

# The Freethinker

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THE ANNOUNCEMENT that the Archbishop of Canterbury is due shortly to visit Rome at the invitation of the Pope, represents perhaps the most intriguing piece of ecclesiastical information that has come our way for many a long day. One must suppose that the future meeting between these two fountain heads of religious orthodoxy (the alleged successors of apostles and saints) will form news headlines for a long time to come. Also, that in what in a less sacrosanct sphere would be described as "trade union circles", the clergy (and in the case of the Anglican clergy) their feminine appendages, will already be engrossed by this sensational news which is, no doubt, already the main topic of conversation in

countless Anglican rectories and Roman Catholic presbyteries. Not that the reception likely to be accorded to this news in clerical circles will be unanimously favourable. In the manner immortalised by Charles Dickens, the Evangelical section of that very mixed grill, the Church of England by Law Established, will probably substitute "suspicious" for "auspicious" as the proper adjectival prefix with which to describe their Archbishop's visit to the earthly representative of the "Scarlet Woman". Whilst upon the Catholic side, we entertain no doubt at all that there is already acute alarm and despondency amongst the clergy and in particular, amongst the Bishops of what a former Archbishop of Canterbury once described as the "Italian Mission". It is a matter of common knowledge among those who have made any sort of study of the past complex relationships between the Roman and Anglican Churches, that the English Roman Catholic bishops have been since the days of Cardinal Manning, the bitterest opponents of any sort of merger between the local Roman Catholic Church in England and the official Anglican Church. If—which we do not imagine—anything of this kind should eventually emerge from the forthcoming meeting of the high contracting parties at Rome, one can imagine Roman Catholic clerics eagerly scanning past issues of THE FREETHINKER to refresh their memories acent the past crimes and follies of the Anglican Church; of that sacrilegious communion established by Elizabeth, as a Roman Catholic publication recently termed it. That is, of course, Elizabeth I! English Catholic writers have also gone on record with the pious hope that the present reign of Elizabeth II will undo the work of her great predecessor by witnessing the reconciliation of England with the "One True Church" of Rome.

## Men of God

How far this pious, but at present, rather improbable aspiration will be furthered by the visit of Geoffrey Cantuar to John Roma, remains to be seen. Certainly whatever its upshot, the conversation between these two eminent prelates should be worth listening to. We must confess to envying anyone endowed with the dubious gift of ESP who might be able to listen in to this remarkable conversation! Not that our hypothetical eavesdropper would

be likely to acquire much theological information about heavenly mysteries. Neither Roncalli nor Fisher is actually much of an expert in the devious detours of divinity; both are practical men or, less politely speaking, bureaucrats by training and temperament. I was once informed by one of my Jewish friends that when the late Chief Rabbi of Israel, Dr. Herzog, to whom my friend was related, had a similar audience with His Holiness, Pius XII, the two holy men never mentioned God but spent the entire interview discussing the situation in the Middle East, a current political problem of such complexity that it might well prove beyond the power even of an infallible Pope to solve. The problems involved in Eng-

lish reunion with Rome are also complex enough to occupy the two pillars of orthodoxy for some considerable time.

## Reunion With Rome?

The problem of an amalgamation of the Roman and Anglican Churches is not a new one, nor is it at all easy to imagine its effective accomplishment. In fact both the theological and the practical difficulties are so great that it might appear to be a safe surmise that only an "act of God" could bring it about! However, perhaps the present fear of Atheistic Communism, at present more acute in Rome (where the Communists are in strength on the Pope's doorstep), than at Canterbury (which even manages somehow to "co-exist" with a Red Dean) may be strong enough eventually to do the trick. Though speaking personally, I doubt it. For the difficulties are enormous on both sides; on the Anglican side, the chief obstacle would appear to be in the extremely mixed beliefs within its comprehensive fold, in which Anglo-Catholics (often more Papal than the Pope) rub along with Evangelicals (some of whom still equate the Vatican with the Great Beast of Revelation) and Modernists (quite a few of whom are theologically to the Left of some of our more reverent rationalists). It is certainly difficult to imagine this hotch-potch ever settling down in submission to the disciplined uniformity of the One True Church. Nor is the theological position much easier on the side of the Vatican. For, since the Declaration of the Papal Infallibility it is impossible for the present Pope—God's unique and uniquely infallible Vicar upon earth—to bargain upon equal terms with anybody. For, since 1870, the Pope is the Catholic Church. To phrase the current theological position in an Irishism, if the Pope leaves the Church, it is really the Church which leaves its members. We appeal to that learned Dominican theologian, Father Paris of *The Faith* of Malta, to clarify that this description is, since 1870, completely orthodox Catholic theology. In the case of the Church of England, there exists from the side of the Vatican, this additional and almost insuperable difficulty, that not one but several Papal Bulls issued by successive Popes (Leo XIII was the first) which deny flatly the validity of the Orders of the Anglican Communion. Or, in non-theological language, these Bulls unanimously

## — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

### Rome and Canterbury

By F. A. RIDLEY



affirm that Anglican priests are not really priests at all, they cannot validly administer any Sacrament; e.g., the bread and wine remain bread and wine after the Anglican self-styled priest has "consecrated" them. (We again ask Father Paris to authenticate that this statement is completely orthodox). As a result of all which abracadabra, every priest in Holy Orders in the Church of England would have to be ordained again upon reunion by a *bona fide* (Roman Catholic) episcopal successor of the Apostles' Creed. This obligation would apply to Dr. Fisher, his colleagues and his successors. (Father Paris please again confirm). Incidentally, the above state of things would not apply to any future reunion between say, Rome and the Greek (including Russian) Orthodox Churches, or even the Abyssinian one, all of whose Orders are recognised by Rome as valid. (cf. The works of the Roman Catholic writer, Dr. Adrian Fortescue on the Eastern Churches—Father Paris again please?). Consequently, in the event of any reunion between Rome and England, Pope John would need "infallibility" to annul several presumably also infallible statements of his predecessors. Dr. Fisher is not confronted with this particular difficulty since he is not,

by definition, infallible, but even if he wished to do so, he could hardly do a deal with Rome without splitting his heterogeneous set-up from top to bottom and this, whilst likely enough after Disestablishment, hardly seems likely under present-day circumstances. Accordingly, whilst he may receive an invitation to attend the projected Ecumenical Council as an observer, we doubt if his Grace will bring much else back from Rome. However, we wish him *bon voyage*. I am sure that I speak with the permission of the proprietors and Editor of THE FREETHINKER if I extend a hearty assurance to Dr. Fisher that, if he cares to send the transcript of his talk with Pope John, we shall be delighted to publish it.

Footnote: The most serious attempt so far to bring about an Anglo-Roman reunion was made at Malines after the first world war when the Belgian Cardinal Mercier who had been runner-up in two Papal elections, opened negotiations with the Anglo-Catholics led by Lord Halifax. Eventually these Malines conversations were closed down by the direct order of Pope Pius XI—1922-39.

[Editor's Note: Mr. F. A. Ridley's article, "Freethought in an Age of Conformity" has been held over until next week.]

## Condemning the Countryman

By FRANK MAITLAND

THE LETTER FROM Eva Ebury, while it certainly sees only blacks and whites, raises a question of very great social importance, one that directly interests the students of religion.

Is it true, as she says, that "all civic virtues arose amidst the crowds. Country folk are again notoriously reactionary, uncouth and superstitious?" Were Jack Cade, Wat Tyler, Cromwell and his New Model soldiers, the Covenanters, products of the town? Did "civic virtues" (whatever they may be) exist in the medieval boroughs? Is it only in modern society that the virtues exist in the towns and reaction in the country? What proportion of our 50,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, are town and country? Are the strongholds of the Tories in agricultural constituencies?

I think that this question deserves careful study. My experience is that there is less superstition and more individual thinking in the country. The countryman, from birth, learns to deal with the breeding of animals and judging of the seasons. He is earthy and realistic. I know that it is an idea of historians and economists (including, unfortunately, Marx) that the countryside is backward, steeped in conservatism and sloth. This is a prejudice. The truth in it is relative. And, in Marx's case, it is an economic and historical relation of *capitalism*.

The countryman always has this great advantage over the townsman—he can go to live in town and swiftly acquire all the town has to teach him; the townsman rarely learns what the country has to teach. And the countryman, slow and "reactionary", can keep his feet on the earth, while townsmen are swallowing every newspaper stunt, following every fashion and living on the surface. In recognising the advantages of the town, we must not ignore the advantages of the country.

But it seems to me that the question is not a direct challenge: country v. town. As a lifelong student of social affairs, it seems to me that in the social history of the people brought up in small country towns and people who have come into town when grown up, and often the first generation of townsmen, with family traditions and relations with the country, have played the most fruitful

part. It would be interesting if some social student with more time and opportunity than I have ever had, could work this out statistically. It seems to me that the mixture of country realism and town organisation, or the general mixture of country and town, is more productive than wholly country or wholly town.

Indeed, I think this idea is applicable to history as a whole. Historians entertain us with accounts of past invasions and wars, in which "superior" cultures conquered "lower" cultures (generally, Christianity conquering the "uncouth and superstitious" pagan). Is it not nearer the historical truth to say that it is the clash and intermixing of two cultures (not at all the question of higher and lower) which produces progress? Returning to the countryside, is it not the countryman in town who produces fresh ideas and becomes a "success" and the townsman going to the country who refines the "uncouth"?

A word about Eva Ebury's last paragraph: "The superstition, ignorance and fecundity of the peasant is a pressing world problem . . . it may well be that civilisation will collapse before it". I should have thought that fecundity was not the peasant problem; but poverty. Poverty creates fecundity, ignorance and superstition—poverty, and the rulers of poverty. I am not at all alarmed at the outcry of the so-called scientists about over-population. It is simply a "scientific" variation of the old Yellow Peril—a red herring to distract us from the real problem.

And why should the ignorant peasant be blamed for all this? What is the townsman, strapped to the gullet with civic virtues, doing to help him out of the bog in which his poverty and ignorance holds him?

If we are going to blame classes of the population for threatening the collapse of "civilisation" (whatever that may be), why not pick out the real authors of much of our trouble—the educated middle classes? If the countryman is reactionary, what about tens of thousands of journalists who write daily rubbish? If the countryman is uncouth, what are all our cultural societies doing except paying money to freaks and fakes? If the countryman is superstitious, what are our writers and learned men and scientists doing except creating an atomic and heartless society? What are the educated and intelligent doing with their brains except selling them to the Establishment? Society is more likely to collapse from lack of brains than from too many babies.



# Catholicism and Crime

By COLIN McCALL

TWO NEWS ITEMS caught my eye recently and, as they seem significant, I should like to summarise them. On October 6th, the *Daily Herald* reported that a nun on the house-keeping staff of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Northampton was caught at a supermarket with "a tin of pears up one of her sleeves and a pot of jam in the bottom of her clothing", and she pleaded guilty to stealing biscuits, butter, soup, soap and coffee in addition. The stolen goods totalled 17s. 5d., and the nun was conditionally discharged for a year. That isn't particularly significant, you may say; plenty of other people steal from supermarkets. No doubt they do. The significance was in the first part of the Bishop's comment on the affair. "I don't hold her in any way blameworthy", he said, "and as far as I am concerned there is no question of her being punished further". Many of us might agree with the Bishop that further punishment was unnecessary, but most of us would—I think rightly—disagree on the question of blame.

But let me now turn to the second news item, reported next day in the *Scottish Daily Express* and the *Daily Record*. Two women, Mrs. Mary Corner and Mrs. Margaret McAulay were "re-married" in the Roman Catholic chapel inside Barlinnie Prison, Glasgow, to their convict husbands. Their first weddings had both been in register offices; on the second occasion they had Roman Catholic ceremonies. And Mrs. Corner explained as follows: "Most people don't understand this, but being married properly has satisfied my conscience. William and I felt guilty about not being married in the eyes of our Church" (*Daily Express*, 7/10/60). "William", here, should I think read "Alexander", for that is Mr. Corner's name. William is William McAulay, Margaret's husband.

And perhaps a word about the two husbands is called for. McAulay (22) has just begun serving a 10-year sentence for taking part in a shooting at Grove Street, Cowcaddens, Glasgow; Corner (23) is serving 9 months for carrying a loaded gun and threatening to shoot a woman and her 18-year-old son. Incidentally, Mrs. McAulay's brother, John O'Brien, received 9 years' imprisonment for his part in the Grove Street battle. Not, on the face of it, a group of people whose "consciences" were very highly developed, one would think. Maybe Mrs. Corner does "feel guilty" about her husband's carrying a gun and threatening to shoot people, but the guilt she apparently most wanted to assuage was that of "not being married in the eyes of our Church". "Now everything is all right", she is reported to have said (*Daily Record*, 7/10/60). Mrs. McAulay is expecting a baby, and she and her husband wanted it to be brought up in the Catholic faith—as no doubt they themselves were. Perhaps she feels some pangs that her husband and brother should have participated in a gunfight, but it is probably true to say she would have felt many more if her son had not been brought up in the faith. Certainly—and it can't be too often emphasised—that is the Church's view. Sin is worse than crime.

Far too few people are aware of the difference between Catholic and non-Catholic morality, and yet it is—as Free-thinkers insist—an important factor in crime: a factor that is regrettably overlooked in criminology. I recently had a rather lengthy correspondence with the Minister of Education regarding Roman Catholicism and delinquency, in which I gave many instances of that widespread phenomenon, the greater incidence of crime among Roman

Catholics than among other religious and non-religious groups.

Not that I convinced the Minister. The last letter I received (dated August 17th, 1960,) said:

Given that the proportion of Roman Catholics convicted of offences is higher than the proportion of Roman Catholics in the general population, it would not, of course, be safe to infer that this was due to Roman Catholic teaching. Religion is one of a cluster of social factors that tend to hang together. One of the other factors might be the cause of the trouble.

Which, in principle, must be agreed. Nevertheless, if this religion-crime correlation is so widespread as to be almost invariable, it must surely be regarded as significant. There *may*, of course, be contradictory figures but, if so, why are they kept so secret? Why do Roman Catholics, above all, do their utmost (with considerable success in this country) to keep the figures secret? The Minister (or his representative who wrote to me) may be right. "One of the other factors *might* be the cause of the trouble." We can only find this out if the relevant facts are made available to us. As it is, while there is considerable investigation into the "other factors", there seems to be little or none into this one known correlative: Roman Catholic training.

As my news items are from Scotland, let us take that country as an example. In a debate with Father Alan Keenan, OFM, at Edinburgh (noted in *THE FREETHINKER*, 11/4/58, and reported, I believe, in the *Daily Mail*, 7/3/58), Mrs. Margaret Knight said that, in 1957 the proportion of Catholics in Scotland was about 15 per cent. but the proportion in Scottish prisons was about 40 per cent and the proportion in Borstal institutions was about 36 per cent. Presumably Fr. Keenan accepted these approximate figures, for in the *Glasgow Observer and Scottish Catholic Herald* for October 17th, 1958, he was reported to have said when preaching at the Red Mass in St. Mary's RC Cathedral in Edinburgh at the opening of the new legal year, in "Dealing with the disproportionately high numbers of Catholics in prisons and borstals":

The sad fact is that the proportion of Catholics in prisons and Borstals is greater than the proportion of Catholics in the population.

It is the same on the other side of the world, Australia, where fairly recent figures are available and were published in *The Rock* (May 12th, 1960) by Mr. Gregory S. Smelters. It was the same in New Zealand in 1927, 28, 29, 30 and 31, when the last statistics relating to the religion of prisoners were published. No figures for nearly thirty years. Why?

Try to get the up-to-date statistics for England and Wales from the Prison Commission as I did last year, and what will happen? You will be told that they are not available. You may point out (as I did) that they must be available at the different prisons, and you may ask if you may write direct to the individual prison governors for the data. If so, you will be told (as I was) that the Prison Commissioners "cannot accede to your request"; that:

Denominational data is obtained solely for internal administration purposes and for the use of the chaplains and the information would be of no use whatsoever in either proving or disproving the questions you have in mind. (Letter dated July 6th, 1959.)

As if data obtained for one purpose can't be used for another purpose, providing it is accurate!

The need for publishing such data was (inadvertently) shown by *The Faith* of Malta, which printed in its (Concluded on next page)



## This Believing World

Without exception all the BBC speakers broadcasting for schools on "Christian Unity" protest that they are enthusiastic supporters for "Unity", and are always praying and hoping for "Unity". This was particularly the case of Dr. Ruth Slade of Louvain University who made a most moving appeal in the name of Rome—pointing out that the Pope was a most passionate advocate for "Unity" as was of course his Church. Naturally, as the Roman Church was founded by Christ himself, it wanted all the other Churches to come back into the fold and then, thank God, Unity will be at last achieved.

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Dr. Slade admitted it would be a hard task to bring the Churches together in this way, but it was the *only* way. In other words, Rome can lay down all the necessary conditions, and exact the only price for Unity for—let's face it—the Vatican holds all the winning cards. The news that the Archbishop of Canterbury is to visit the Pope, and not the Pope to visit Canterbury, is surely highly significant. We wonder how the Protestant Truth Society and similar bodies would like a Cardinal-Archbishop of Canterbury—appointed with the full approval of the Church of England?

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How to treble your congregation in church has been successfully demonstrated by the Rev. B. Gilbert who is minister of West Woolwich Baptist Church. He has invaded a number of pubs, armed with a guitar and a melody of hymn tunes, singing them to his own accompaniment and customers have—so we are informed by the *Kentish Mercury*—wholeheartedly joined in and later, no doubt, gave themselves just as wholeheartedly in church to Jesus. Mr. Gilbert believes every possible means should be used for this noble end—and even Christian temperance fanatics must admit that a pub, a drink, and a hymn, for Jesus's sake is better than nothing at all. But what a pity that the reverend gentleman does not try his luck some times with instructed Secularists.

★

The other week a Peckham family ran to the police complaining that their flat had been violently disturbed by a poltergeist, though everybody in the building insisted that nothing ever happened to *them*. The only spirits they ever encountered were in the pub up the road. However, the solution was quite easy—in the first place, the head of the family was a Spiritualist, which explains quite a lot; and disturbances by the poltergeist were in the room occupied by his young son. When he was sent away, "nothing again happened". So what? Nothing at all. Millions of people still believe and always will in "spirits". Just as they do in "fairies".

★

Although the "theology" of St. Paul is very nearly unintelligible and is very rarely referred to by the parsons and priests who come to us on TV and the Radio, the religious directors of both mediums have suddenly found that the "life" of Paul is quite as interesting as that of Jesus which has been on the air *ad nauseum*. (If it were not for the difficulty of finding an actor whose life has been "holy" enough to personate Jesus, we should have had "our Lord" on TV *ad nauseum*.)

★

As it is, there is a serial on TV all about Paul quite as fictitious as all the serials and plays about Jesus; and even *Today* has the life and adventures of Paul running as a serial complete with pictures thus perpetuating the myth and all in the interests of true religion and Christianity.

In fact, the now famous slogan, "We've never had it so good" could well be sung in chorus by priests, parsons and pastors, with perfect truth.

★

We wonder how the people who forget the work the National Secular Society achieved during the past century or so—work which has resulted in emptying many a church all over the country, or producing an apathy which even TV and the radio cannot dispel—face the challenge made by these? Are they so certain that all that is necessary is to repeat as often as possible the word "Humanism"?

## Blasphemy Trial on T.V.

SO AFTER ALL, the very religious ITV refused to show Mr. John Osborne's play, *A Subject of Scandal and Concern*, while the equally religious BBC's TV appeared to have no scruples whatever in allowing millions of viewers to see how a trial for "blasphemy" was carried on over 100 years ago.

This must have caused much wailing and weeping among them. It is one thing to *read* about horrid and blatant infidels blaspheming "our Lord" and how a thoroughly Christian community savagely wreaked its vengeance on them. But to see it actually done . . . that was quite a different matter.

The picture was not a pleasant one, and we must congratulate Mr. Osborne not only because he pulled no punches, but also because he chose such a subject.

Young George Jacob Holyoake in one of his lectures on sociology delivered in 1842 suggested that the clergy should get only half their stipends while the Deity could be put on half pay. This staggered his hearers, and one journalist present promptly did his utmost to bring a charge of libellous and criminal blasphemy against him—aided of course by as big a bunch of ignoramuses and illiterates as Cheltenham could raise. In addition, there was Mr. Justice Erskine—not quite as infamous as Judge North who gave G. W. Foote 12 months—but only a little better. To give a man six months hard in our jails of over 100 years ago merely for saying the Deity should be put on half pay was an outrage on humanity.

All this was splendidly brought out by Mr. Osborne's play, and Richard Burton made an ideal Holyoake in every way. He was ably supported by an excellent cast, and altogether the whole performance was a brilliant one—though, naturally, it will be highly resented in Christian quarters.

We wonder if a play like this will help to make "blasphemy" not only ridiculous but once for all abolished?

H.C.

## CATHOLICISM AND CRIME

(Concluded from page 371)

September issue an item I had missed in the English press. When opening the Bishop Grant School at Streatham, the largest Roman Catholic school built since the war, Sir David Eccles said:

I am a great believer in denominational education, and I have no doubt that if all our schools were denominational it would be a good thing not only for Britain but for all those parts of the world where we exercise influence. I welcome the opportunity of being here, not because this is just another school being opened, but because it is a school where a Church is looking after the children.

Sir David, in case you have forgotten, is Minister of Education.



# THE FREETHINKER

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## 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. (Plass 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.

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

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, November 20th, 6.45 p.m.: JOHN FREMLIN, M.A., D.Sc., "Nuclear Disarmament and Patriotism".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 22nd (Large Hall), 7.15 p.m.: RT. HON. A. CREECH JONES, M.P., "Colonialism in Collapse in Africa—What Now?"

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 20th, 6.30 p.m.: P. BRODETSKY, M.A., "The Influence of Religion on English Law".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, Edgware Road), Sunday, November 20th: "Danilo Dolci's Work in Sicily".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, November 20th, 2.30 p.m.: H. LAWSON (of U.N.O.), "United Nations: Success of Failure?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, November 20th, 11 a.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, M.A., "Ours Laws and Morals".

West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead Community Centre, Wanstead House, The Green), Thursday, November 24th, 7.45 p.m.: P. TURNER, "How Astronomy Affects Our Lives".

## Notes and News

WE HAVE HEARD various views of the BBC's production of John Osborne's TV play about George Jacob Holyoake, *A Subject of Scandal and Concern*. Those of the Chairman of the Rationalist Press Association, Mr. Joseph Reeves (who grew up "almost idolising" Holyoake) and the Secretary of South Place Ethical Society, Mr. J. Hutton Hynd, for instance, were unfavourable. Mr. Hector Hawton, Editor of *The Humanist* and our colleague Mr. H. Cutner (as his comments on page 372 show) on the other hand welcomed this play previously turned down by ITV. On the whole we side with Mr. Hawton and Mr. Cutner. Mr. John Freeman's narration may have been unnecessary, there may have been some dubious touches and a documentary form would probably have been more suitable. The fact remains that the BBC produced a Sunday night TV play about a prosecution for blasphemy, in which the prosecution witness and his paper, the *Cheltenham*

*Chronicle* behaved in a bigoted and dishonest way and in which the victim was dignified and distinguished, despite his stammer. And that is really something.

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THERE REMAINS, though, the strange BBC behaviour before the programme: the reiteration that this play was not suitable for young people. One of our readers, Mrs. J. Grubiak, broke into rhyme about this warning, and we leave the last word to her:

Children, welcome!

to

TV films of Vice and Violence,  
Orgies of Sex, Bare Legs and Breasts,  
Gangsters with Guns and Knives,  
Fisticuffs, Faithless Wives;  
But spare our little dears we pray  
From questioning established ways;

from

Unconventionality!

★

WE ARE PLEASED to report that the indoor meetings of the Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society have been particularly successful this year. The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, W.1, is regularly filled on Sunday evenings, and lectures are always followed by a lively discussion. They will, of course, be continued throughout the winter. On November 6th a special collection was held for the National Secular Society Building Fund, for which the General Secretary thanks Mr. W. J. McIlroy and his branch.

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THE EDITOR OF *IM*, the official organ of The British Interlingue Association, invites articles with a rationalist outlook from readers of THE FREETHINKER. The subject-matter, he says, is immaterial, so long as it is humanist in content, and does not assume a knowledge of rationalist principles in the reader. All articles received will be acknowledged, but no payment can be made for them. They should be addressed to Mr. W. R. Wallace, Editor *IM*, 115 Borrowdale Drive, Worcester, from whom details of the Association may also be obtained.

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MR. B. C. BEVIS of 107 Hill Lane, Southampton, describes himself as "one interested in Freethought and willing to correspond with others of like mind".

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WE ARE PLEASED to learn from FREETHINKER reader Mr. G. M. Jones of the formation of the Cheltenham Agnostic Society. The inaugural meeting was held on Thursday, October 27th, and was reported in the local press. The second meeting took place on Tuesday, November 1st, and it is hoped to continue to meet weekly. Would-be members are asked to write for information to Mr. Jones at East View, Gretton Fields, Winchcombe, Near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

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"I ONCE LEFT MY spectacles in a cinema," wrote a correspondent to *Reynolds News* (21/10/60), but "I left my name and address, and they were returned to me". A month ago, however, this apparently forgetful gentleman left his glasses "on a ledge in Winchester Cathedral". This time he wrote to the Dean enclosing a stamped-addressed envelope. Not only has he not received the glasses; he hasn't even had an acknowledgment from the Dean. No wonder he signs himself "Dim View"!

### NEXT WEEK

A HUMANIST DAY-SCHOOL

By E. G. MACFARLANE



# Fear of Death

By G. I. BENNETT

THE LAST WORD has not been said on the subject of Personal Immortality, though I think Mr. Nicholas Toon comes near to saying it. In his thoughtful contribution under that title there is nothing with which I would disagree except his assertion that, "to fear death, which is as natural and as inevitable as life, is morbid and unhealthy". That may be his own point of view but one idea I would contest is that it only remains to embrace rationalism to banish all fear of death from life. Some people can do this, but some cannot. Those who cannot do not, I think, deserve to be treated as though they were cowards or cases for a psychiatrist. I do not suggest that Mr. Toon does this but some consideration of the question will not be amiss.

Aversion to death to some extent cuts across the field of religious controversy, and rationalism does not easily dispose of the matter. For instance, the famous Dr. Johnson (a devout Christian) feared death, whereas General Gordon (a Christian equally if not even more devout) found it possible to welcome the thought of it. On the other hand, that nature-loving heretic, Llewelyn Powys, though passionately fond of life, could meet death unflinchingly when it came; but the agnostic W. H. Hudson, whose evocative nature-writing is, I consider, rivalled by none except Richard Jefferies's, was plunged into despondency at the very thought of dying.

As I see it, the truth is that too much thinking about death, whether in fearful or in eager anticipation of the event, may in believer and unbeliever alike indicate some sort of neurosis. General Gordon met a soldier's death in Khartoum. The world marvelled at his dauntlessness and his calm readiness to "meet his Maker". But remember that he had had suicide thoughts even as a boy. He avoided women and never, it seems, achieved any kind of heterosexual adjustment to life. He wanted to play the part of a hero, and to occupy the role of prime mover in any situation in which he found himself. Yet he hated himself secretly for what he felt to be such worldly vanities. Conversely, Hudson was morbid in his fear of death. Logically, his disbelief in life hereafter (it amounted to that) should have reduced that fear to naught; but on him it had the opposite effect, making him cling tenaciously to every passing moment of life. He married a wife years his senior and confessed after she was gone that he was never in love with her, nor she with him. He married her "because her voice moved me as no singing voice had ever done before" (she had been an opera-singer). I fancy that a psychiatrist might have found both Gordon and Hudson interesting cases.

"Why fear death?" asks one writer I came across recently. "It is the most beautiful adventure in life." This kind of talk is less uncommon than one might suppose. The Poet of Democracy, Walt Whitman, himself wrote, "Nothing can happen more beautiful than death". What one can say of people who write like this I am at loss to know, although it might be pleaded for Whitman that he was allowing his poetic heart to dominate his head. But the young, as Mr. Toon says, usually think of nothing so little as death. Ordinarily, it is only in the desolation and loneliness of old age, with cares and pains and infirmities multiplying, that men tend to turn their minds increasingly on it, as did Jonathan Swift when death ended the years of his extraordinary platonic friendship with Stella and Vanessa. To a young person, life is Adventure and Happiness, with discoveries to be made and joys to be tasted.

In life's spring- and summer-time, when it is good to be alive, it is perhaps difficult to imagine that death will ever come. Though a sick man, Keats writing to Fanny Brawne, the young woman with whom he fell passionately in love, typifies this mood: "I wish to believe in immortality—I wish to live with you for ever".

We can all admire rationalists of the heroic mould of John Stuart Mill who, when told that his end was near, could murmur calmly, "My work is done". And weary men who have completed a great lifetime's task, and know of nothing else they can usefully do, may well feel as did Wells when he wrote what Mr. Toon quotes: "I have warmed my hands at the fire of life and am ready to depart".

But this is not the attitude of those who have still a zest for living. "When I die", said George Bernard Shaw. "I want to be thoroughly used up. The harder I work the more I live. Life is no brief candle for me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I hold for the moment. I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations . . . As long as I have a want I have a reason for living. Satisfaction is death". The busy, vigorous man with important and constructive tasks or creative work to do will no doubt agree with Shaw. The notion of a hereafter is not likely to engage his thoughts very much. It has had no place at all in the thinking of that outstanding Indian statesman, Pandit Nehru. "I am afraid the next world does not interest me", he remarked in his book *Glimpses of World History*. "My mind is full of what I should do in this world, and if I see my way clearly here I am content".

What, then, are we to conclude? I think I would say that, while obsessive fear of death indicates mental illness, an element of fear is, on the contrary, not unnatural. It is part of man's psychological make-up—an atavism that has been of undoubted evolutionary value. If there has ever been a race of men who were completely fearless of death (and therefore without the instinct of self-preservation), extinction is the price they must surely have paid for being so. But, generally speaking, those who look forward to death have either had unhappy lives or, for health or other reasons, find that happiness for them is now but a memory. What in earlier years may have been an instinctive recoil from death becomes finally indifference to it or even glad acceptance of it. Shelley in his poem on Death expressed it well:

First our pleasures die  
—and then  
Our hopes, and then our fears  
—and when  
These are dead, the debt is due;  
Dust claims dust—  
And we die too.

## OBITUARY

Alphonso Samms, who has died in Sheffield at the age of 78, was an indomitable little man and, until the death of his wife last year, seemingly indestructible. Then a part of him died too, and although he attended the National Secular Society Conference in Birmingham at Whitsuntide, he was not quite the man we once knew.

And what a man he was! What a fighter for the causes he embraced: for secularism, socialism, vegetarianism: against war, conscription, vivisection. Such men are rare indeed, and he was fittingly made an Honorary Life Member of the National Secular Society.

The General Secretary NSS conducted a secular service in Sheffield on November 8th in the presence of Mr. Samms's daughter and two sons, other relatives, and friends, who included two from the old *Clarion* days.



## An Austrian Reminiscence

By P. G. ROY

WHEN ON MY ASCENT I reached the bare rock face of the mountain, I passed a *Marterl* (a small memorial tablet) bearing the photograph of a young and pretty girl of 20 who, in 1942, fell to her death while picking alpine flowers.

Not long after, I passed another little board with the poem by a local schoolmaster, expressing the desire to be granted the favour of death in the midst of this wild Nature. "I am not scared of death"—it said—"but when it comes, O Lord, let me die in my beloved mountains here so that my soul can soar up unhampered to Thee". I found this wish touching in its simplicity, and I mused how much the mountain people are one with Nature, however cruel and cold these mountains may be. Perhaps it is just this romantic disposition that renders mountain dwellers like the Austrians susceptible to the fancies of religion in general and the pomp and circumstance of Roman Catholicism in particular?

I was approaching the summit when, from its readily accessible side, I heard voices, and looking down I noticed a group of schoolboys carrying green and red balloons. When they reached the spot where I was, their leader told them to sit down in a circle, called the roll, and then gave each boy a card bearing his name, to be affixed to his individual balloon by string. Despite his warning to keep the balloons tight during the operation, one escaped into the air. Instead of offering consolation, the leader told the culprit cold-heartedly: "For a punishment, you're excluded from our later games".

This could have been any youth group, from the "Red Pioneers" to the Roman Catholic "*Sturmscharen*" (Host of Attackers), but from this queer educational approach I knew that it was the latter. And the corroboration was not long in coming.

When all the rest of the boys had safely tied their labelled balloons to their jacket buttons, the leader harangued them, saying how proud they ought to be to belong to The Catholic SS (*Sturmscharen*). There are other youth groups, such as the "Red Falcons" (Socialist), but none as numerous as the SS and because of that they have been able to assist financially the Pope's missionary work in faraway countries. "Some of you have joined only recently, but I take it that you will renew your membership". He then called the names of some new recruits, who all promised to renew their affiliation. Upon which the brain-washer proceeded to tell them in glowing terms how he himself was permitted to take part, during his student days, in a Holy Procession of the Image of the Blessed Virgin of Lourdes, and how splendid the clerical pomp of the procession was. "And what would you do if I gave you the opportunity to study and become a priest?"

Upon which the boys answered: "Go to the heathen and preach the gospel".

Satisfied with his success, the leader now allowed the boys to stand up, release their balloons after a count-down, and watch the race. Did they, I wonder, expect their tiny toys, proudly bearing the names of a few deluded people from the backwoods of Austria, to join the sputniks, luniks and pioneers?

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## Fr. Paris and Mrs. Ebury

Dear Mrs. Ebury,

Thanks for your reply (THE FREETHINKER, September 30th).

I think it is impossible to find happiness in "a purposeless, wasteful, painful universe". So mankind is doomed to failure and despair. And, is there no one to be blamed for such a most terrible and universal crime? We are, therefore, in a universe where only idiots can possibly be happy, where ignorance is bliss. We, as intelligent beings, are in a worse situation than that of the brutes. What a fiasco of Nature! But England was "Merry England" once! But for us "Believers" (especially Catholics) *per crucem ad lucem* (Through the Cross unto Light). Better than Lucretius and Iphigenia let us follow Christ, as countless millions have so far done and not less than about one thousand millions are actually giving credit to his invitation: "Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened; and I will refresh you..." (Matt. 11,28-30). Humility is the way to happiness in this "Valley of tears".

With regard to your other point, namely: "the throng of illiterates", philosophy of commonsense is sufficient for them. It was this natural philosophy of commonsense that invented for all mankind and for all ages the word "Creation". This is not a matter of senses which can err, as in the case of the Ptolomaic system, but of intuitive intelligence, which is common to all normal minds, unhindered in their normal course of understanding.

G. M. PARIS, O.P.

Editor, *The Faith* (Malta).

Dear Father Paris,

For your first point, so "ignorance is bliss"; no, the Materialist refuses a Fool's Paradise, he asks simply that all man's efforts shall be directed to man's advantage; that, within the limits of possibility, there should be an Eden for every child that is born. How can "humility" help him in that battle? Of what use is crawling and prayer to an omniscient, omnipotent Creator, who knew before the foundations of the Earth were laid, how every sparrow would fall?

For your second point, the philosophy of common sense is sufficient for the "throng of illiterates". For the uneducated, common sense may have "invented" the theory that "Someone must have made it all", that is, in fact, the most common of all the ignorant remarks made by the believer to the materialist. But common sense could never have invented for the poor illiterates the Catholic answer to poverty, misery and unemployment; that has to be inoculated under threat of eternal damnation. Is it common sense that in the overpopulated Catholic lands, the poor should be required to breed like flies, and that from their meagre earnings they should be required to support an unproductive priesthood? Is it common sense that a Creator should require them to live in insanitary squalor and contribute to the erection of temples to "Him", and to waste on purchasing heavenly redemption for the dead their few much needed pence? And is it common sense that in the name of this Creator, science, knowledge, politics, economics, literature, painting, sculpture, stage-craft, should be brought to the bar of Catholic theology for judgment? No, not common sense, but Authority is the basis of the Catholic faith, yours, equally with any of the illiterate throng, has no surer foundation. You have failed to demonstrate by "reason" either the existence of a Creator, or the existence of the Catholic anthropomorphic Jehovah, son, mother and Holy Ghost.

EVA EBURY.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE EXODUS

If when studying the religious history of the human race we come across stories which claim to narrate historical events, we do not write them off as myths just because they contain material that to us appears fantastic and unreal. Nor are we justified in creating theories to account for the stories until we have established beyond reasonable doubt that they are not accounts, however distorted, of actual events. For example the Roman historian Suetonius was very taken in by astrology and omens, his works contain countless references to them (see *The Twelve Caesars*), but that does not allow us to dismiss the works because we find such things just so much rubbish. On the contrary we sift fact from fiction. This is the case with the story of the Exodus. Taken at its face value it appears a fantastic myth, but strip it of the element of the miraculous, intervention of a deity, etc. use up-to-date methods of translation (Red Sea becomes reed sea); examine the historic background as to the period you place the event (this will supply information regarding customs, personages, religious beliefs and practices, political and economic conditions, etc.), and see if the account recorded conforms to



the information obtained. Then we are in a position to decide whether or not the account is to be treated purely as fiction invented at a later date. Even if it is discovered that there was only a "kernel" of truth in the story this is of great value to the historian. Some very significant potsherds have given much more information than many elaborate artifacts or even complete tombs.

The approach to the problem of the Exodus taken by P. G. Roy screams of dogmatism. We come across statements such as "Any student of religion knows, etc., etc.". Such assertions are better left without comment. In conclusion I would point out that Mr. Roy's points (a) and (b), which he presents as being my position are anything but representative of it. I did not suggest that the Hebrews were a "political unit" (whatever that might be). I Kings, 6,1 hardly discounts my position. As to my being unable to credit the "authors of Holy Writ" with no ability to invent "a story", nothing could be further from the truth. The "authors of Holy Writ" were quite able to invent all manner of stories, but in the case of the Exodus I suggest that it is based on fact. The evidence produced by an examination of the story itself supports this (it is significant that some of this that I drew attention to in earlier articles was left untouched by P. G. Roy). This position is very different from that credited to me in point (b). And Mr. Roy talks about my "red herrings . . .!"

ROBERT MORRELL.

#### UNLESS!

The following example of clerical anxiety for the spiritual and material welfare of the children of our country appeared in the October 8th issue of *The Inquirer*, weekly bulletin of the

## Christmas Cards

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.

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Warmest  
Greetings

Unitarian Church, and is taken from the *Oldham Calendar*, monthly programme of U.C. activities in Oldham. Children attending the Unitarian Sunday School recently told their Minister, "with sorrow", that they could no longer come to the School as they could not get places in Henshaw's Secondary Modern unless they attended the Anglican Sunday School. The Minister personally interviewed the Vicar of Oldham Church, Canon Harold Kirkman, also a Governor of Henshaw's, to ask if the children had been told this by some irresponsible person. But said the Minister "he informed me that he gave specific instructions to the Head Master to make it clear to his scholars that unless they are Anglicans there will be small chance of their going to Henshaw's". All the children concerned live within a few minutes' walk of Henshaw's, so the difficulty of the position both for parents and children can easily be understood.

G. MATSON.

#### FREETHOUGHT IN RUSSIA

To the section of Charles W. Schab's letter directed at me I do not doubt that a paper devoted to Atheism as a subject would be tolerated in Russia, but our FREETHINKER is something more than that, it advocates freedom of thought, expression and publication.

We would be fiercely against any tendentious state pressure in matters of opinion; on literary men, musicians and scientists, as in fact is exercised in Russia. We would regard this as insufferable, intolerable. In fact I would say on my own authority that our Atheism does not call for any backing from the state. British Freethinkers have always looked to the emancipated individual as the source of their moral convictions. This attitude was seen ideally in Bradlaugh, Foote and Cohen. When confronted with a judge and on a charge of blasphemy, Foote offered no "confession". His famous reply was: "Your sentence is worthy of your creed".

Of course, if Mr. Schab believes that Atheists are justified in persecuting opinions that happen to meet with state disapproval, I have nothing to add.

ROBERT F. TURNER.

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