she said, many possible explanations of the latter, but the one she favoured was that Jesus was not dead when taken down from the cross. No doubt she would agree that this view presents difficulties (and time is of course limited in a lecture of this sort) but she never faced the main objection to it: that Jesus would surely have made the most of his apparent resurrection by exhibiting himself publicly.

That the influence of Paul on Christianity was enormous, cannot be denied. Some would prefer to speak of the Epistles rather than a specific native of Tarsus but, given the latter, Mrs. Knight's appellation, "public relations officer", seems very apt. Jesus wouldn't have recognised his own teaching when Paul had finished with it, she said. He gave a "new look" to the Crucifixion, for example. It became part of the plan from the first, the Atonement. Christian theology derives more from Paul than from Jesus.

But even Paul's transformation would have been of little avail had there not been a particular combination of historical circumstances: the Roman religion on the way out; Constantine converted, and so on.

To the average Roman, in fact, Christianity was just another mystery religion. It had one difference, however, and it was, literally, a hellish one (though this was not Mrs. Knight's exact terminology): the unique and hideous feature of hell for unbelievers. The "conversion" of Constantine, however, pretty well ensured Christianity's success. Not quite: there was still Julian the Apostate, but his death did mark the end of real opposition to it. But, as we know, much of Mithraism, its great rival, was incorporated into Christianity as the latter displaced the Roman religion. In short, the triumph of Christianity was a natural phenomenon. Those who saw the supernatural in its success had to face the problem of its subsequent eclipse before Muhammedanism in the Middle East.

Mrs. Knight developed her theme in typically interesting and lucid manner. One might differ from her in seeing so much historical content in the Gospels and Acts, but one couldn't help being stimulated.

### Henry George

Mr. Cutner reminds me of the schoolboy who when asked to write an essay on a village pump wrote, "I don't know anything about a village pump as we haven't one in our village, but I'll write about a wheel-barrow", and he did.

In my original letter Mr. Cutner was invited to comment on Book X of *Progress and Poverty* which deals with the law of Civilisation and Decay, a matter so nicely introduced by Mr. F. A. Ridley in a previous issue of THE FREETHINKER. Instead of doing so, Mr. Cutner, not having read Book X and, therefore, knowing nothing about its contents wrote about population. If his reference to the views of Henry George had been accurate his essay might have passed muster and he could have been forgiven for side-stepping the point at issue, but it was inaccurate and I had to point out that he had misquoted Henry George and very badly too.

Now, Mr. Cutner gives the correct quotation but this time right out of its context and conveniently side-steps my explanation (September 2nd) of Henry George's hypothetical London population. Really, Mr. Cutner, this is not free thinking!

Mr. Cutner gleefully quotes from the *News Chronicle* some references by the "Experts" of the British Association and glosses over the fact that they tend to cancel each other out. But, I too will quote the *News Chronicle*. On the 29th August, 1960, in the Editorial Comment, we see:

"Unfortunately, it is in the countries least able to cope with a rapidly increasing population that the pressure is greatest. It is no accident that the seven nations whose inhabitants have the highest food supply are all remarkable for having an only slowly increasing population. India, whose citizens have the shortest expectation of life and the least food, suffers from a tremendously high birth-rate, and it is in poverty-stricken South-East Asia and Africa that population increases at its most alarming rate".

This quotation substantiates fully two important points made by Henry George, namely:

(1) That the cause of poverty in India and in certain other countries is not due to excessive population but that it is due to the past tyranny of the landowners. Any interested reader may find this lucidly discussed in pages 78-86 of *Progress and Poverty*.

(2) That there is a third check which comes into play with the elevation of the standard of comfort and the development of the intellect.

It is quite obvious from Mr. Cutner's own statements that he has not read all *Progress and Poverty* and that that part which he may have read he certainly has not understood. Three statements will prove this: He says: (1) "I simply could not get to Book X". (2) "Henry George's contribution to all this is (I think) state-ownership of all land, and a single tax." This absolutely misrepresents Henry George for the term "state-ownership" to-day means nationalisation with bureaucracy. Henry George proposed the exact opposite; here are his words: "I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second, needless . . . It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent. What I therefore propose, as the sovereign remedy, which will raise wages, increase the earning of capital, extirpate poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wishes it, afford free scope to human powers, lessen crime, elevate morals, and taste, and intelligence, purify government and carry civilisation to yet nobler heights, is—to appropriate rent by taxation. In this way, the State may become the universal landowner without calling herself so, and without assuming a single function. In fact, the ownership of land would remain just as now. No



# The Phenomenon of Man

By EDWARD ROUX

BORN IN AUVERGNE, FRANCE, in 1881, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin joined the Jesuits at the age of 18. He became a world authority on certain branches of palaeontology. He visited China and, among other countries, South Africa, where he is remembered with affection by some of our local scientists. He wrote extensively, developing what has been called an "evolutionary mystique", but his philosophical writings did not meet with the approval of his Order and he was forbidden to publish them. He died in 1955 and almost immediately his *Le Group Zoologique Humain* and his *Le Phénomène Humain* were printed in France. The latter has now appeared in English as *The Phenomenon of Man*, with introduction by Julian Huxley.

Reviewing this book in the *Scientific American*, G. G. Simpson says that it is "not strictly or even mainly concerned with describing the factual course of evolution. That is 'the without' of things, and the author is here concerned with 'the within'. The within is another term for consciousness, which in turn implies spontaneity and includes every kind of 'psychism'. Consciousness, in this sense, is stated to be a completely general characteristic of matter, whether in an individual atom or in man".

Teilhard's first sentence is as follows: "If this book is to be properly understood, it must be read not as a work on metaphysics, still less as a sort of theological essay, but purely and simply as a scientific treatise". This may have been the author's view, but it is not shared by his readers. Thus Simpson writes: "The direction of evolution towards an irreversible perfection is the whole theme, and not merely a philosophical appendage of the book. Hence we have a book submitted purely as a scientific treatise and yet devoted to a thesis undemonstrable scientifically . . . The discussion begins as a sort of mystical science and . . . gradually, almost imperceptibly, becomes mystical religion . . . The origin and fate of the individual soul, Adam and Eve and original sin, and the divinity of Christ . . . are all alluded to or allowed for, but only briefly and in veiled terms". Evolution has a purpose and is planned by God who is also the Omega into which consciousness is finally to be concentrated. Mystical Christianity is the path to ecstatic union with Omega.

Rationalists and agnostics must be forgiven for regarding this book, in spite of the eminence of the author, as in the main so much more pseudo-scientific Mumbo-jumbo. Simpson says: "Teilhard's major premises are in fact religious and, except for the conclusion that evolution has indeed occurred, most of his conclusions about evolution derive from those and not from scientific premises. One cannot object to the piety or mysticism of his book, but one can object to its initial claim to be a scientific treatise".

Whoever were responsible for the posthumous publication of Teilhard de Chardin's *Phenomenon of Man* have thrown an apple of discord into the ranks of Catholic scientists. We have come to this conclusion through reading the last two numbers of the *Bulletin of the Philosophy of Science Group* of the Newman Association, which is a mouthpiece of Catholic scientists in Britain. Teilhard has been defended by certain modern and flexible Catholic scientists who feel that scientific ideas about evolution must somehow be amalgamated with Catholic faith. He has been attacked by the purists, particularly the Dominicans, who are prepared to accept evolution but will not forego one jot or tittle of their Thomist philosophy.

The arguments lose some of their precision because in the course of hundreds of pages of mystical writing

Teilhard has contradicted himself frequently. Both sides can thus quote passages in support of their views. In essence the dispute arises over the problem of the relation between the body and the soul.

Teilhard made the (from the orthodox Thomist point of view) heretical statement that personality can survive the death of the body. We quote the following passage in which this view appears, giving incidentally an example of Teilhard's incomprehensible style: "By death, in the animal, the radial is absorbed into the tangential, while in man it escapes and is liberated from it . . . Thus, from the grains of thought forming the veritable and indestructible atoms of its stuff, the universe goes on building itself above our heads in the inverse direction of matter which vanishes. The universe is a collector and conservator not of mechanical energy, as we supposed, but of persons. All round us, one by one, like a continual exhalation, 'souls' break away, carrying upwards their incommunicable load of consciousness".

Father Tony Kenny, who leads the attack on Teilhard in the pages of the *Bulletin*, stigmatises the view that a human person can exist without his body as "philosophically indefensible" and "no part of the Catholic faith". Furthermore this view represents a Cartesian deviation, the fallacy of *cogito ergo sum*.

All this must sound rather like the arguments between the Stalinists and the Trotskyists and be completely mystifying to those not well versed in the intricacies of Catholic theology. We have been told "When you die, you will go to purgatory or to hell". We have seen pictures (both the classical ones and the more garish ones sold to the public) showing the souls of the damned being received by Mephistopheles and his gang. Now we are told that my soul is not myself, not "me" it is something different.

However it is all sorted out very nicely by Father Kenny: "My body is a part of myself and my soul is a part of myself. When I die, and my soul leaves my body, I shall no longer exist; and I shall not exist again until the Resurrection. My soul, we believe, will continue to exist meanwhile; but a disembodied soul is not a person". There you have it, and what could be simpler?

If space permitted, one would like to follow this argument a bit further and discover why Thomas Aquinas refused to identify the soul with the person as most unsophisticated Christians and all spiritualists do. Briefly we may suggest that Aquinas was intelligent enough to see that you cannot really separate a person from his body. His vested interest in "souls" (he was a Catholic monk) and the age in which he lived prevented him from drawing the materialist conclusion that the organism—plant, beast or man—is the product of the composition of its material parts and does not survive their disintegration. This is a view that had to await the advent of experimental biology.

One has some idea why orthodox Thomists have fallen out with Teilhard. One wonders on the other hand how he could have won the approval of agnostics, like Huxley and even Joseph Needham. The explanation is probably to be found in certain ideas in the book which would appeal to biologists, for instance the attempt to correlate consciousness with complexity, as in the following statement: "Consciousness presents itself and demands to be treated, not as a sort of particular and subsistent entity, but as an 'effect', as the 'specific effect' of complexity". Very few materialists would quarrel with that.



## This Believing World

So once again that distinguished sect of "true" Christians, the Witnesses of Jehovah—we always thought that the only *genuine* witnesses of the Divine reality of Jehovah were Jews—is in the news, and gets far more publicity (without paying for it) than even the Catholic Church. It appears that some airmen abroad have been converted, and now they don't want to wear uniforms or obey orders, and prefer to do time. A Witness is opposed to fighting as he is to dancing and drinking, but there is no absolute rule in this.

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The persistent way the Witnesses try to convert people on their doorstep, so to speak, is quite amusing—as amusing as their profound belief that they and they alone can interpret the Bible. Still, like Mormons and Christian Scientists, they do make converts. In England they number 50,000 active members, and their success with illiterates and ingnoramuses is quite astonishing.

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What we would like to see is a round table Conference between a Mormon, a Christian Scientist, and a Jehovah's Witness, presided over by a stout-hearted Roman Catholic. Would we be able to disentangle "true" Christianity from their chaotic beliefs? Or would we get something so funny as to put the first chapter of the immortal *Pickwick Papers* quite in the shade?

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Although Christian marriage is a "sacrament", it is so no longer if Christians of different sects want to marry. The Rev. C. S. Nye, Vicar of St. Nicholas' Church, Blundellsands, strongly opposes "mixed" marriages and warns Anglicans not to sign any document promising to bring up children to Roman Catholicism. Catholics are in full agreement against mixed marriages anyway—but they protest that the only "sacrament" involved is theirs; for, after all, it is a holy obligation "to bring all men to the love of God in His Church"—as one of Mr. Nye's critics piously explains to him. "His Church" is of course a Roman Catholic One, and Mr. Nye himself is outside of it if he persists in the heresy of being an Anglican. It is all so beautifully Christian!

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Whether that symbolism of a pure teenager, Brigitte Bardot, will ever ascend to holy saintship in the Roman Church cannot as yet be prophesied, but the well near which she was recently found unconscious is being turned into a "shrine" by her adoring fans—much to the annoyance of the local priest we are told by the *News of the World*. Tight-trousered girls have been placing flowers nearby, and kneeling in prayer; and the priest angrily claims that "this is nothing but idolatry", strongly denouncing the way they "are giving a woman the adoration they should reserve for Our Lady". He adds, "The next thing I suppose is that miracles will be worked at the well". But why not? Are they not part and parcel of similar stories over the centuries?

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Pious lovers of the design argument will be very angry with the "shock race" theories of Colonel Weir who is the President of the Scottish Association of National Health Service Executives. He wants to forbid some people from having children *by law*. He contends that—according to the *Daily Record*—"Criminality—and by that I mean a tendency to crime, theft, violence, immorality—is inherited and runs in families". Colonel Weir thinks this should be noted and stopped if necessary by Government action.

HENRY GEORGE

(Concluded from page 354)

owner of land would be dispossessed, and no restriction need be placed upon the amount of land anyone could hold. For rent being taken by the State in taxes, land, no matter in whose name it stood, or in what parcels it was held, would be really common property, and every member of the community would participate in the advantages of its ownership".

(3) "When George said that 'subsistence increases as population increases', all that is meant here is that population could not increase without food, which is true." Mr. Cutner, here, puts the cart before the horse, namely, the *product* before the *producer*. George is not out to prove that population cannot increase without food (product); his point is that an increase of population is an increase in one of the *factors* of production, the other factor being land and that the present system of landownership forces the margin lower and lower by holding land out of use or by not allowing the land which is already in use to be put to the best use, thus preventing any increase in population from producing its own food, or its equivalent in exchange.

Riding his high horse, Sarcasm, Mr. Cutner apparently classes me as a fellow-traveller of the Catholic repopulators. Let me at once inform him that he has committed the fallacy of jumping to conclusions. I am just as much against what the Catholic Church stands for as Mr. Cutner is. Where Mr. Cutner and I differ is that Mr. Cutner shirks the economic issue and is self-complacent with his advocacy of contraception. It may surprise him to learn that I strongly oppose any institution that is out to prevent people from practising contraception but I do not stop there. I am out to remove the causes which tend to prevent them from making up their own minds on the matter. After all, not everyone wants to practise contraception but, in the present adverse economic circumstances, many are forced to do so. In any case, since all social improvements tend ultimately to be reflected in increased land rents, if contraception produces any economic improvement, it will sooner or later find its way into the pockets of the landowner. Further, instead of the present welfare state with its bureaucratic godfathers and godmothers, I want the conditions where individuals may work out their own destinies without interference, their actions being regulated solely in accordance with the law of equal freedom, and that is the doctrine of Henry George. But Mr. Cutner says Henry George is out of date.

As a former WEA tutor, for fourteen years, engaged in teaching economic and allied subjects, I am not unacquainted with works on these subjects written since the appearance of *Progress and Poverty*, but I should be pleased to learn of the up-to-date books which Mr. Cutner has in mind which are superior to it. *Progress and Poverty* is the only book that I know of which analyses the economic cause of poverty and which presents the only logical solution.

In conclusion, I feel sure that many readers (myself included) will be grateful to Mr. Cutner for the knowledge they have gained from his criticism of the Bible; he is a master in this sphere and if I were an examiner I should probably put him at the top of the form with an "A" mark, but I am afraid I should have to advise him not to enter for the Economics examination as I should be compelled to give him a "D" or perhaps, generously, a "C—".

W. HARTLEY BOLTON.

MR. CUTNER COMMENTS: *Although I have often dealt with the Population Problem in these columns, I have always felt that our special job is opposing religion, credulity and superstition. I feel therefore that a long and detailed reply to Mr. Bolton may well bore readers—especially as Henry George's work is not particularly known. Let me therefore add to what I have already said that George's opposition to Malthus was, in my opinion, just nonsense, and leave it at that.*

*I may however look into Chapter X one of these days, and if I agree with it or not, will deal with it—with the Editor's permission.*

*But I must thank Mr. Bolton for his generous remarks in any case about my other work.*

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CONVERSIONS AND DEATHBEDS

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG



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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 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. TRIBE and J. P. MURACCIOLE.

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Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, November 6th, 6.45 p.m.: MAX MITCHELL, "Life in Israel Today".—Colour Slides.

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 8th, 7.15 p.m.: J. ALLEN SKINNER (*Peace News*), "Unilateralism".

Humanist Group of S.W. London (Mulberry Lodge, Barnes Common, S.W.13), Sunday, November 6th, 8 p.m.: Open Debate, "Religious Instruction".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 6th, 6.30 p.m.: SAMUEL J. LOOKER, "W. H. Hudson, The Man from the Pampas".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, Edgware Road), Sunday, November 6th, 7.15 p.m.: J. P. MURACCIOLE, "Homosexuality, Religion and The Law".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, November 6th, 2.30 p.m.: H. WHEATCROFT, "The Ramblings of a Rose-grower".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, November 6th, 11 a.m.: DR. W. E. SWINTON, "George Bernard Shaw and Evolution".

## Notes and News

THE CURRENT (November) issue of the South Place Ethical Society's *Monthly Record* contains a letter from Howard Hunter which holds up the National Secular Society as a warning to the SPEC. "In Bradlaugh's day", says Mr. Hunter, "the NSS was a power in the land". "Then the great creative force that was Bradlaugh passed away, and the policy of the NSS became increasingly negative and ultra-militant. No longer organically linked to creative social forces, its programme became more and more divorced from the physical and psychological needs of ordinary people, and to the shrinking, ageing body of its membership it presented the Dantesque parody: *de l'atheism, encore de l'atheism, toujours de l'atheism.*" Today, Mr. Hunter says, "the NSS is little more than a crumbling, forgotten tombstone that marks the resting place of a great man".

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED. £174 8s. 1d. W. Maybank, 15s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1 1s.; E.C.R., 6s.; Wm. Scarlett, 5s.; R. J. Hale, 5s.; R. Brownless, £1 2s. 6d.; Anon. 2s. 4d.; Wm. Mawhinney, 10s. 6d.; B. Pinder, 5s.; P. Turner, 10s.; Wm. S. McNeil, £1; A. O. Snook, 10s.; A. J. Hellier, 5s.; J. Martin, 13s.; H. Meulen £2 5s.; J. Barron, 5s.; In memory of Jane Glyde, £5. Total to date, October 28th, 1960, £189 8s. 5d.

WE DON'T KNOW what Mr. Hunter's experience of the NSS is. He is not a member and he certainly seems ignorant on a number of points. To say that the policy of the NSS has become "increasingly negative and ultra-militant" is absurd. A glance at the Society's Aims and Objects (which are regularly propagated from our platform and in letters to government bodies, MPs, etc.), would show this to be so. We have no Bradlaugh, it is true, but at least we perpetuate his principles. And Bradlaugh would have been the first to appreciate (as Mr. Hunter apparently doesn't) the difficulties we face in doing so, especially with the development of mass media of propaganda from which we are barred. And incidentally, it is by no means certain that so unorthodox a man as Bradlaugh would have got into the House of Commons today. What party would have backed him? Bevan had to "keep dark" about his irreligion.

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BUT, WHEN ALL comes to all, there is no need to apologise for the National Secular Society today. Within the limits imposed by an increasingly acquisitive and apathetic society (Mr. Hunter calls this a "sad, sick, neurotic age"), it gets through an enormous amount of good work. Mr. Hunter should hear some of the tributes from people who have rejected religion as a result of our efforts. And at any rate, the NSS sees, and states, the essential problem clearly. What does Mr. Hunter himself suggest? That "we should apply ourselves to the task of finding out what happiness is (not what it was or will be) . . .". Well, that is quite a task, and the NSS will wish him every success in his search. Meanwhile, it will carry on spreading a little.

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WHETHER OR NOT the Society has an ageing membership is hard to say. By the nature of things, with religious instruction in school and many youthful distractions, applicants for membership are likely to be fairly mature (physically and mentally), but there is a very good sprinkling of youngsters in our ranks. In fact, our platform at Hyde Park boasts as many young speakers as middle aged or veteran ones. That many people join the National Secular Society and remain members for life is something we are very proud of. In that sense our membership does age, we are glad to say.

★

WE TAKE OUR LEAVE of Mr. Hunter by citing a letter received a week or so ago. "I came to this country in 1920", said the writer, Mr. C. Lambert, "from France my native land, and I was glad to come across some Freethinkers. I joined the National Secular Society in 1921. I am now on the wrong side of 80, but my wife and I are two contented people, and we do not believe in bemoaning our fate. In fact, we are happy".

★

WE LEARN from *The Observer* (9/10/60) that the annual report of the Church in Wales "shows a profit of £3,273,000 in five years as a result of switching its investments from gilt-edged securities into industrial Ordinary shares". It purchased Bush House, in the Strand, London, and this alone brings it a net income of £270,411. Congregations fall but profits rise.



# A Defence of Marcus Aurelius

By G. I. BENNETT

MR. F. A. RIDLEY'S article, "Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics", is more than a criticism of the author of the *Meditations*; it is a depreciation of the man himself. I think I have over the years read most of what has been written about Marcus Aurelius—the encomiums, the thoughtful assessments, the disparagements—so I am not unduly upset by Mr. Ridley's remarks. The founder of THE FREETHINKER, G. W. Foote, in an article published in this journal as far back as 1902, and reprinted on July 24th, 1953, described him as "that great and noble Emperor whose very name is music to the students of humanity". Not everyone, perhaps, would put it so mellifluously; but it is a significant opinion for an uncompromising freethinker like Foote to hold. It would be easy for me here and now to fill pages with extracts from what men of various beliefs in various circumstances in various occupations and walks of life have written to the credit of Marcus Aurelius. *Chambers's Biographical Dictionary* calls him "one of the noblest figures in history"; and I think—indeed, I am certain—that that judgement will stand.

Mr. Ridley opens his article with a comment on my "rather out-of-date views" on the Stoic emperor. If he is implying that my reading on the subject is confined to authors of 50 or 80 years ago, I am able to assure him otherwise. It is, in fact, a modern German author, Ivar Lissner, whose book under the title, *Power and Folly: The Story of the Caesars*, has been published in England as recently as 1958, who writes one of the best tributes to Marcus I have come across, describing him as "one of the luminaries of antiquity".

In a sense, it is amazing that, without the backing of a movement, party, or church, and purely by their own merits, the Greek soliloquies we know as the *Meditations*—which were never intended for publication—should have survived for nearly 2,000 years; and that, as one writer has pointed out, "over 200 different translations have appeared in England alone". Yet Mr. Ridley tells us that, "in essence, the philosophy of Aurelius was that of the falling leaf and the dying year", symbolic of the decline of the Roman Empire, which Marcus "contemplated with a hopeless and pathetic resignation"! Obviously, in view of the long-continued fame of the *Meditations*, the philosophy therein enshrined must have more in it than that! It is true that Marcus Aurelius stood at the outgoings of an age, one of the last emperors in whom, as G. H. Rendall says in the biographical study that prefaces his translation of the *Meditations*, "the ancient stock of Roman virtue survived". Though Rome was still at the height of power, erosion of the foundations had begun. And Marcus, his thoughts ranging freely over the human scene, surveying the present in the light of the past, saw vanity in what others called glory, sensed the futility in so much of men's strife, the worthlessness of so much of personal ambition, and the transitoriness of all things. Fate had dealt him some hard knocks. Loss through death of wife, children, and lifelong friend made his feeling of isolation very real. He was surrounded by men who were not of his cast of mind and who were without his moral scruple. A sense of duty called him away from Rome to bleak frontier country to engage in years of warfare from which his sensitive spirit recoiled. And it was in the military camp ("Among the Quadi on the Gran" and "At Carnuntum", say two notes) that he, in the silent watches of long nights,

wrote down many, if not all, of his thoughts. In all this, we have perhaps the key to his melancholy and his resignation. Stoicism was a philosophy for hard times, and Marcus, by the way in which he applied it to the difficulties of his own life, has evoked the admiration of men ever since.

I would agree with Mr. Ridley when he asserts that, as a progressive legislator, the Stoic emperor cannot be compared with his predecessor, Hadrian. He goes on to say that Marcus "granted a record sum for the upkeep of the brutal gladiatorial games in Rome", but he does not give us his authority. In this connection it is interesting to record what Mr. Archibald Robertson (whom no one will accuse of over-praising Marcus Aurelius) wrote in his *Morals in World History*. "As emperor", says Robertson, "he inherited the reformist policy initiated by Hadrian and extended it in some directions: for example, he tried to mitigate the horrors of the gladiatorial shows". And again Lissner: "He refused to allow a lion which had been trained to devour human beings in the Circus to enter the arena, in spite of popular demand, and locked up the trainer. Being asked to give him back his freedom, the Emperor pointed out that the man had not done much for freedom himself. 'Heaven forbid', he once said, 'that anyone be condemned to death by me or by you senators!'"

In considering Marcus Aurelius the Man, I find I care little whom the early Christians regarded as their enemies: a matter that seems to weigh on the thoughts of Mr. Ridley. In the quotation he attributes to Clement of Alexandria, that Church Father may, I suggest, have been addressing to the Stoic emperor one of those appeals for toleration of the Christians, which were then becoming so prevalent. But apropos of the philosophy of Marcus, does it really matter?

Seneca was indeed a wealthy man, against whom has been cast the sneer of his "writing on poverty with a gold pen", though in calling him "a ruthless and oppressive financier" I am not sure that Mr. Ridley is just. Yet it is true that his philosophical writings are so religious in tone that they might almost have been appropriated by the Christians themselves; but as Coleridge is on record as saying, "you may get a motto for every sect or line of thought in Seneca".

I come now to what is probably the salient point in Mr. Ridley's criticism, since he makes it not once, but two or three times. I appear, he says, to imply that Marcus was a complete rationalist and humanist. And he further states that, because this imperial Stoic faced the future apparently without hope, to regard him "as a prototype of a modern progressive humanist" is "really absurd". Actually, I have never used either term for Marcus and the Stoics. In the first place, I have to avow I don't care for the word *humanist*, so much in vogue today, and I mostly avoid it. What I said of the Stoic emperor is that he was a humanitarian rather than a reformer. In the second place, I consider that rationalism as we know it strictly relates to the criticism of revealed religion, which the Roman Stoics of the first and second centuries had no understanding of or interest in. The point I tried to make is that the Stoics generally and Marcus in particular based their philosophy upon reason and sought to apply reason in the conduct of life. In the *Meditations* are to be found numerous references to the ruling reason, the "divine monitor" within, which enabled a man to stand alone



against the world, if need be, and to which all personal problems and moral decisions were to be submitted.

In the essay on Stoicism, which forms the introduction to his translation of the *Meditations*, C. R. Haines explains the Stoic doctrine of reason thus: "As all that is rational is akin, we are formed for fellowship with others and, the universe being one, what affects a part of it affects the whole. Reason is as a law to all rational creatures, and so we are all citizens of a world-state". Marcus Aurelius fully accepts this. His concern is with the common welfare, the well-being of the whole. All conduct that promotes the good of the human community is, for him, right, and all that which is inimical to it, reprehensible and even evil. It is true that in the *Meditations* the emperor speaks of God and the gods, but, as Professor M. L. Clarke in his book *The Roman Mind* (published 1956) says, "he remains an orthodox Stoic whose God is reason, the universal spirit in man and nature". It would be possible to pursue this subject at some length, but to do so lies outside my present scope.

What has long been of real interest to me about the *Meditations* is the ethical feeling that suffuses this work and, in combination with its author's spiritual humility, gives it such a high-minded tone. It was this with which I was concerned in my essay. It is in this that the abiding value of the book lies. And when criticism has run its full course, it is this that remains, standing independent of any theological system, to remind us that, in the highest thought of antiquity as now, virtue is its own reward.

## Back to the Middle Ages

By H. CUTNER

SOMETIMES, READING SOME of the articles in our national and weekly journals inspired by Christianity, I find myself transported to the Middle Ages. The other week, for example, appeared an article on the Devil in *Today*, and except that it was written in our modern idiom, it could well have appeared in 1560 rather than 1960. For sheer ignorance, credulity, and superstition, it would be hard to beat.

Almost half a page was given to its title—huge white letters on a black background—"The Devil and Your Mind", and it asks the question, "Is exorcism a mere mumbo-jumbo survival of the Middle Ages—or can a human being really be possessed by the Devil? Here is the evidence".

Evidence indeed! About as much evidence as there used to be for flying witches.

One gentleman who is brought forward as an "authority" is a doctor—Dr. Christopher Woodward—a thorough-going Christian, as indeed he has every right to be. Thus, backed up by Christianity, he tells us, "I believe the devil is responsible for ill health more frequently than most people imagine", and he prefers a priest to "cure" these people rather than a doctor. He gave *Today* an account of a lady who looked perfectly well, but whose husband had Parkinson's disease. Dr. Woodward explained to her how he depended on "the healing powers of Jesus Christ", but the instant he mentioned Jesus Christ, the woman's expression changed, and "she shouted, 'I am the Virgin Mary'". Then she fled round the room, and screamed that she wasn't the Virgin Mary but a snake, stopped wriggling and foaming at the mouth, declared she was Mary Magdalene.

After this, "she began to blaspheme terribly", and only stopped when the doctor made the sign of the Cross on her head. Dr. Woodward was thus convinced that "the devil took advantage of her foolishness". One can almost fancy hearing the true authentic voice of the celebrated

Matthew Hopkins, the "witch-finder", of the early part of the 16th century in this account of blaming the Devil for a poor woman claiming to be the Virgin Mary, a snake, and Mary Magdalene. In any case, the author of the article, Mr. Alan Bestic, adds, "Sceptics, of course, may scoff . . .".

Naturally, a Roman Catholic priest, Mgr. Worlock, an Anglican, the Rev. H. Cooper, both believe that the Devil can be cast out quite easily with a special form of "exorcism"; while Father Shaw, another Anglican, casts out "demons" and plaintively admits that "the devil always makes a fight for it".

It would be quite useless to argue with any of these people. They are all melancholy examples of what religion can do for "belief" of some kind or other.

Hundreds of thousands (probably millions) of men, women, and children were burnt to death or tortured in diabolical ways when suspected of "witchcraft", and some of us wonder what would happen even in these days if the law of common-sense had not stepped in and exposed this primitive belief in Devils and their like as humbug? Fat jobs for "witch hunters"?

H.C.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### AMIDST THE CROWD

It is always somewhat distressing to find a Freethinker of Mrs. Ebury's calibre indulging in the unthinking prejudice of the smug townsman. I do not wish to intervene in her general disagreement with "Rusticus" but I am concerned with her somewhat unscientific comparisons between the relative merits of the countryman and townsman. "Their very names signify their stagnant outlook, Rustic, Bumpkin, Boor, etc. . . . Really! What nonsense. How distinctly Tudor! I have no doubt that these names were given by some superior townsman to people who did not, fortunately, live within his so civic virtuous "madding crowds". How apt that phrase is! "Madding crowds". How can the countryman be so silly as to want to live in the countryside when we find it so superior to live in Towns? How dare they think thoughts so different from ours? In fact, how dare they be different? Don't, above all let us show any tolerance or understanding. They're different, therefore they must be inferior. Let's denigrate.

"Countrymen are notoriously inhumane with animals". Are they? Some are, of course. As are townsmen. Most of those who keep dogs in London are. After a period of agricultural training in England and Germany I spent many years as a land worker, almost exclusively with animals and I found countrymen no more cruel than their town brothers. As with their town brothers most cruelty stems from ignorance rather than intent. Certainly I found no countryman who was prepared to subject noble animals to the indignity of circus performances. That was left to the slick money-making townsman. Neither did I see any addiction on the part of the countryman to inflict unnecessary suffering on animals in the cause of "research". That, too, was left to the virtuous townsman.

Among other civic virtues left to the townsman was the manufacture of atom bombs and other implements of war—even the declarations of war. And they leave mainly to the superior townsman the upkeep of most of the parish churches. If Mrs. Ebury knew anything about the countryside she would know that the churches are much more empty than the fashionable and the sub-topia churches of the towns. Without money from the townsman most parish churches might be in serious danger of closing down. So if townfolk were not so "reactionary, uncouth and superstitious" we would have less parsons.

Mrs. Ebury also seems to know very little about agricultural economics when she introduces the question of subsidies. And she also appears to confuse farmers with countrymen in general. For her information farmers represent an infinitesimal proportion of the countryside population. I can assure her that the farm-worker has always been "bankrupt" mainly because decisions

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concerning his industry are controlled by superior townsmen and their representatives.

Mrs. Ebury really must cease from looking at the world in terms of black and white. She must accept that because people are different they are not necessarily inferior. Townsmen and countrymen each have their virtues and their vices. One doesn't have to go to the countryside to find ignorance, uncouthness, superstition and reaction. You'll find more of it in an acre of London's West End than all England's country acres. But then Mrs. Ebury's definitions may be different from mine.

JIM SHEPHERD.

"Rusticus's" articles provide a refreshing and welcome change of literary content. Whether or not countrymen are notoriously inhumane to animals, reactionary, uncouth and superstitious is a controversial question. At any rate they have no Notting Hill, call girls, safe blowers, thugs, spivs, smart alecs and other amenities of the city dweller such as poisonous smog and slums. Country Bumpkins compare not unfavourably with cocksure cockneys! May I remind Mrs. Ebury that Thomas Paine and J. M. Robertson, two of the most eminent Freethinkers were countrymen?

F. S. HOUGHTON.

[*"Rusticus"* will reply next week.—EDITOR.]

**FREEDOM BOOKSHOP** has now moved to 17a Maxwell Road, Fulham, London, S.W.6 (near Chelsea Football Ground), where a variety of secondhand books can be found. Or send for a free copy of our weekly paper *Freedom*, and our No. 11 list of secondhand books. Books sought for, and frequently found. Hours—10 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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In response to many requests, we are offering two kinds of Christmas cards for sale, one of which is illustrated below. The size is 5" x 4" when folded, and it is printed in red and green. The greeting inside reads "Here's Wishing You a Helluva Good Time". The price together with envelopes and post paid to your address is 6/- per dozen. A second design, price 5/- per dozen, was illustrated last week.

Please order from *The Freethinker* office as soon as possible as supplies are limited.



Warmest  
Greetings

## TWO AMERICAN VIEWS

At every critical juncture in our national life, there always has emerged a man with more than ordinary integrity, courage, understanding and vision to provide the type of leadership demanded by the particular challenge of his day.

In the "debates" thus far, Senator Kennedy bears all the earmarks of that "man of destiny" for the 60s.

His opponent paints distorted word pictures which, by indirection and implication, belittle the Senator's intelligence and exalt his own. Nevertheless, the forthright clarity of Kennedy's thinking comes through sharp and clear by comparison.

Although I am an unorthodox religionist, I accept Kennedy's adherence to our basic constitutional philosophy. Once again, "we have nothing to fear but fear itself".

ARTHUR B. HEWSON (Chicago).

Despite your good word for Senator John F. Kennedy, I shall not vote for him. I don't trust Catholic pledges.

GUSTAV DAVIDSON (New York).

I've just finished reading the October 7th issue of *THE FREETHINKER*, and I find the article by Colin McCall extremely interesting. One statement interested me especially and that statement was "Anyway, it is a mistake to equate politics with economics". When I read that I had to blink my eyes. If economic theories do not determine politics, just what is the function of politics?

In reply to the letter of Robert I. Turney, I should like to say that one statement of his doesn't sound rational to an observant reader. Namely his statement "A paper such as ours would not have been tolerated in Russia . . ." Does he mean to say that a country based on atheism would not permit the publication of a newspaper expounding Atheism?

I would appreciate being straightened out on these two matters.

CHARLES W. SCHWAB (New York).

[Mr. McCall writes: "I had hoped to retire from the discussion on the American presidency, having had my say. But my statement that 'it is a mistake to equate politics with economics' seems to have raised a few eyebrows. I can't see why, unless they are Marxist eyebrows. The crucial word is 'equate'. That economics play an important role in politics, I don't deny: that the two are identical, I do."—EDITOR.]

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