

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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THE *Sunday Express* (6/11/60) recorded an item that must rank as one of the most intriguing, as well as important from a freethought standpoint, that has appeared for a very long time. The Vatican has just created a special course in Atheism for the instruction of Roman Catholic priests about to be dispatched on missions to convert both avowedly Communist lands and lands amidst which godless Bolshevism (besides no doubt other less publicised forms of atheistic propaganda) are currently ruining millions of souls. This academic course is, so we learn from our Protestant contemporary, run under the auspices of the famous Roman congregation, *De Propaganda Fide*, which is in charge of the missionary work of the

Church in Pagan or heretical lands. Incidentally, it is from this historic institution (founded by Pope Urban VIII in the early 17th century), that there originally emerged the now world-famous term, *propaganda*, which has long since passed into secular use. The President of the Congregation of Propaganda, is the Armenian Cardinal Agagianian who rumour has it, was runner-up to Pope John in the last Papal Conclave and who, for the record, was born a Russian subject! The first "Professor of Atheism" at the Vatican is an Italian priest, Father Cornelio Fabro, an expert on Communism; and the course will be a three-year one. And I am sure that the National Secular Society and indeed, the World Union of Freethinkers (in particular, its Italian section, the Giordano Bruno Society) will be pleased to render any assistance to the Vatican within their power. We might even supply literature and, if asked, lectures for the course. And meanwhile, we congratulate Pope John and Cardinal Agagianian on their wise decision to add the subjects of Atheism and of Materialism to their hitherto somewhat exclusively medieval theological course.

After all, St. Thomas Aquinas has now been dead quite a while!

## Doubting Thomases

The decision to see that Roman Catholic missionaries are equipped with some understanding of the arguments by their *real* antagonists in the mid-20th century, Atheism and Materialism (no longer as in all past ages, some rival form of religion) represents a wise, as well as undoubtedly bold, decision on the part of the "Infallible" Papacy and its advisers in the Congregation concerned. After all, it is always a great advantage to any kind of propagandist to know the arguments of his opponents. For that matter, the same thing holds true for both sides of the religious Iron Curtain: one has only to consider the many eminent Freethinkers who have had, and who have been, able to profit by a technical theological training. Meslier, Voltaire, Renan, Turmel, McCabe, Alfaric—all these eminent scholars had received such a theological groundwork. In his own small way, the present writer would add his own personal tribute to the value of a theological education for anyone desirous of being properly equipped for the

effective role of a propagandist of Freethought. Whether, however, a knowledge of Atheism will, in a similar fashion enable the budding theologians at the College of Propaganda to become fully competent to answer their Atheistic opponents, as also, to plumb the mysteries of Dialectical Materialism as expounded in the classical expositions of Marx, Engels and Lenin, we must confess to regarding with considerable doubt. According to our contemporary,

our doubts are shared at Rome itself where they have, after all, much earthly if not heavenly experience. We learn that there are many Cardinals opposed to this—from the Catholic standpoint—daring innovation. The dangerous example of the former French

worker-priests is expressly cited; for it is well-known that the worker-priests, authorised to work in the French factories as an antidote to the Communism and Atheism so prevalent amongst the French working class, ended up in several cases as Communists themselves; while other cases are reported where the worker-priests eventually married. Not at all *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, not to mention their traditionally celibate profession. There was also cited a case of a Roman Catholic priest sent out to convert votaries of Islam (still the major religious rival of the Vatican in West Africa and the Middle-East), and who ended up by himself embracing the creed of the Koran, which also includes permission to marry four wives as a kind of religious bonus of terrestrial bliss. However, despite these ominous precedents, Pope John and Cardinal Agagianian, apparently intend to carry on with the courses as at present. No doubt they entertain the optimistic hope that a new St. Thomas may learn from the arguments of the Atheists themselves to refute the specious fallacies of his Atheistic instructors, just as his medieval prototype elaborately refuted (especially in his *Contra Gentiles*), the then current arguments of the Muslim.

## An Epoch-Making Decision

Be that as it may, the decision of the Papacy to legalise the study of Atheism as a necessary part of a new era of theological study, cannot but be regarded as an epoch-making decision, for it marks the dawn of a new era of Atheism. For, up to now, theologians of all schools have ignored Atheists and Materialists, and have refused even to recognise them as serious critics. An article on Materialism in a world-famous Protestant Encyclopedia, curtly informs its readers that "no great philosopher has ever been a Materialist". The Roman Catholic Church has always taken up an even more dogmatic stand upon this subject. Up to now, it has been the authoritative teaching of the Church that the existence of God is "self-evident", and that only criminals and lunatics could deny a belief which is unanimously attested by all nations and all ages. St. Thomas's famous "Five Ways" which together probably form the most elaborate and ingenious set of proofs ever yet produced for the existence of God, are only, so to speak, designed to give logical justification for a belief

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Rome's Chair of Atheism

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

that all theologians since Paul have held to be self-evident. Now however, Atheism has, at long last, apparently arrived; it is now accorded theological status as a major recognised heresy, with basic arguments that require refuting. This is, most certainly, a notable admission on the part of the Vatican. Apparently, since there would be no obvious point in arguing solely with criminals and lunatics (the sole Atheists according to tradition) the Catholic Church is now forced to accept the hitherto unrecognised fact that there are serious and mentally mature Atheists and that, sequentially, there must accordingly be serious Atheistic arguments worthy of the attention of theologians and of the (pseudo) science of Catholic Apologetics. All this constitutes a most notable departure on the part of the Church—and also, a most dangerous one. It is no longer only the Biblical fool who has said in his heart that there is no God. The Infallible Papacy has now been compelled to realise that Atheism has become a world-wide power, and that any future system of theology must take account of it. This signifies the advent of a new, of a post-religious age, of the age of Atheism and of Materialism. 2,500 years after its Greek pioneers, Atheism has now become a recognised, if not yet, respectable heresy. We shall look forward with keen interest and curiosity to the eventual result of this bold experiment which will, we hope, turn out better for the Vatican than did the experiment of the ill-fated worker priests. And we repeat, we shall be most pleased, if called upon, to offer advice and even to supply lecturers who *know* something about Atheism.

## Far From The Maddening Crowd

"Wessex yoke!" Does not the phrase stink of class-consciousness? However, let it pass.

I should require a whole issue of THE FREETHINKER to answer Eva Ebury's latest in detail. However, I will take a few samples at random.

1. In my rural jottings I am not concerned with world "peasantry", merely the rural workers of England, especially Wessex.

2. The local "peasants" are neither conservative nor reactionary. North Dorset is noted for radicalism (temporarily in eclipse), and even in recent years a Liberal has represented the constituency. Time was when no Tory dare show himself in the village. Well within living memory the bridge leading into our local market town was barricaded, to keep the blighters out during an election.

3. Progressive movements arise in the town! What of Tolpuddle?

4. The Mother's Union is on its last legs, and not 10% of the village attend Harvest Festivals. E.E. might have mentioned the W.I.! ("Mrs. Strumpeting-Fetherstonchaugh will lecture: 'My Impressions of the Holy Land'. A collection will be taken in aid of the Society for the Propagation of Purity in the Public Parks.")

5. "Squalid scandal, old folk bent with toil and rheumatism, youth frustrated." Well, well! So these things are unknown in towns!

6. As to "civic virtues belong to the town"—Good God! So do brothels, homo clubs, strip-tease clubs, stinking slums, filthy pubs and a thousand religions.

7. As for culture—what do we see in the towns? Theatres closing down left, right and centre (our village dramatic society is a flourishing affair), art galleries and symphony orchestras struggling for a bare existence. Some time ago *The Sunday Times* published a survey of several big towns, as the *Herald* is doing today, and it was, and is, apparent, that millions of town dwellers have never heard the word. The surveys make it obvious that the average city dweller is a moron, obsessed with money. *Rem si possis, recte, si non, quocunque modo, rem.*

8. The towns are responsible for ten years of Tory "government". When the present era of "prosperity" ends the people will again turn to poor old Labour, and expect it to get them out of the mess. And what do the mass of the town dwellers read? *The Daily Express, Mail, News of the World, The People*; as for the women's magazines—I have no words. None of the papers mentioned above are fit to be put to the meanest use to which

it is possible to put paper, yet their contents are lapped up year after year.

Culture? Pah!

As for my fair critic's preference for modern sanitation—give me the old dung-bucket, every time. You should see our rhubarb!

In conclusion, perhaps Eva would care to spend a weekend at the local "Pig and Whistle", where we could discuss our differences further. The public bar is a cosy place on a winter night for just such a discussion though how E.E. will react to the hawkings, spittings, retchings and belchings of the West Saxon peasantry, I can't imagine.

RUSTICUS.

I am sure that when Rusticus began writing his articles on the countryside he did not suspect that they would become a subject of controversy. A man with an affecting enthusiasm for and love of the quiet simple life away from the madding throng, he has sought to communicate some of that enthusiasm and love to us. A town-dweller myself, I have enjoyed his contributions and hope that we shall have more of them.

I think townsfolk tend to forget that there is another kind of life than the fretful, hurried, harassed existence that they often endure from one year to the next. But it is not wrong, indeed it is salutary, that they should be reminded of this. Anyway, I see no cause for anyone's making an issue out of the reminder and setting civic virtues against rural ignorance. This is where I think Eva Ebury is in error. An ardent town-dweller might applaud the vigour of her argument, but one less ardent may well consider that her outlook is marred by intellectual prejudice.

Town and country are complementary to each other. Civilisation could not advance without civic organisation. But let us remember that even the most progressive societies depend for their very existence upon the produce of the land, and that in the countryside there is a health and sanity and peace that the cities can never give. If in the cities wits are sharpened and academic distinction is to be found, what of it? These things do not constitute the whole of life—and heaven forbid they ever should.

Nothing, of course, is proved by citing that this man or that came from the town or country. But for partisan champions of the town, who are inclined to be disdainful of the contribution of the country-born to history, let me mention Abraham Lincoln. He was not a product of a city or of a college; but by reason of his impact upon his own nation, and upon men in many places elsewhere before and since his death, he ranks among the world's really great men. In this college-conscious age it is well to remember that scholastic education (like technological achievement) can be overrated. A man's capital lies more within himself and in his fundamental reactions to life than in the geographical accident of birth, or even in the privileges of culture that money can buy or a materially affluent society can provide.

G. I. BENNETT.

### GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

I had been engaged on a critical study of the life and writings of George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) for some time before John Osborne's play unexpectedly resuscitated general public interest in this pioneer of secularism. May I be permitted to take advantage of the present situation to appeal through your columns, in a cause which must be dear to both of us, to anyone who thinks they could be of assistance to me in my researches by offering loans of autograph letters, personal reminiscences, and the like?

(MISS) GILLIAN HAWTIN.

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### NEXT WEEK

#### ATHEISM, FAITH AND RELIGION

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

# The Scandal of Sicily—2

By ADRIAN PIGOTT

CONDITIONS IN SICILIAN VILLAGES are little better than in Palermo, but they are not so cramped. Few of the roads or lanes are paved, resulting in a great deal of dust in summer and plenty of mud in the winter. There is even less electric light or running water, and the horrible sleeping conditions at night are intensified. In southern Italy it is the custom to have one large family bed upon which perhaps a dozen adults will huddle together for warmth: the children (as in the towns), lie on the floor, because they would be crushed in the main bed. The fetid atmosphere may well be imagined with a room being occupied by perhaps 16 human beings—who are, however, not the only inmates. All the domestic animals come in for the night: the mule, the goat, the poultry—as well as cats and dogs—all settle down on the floor among the children. If the animals want to urinate, they do so on the floor, possibly over the children, thus spreading diseases which are already only too frequent owing to the fleas, bugs and cockroaches. The reason why the animals come in for the night is because they would be stolen if they were left outside! The villagers are so poverty-stricken that the loss of a goat is a serious family catastrophe and no risks must be taken.

One reason for the prevalence of stealing is that 2,000,000 Sicilians live at starvation point, so that robbery and pick-pocketing have become fine arts. Indeed young boys are given lessons in pick-pocketing exactly as in the days of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*. Such is life today under the "Holy Catholic Church".

An unusual feature of the housing in the country are the villages of tiny straw huts where the peasants live in very primitive style. These miserable little dwellings have an entrance hole about 4 feet high; there is no outlet for smoke from the heating stoves in these hovels—and elementary cookery is often conducted in old tins (pots and pans usually being luxuries far beyond the purses of these poor peasants). These wretched places closely resemble the kraals of Central Africa—and the illiterate Sicilians are very little above the intelligence of equatorial Africans.

The panel of British visitors examined a colony of these hutments and they found that 44 "kraals" contained the following zoological collection at night—218 human beings; 55 mules; 3 horses; 8 goats; 1 pig; and a number of cats and dogs.

*Victims of the Vatican have a heavy price to pay for their simplicity!*

There are, needless to say, no drains, water taps or lavatories—and, at a suitably discreet distance from the smells caused by the peasants and their animals, there can be seen the comfortable manor-houses of the landlords and the police barracks. The contrasts between the two standards of living exemplifies the very curious ways in which rich Roman Catholics (mis)interpret the Christian tenet "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".

The Sicilian rustics suffer from the attentions of the bandits who live in the mountains, and who remove anything upon which they can lay their hands. Another social evil is the Mafia Secret Society, whose activities range from demanding money for "protection" (as practised by Chicago gangsters), to planned assassination of an enemy at an agreed price. Since 1945 over 500 people have been murdered by the Mafia and nobody has been convicted. The police are fully aware of the fact that if they should take too active steps to track down the

murderers, there would be repercussions against themselves and their families. In every down-trodden community there are luckily a few bold spirits who are brave enough to protest openly against the current evils. These creditable men are the especial targets for the murderers. 38 Trade Unionists have been recently singled out to be assassinated.

*All this is going on in part of what is commonly called the "free world".*

A great deal of the land is owned by a few feudal landlords, who take very little interest in the welfare of their peasants. Quite a number are "absentee landlords" who leave their estates to be run by unscrupulous deputies and agents. In view of the risks of having themselves or their children kidnapped by the bandits or the Mafia, it is understandable that most of the landowners prefer to live in the security of Rome or Naples. Recently, however, one of these gentry was incautious enough to disregard the danger. He was captured by the Mafia and forced to live with them in their mountain stronghold for 2 months before the ransom of £18,000 was paid over.

Very few Sicilian men (whether in town or country), work more than 120 days a year and many of them spend their very considerable spare time in the hills gathering grass, weeds, snails and frogs which they bring back to their homes as food.

Another scandal is the employment of child-labour, owing to its relative cheapness—exactly as in Britain before the 10 hours Bill of 1847. At the age of nine (when they ought to be at school) Sicilian boys—being able to perform light manual work in road-making, quarrying and agriculture—are victimised by selfish employers. The family destitution in Sicily is so extreme that parents have little hesitation in accepting as little as 4s. and allowing their small sons to work for 11 hours daily in the service of rapacious contractors.

Quarry boys have to carry heavy baskets of stones to the crusher, and they are often disfigured for life. Their immature bones cannot stand the strains of the loads involved. They grow up with bent distorted backs and the stone dust in their lungs. When they reach the age of 14 the poor boys have to become "registered labourers" and thus entitled to a fixed wage of 12s. a day. They are then immediately discarded by their employers, who engage new supplies of boys at the slave rate of 4s. The discarded 14 year-olds, then swell the ranks of the unemployed, having become useless for any good job because they are illiterate and having wasted their receptive years slaving in the quarries. Lovers of Dickens will remember the intense indignation which the great man exhibited towards injustices against children (incidentally, Dickens was fully aware of the evils of Popery and he wrote "Roman Catholicism is the most horrible means of social and political degradation existing in the world today.") The tragic death of Poor Jo (the starving crossing-keeper in *Bleak House*) provides a suitable parallel to the modern social victims of Sicily today. Poor Jo gave Dickens an opportunity by which he could castigate the selfish Victorian big-wigs who were callously indifferent to the fate of so many unfortunate waifs. At the end of Chapter 47 of *Bleak House*, Dickens wrote some very scathing lines about the end of Poor Jo who died in degradation — as so many

(Continued on next page)

## This Believing World

The triumphal journey to other lands made by the Archbishop of Canterbury was of course a great success, especially from the Roman Catholic point of view. But we cannot help wondering if Dr. Fisher has ever read Voltaire? On TV and the news films the Archbishop is shown surrounded by happy, smiling, priests and they all call to mind Voltaire's jibe—that one priest cannot meet another without laughing. How true!

★

And what about that naughty word "Protestant"? It is causing quite a correspondence in the staid *Daily Telegraph* which recently printed a letter from the Rev. I. R. Christie pointing out "the help and profit" he derives from the Book of Common Prayer. In Article XXXI of the Church of England, we find it declared that "the sacrifices of the Masses in which it was said that the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead to have remission of pain or guilt were blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits".

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But it is a fact that the "Catholic" members of the Church of England disavow this plain statement—or if we are told they don't, then they certainly *are* Protestants, as Mr. Christie, who agrees with the Prayer Book and not with "Catholics", still proudly calls himself. But why does not the Archbishop of Canterbury make an authoritative statement about the now much despised word "Protestant"? Should his followers use it or not?

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For 15s. you can buy yet another book on Pilate and Herod and Jesus entitled *Crime before Calvary* by Guy Schonfield, another example of pious myth-making, treating the trial of Jesus as related in the Gospels as being factually true in every detail. Indeed so true, that it equals or surpasses any verbatim transcript of a modern trial. Although the book's reviewer in *The Observer*, Mr. Christopher Hollis, sadly admits Mr. Schonfield "has raised a mystery rather than solved it", he is of course quite certain that there was a Trial and a Crucifixion and a Resurrection, for thus the myths are constantly perpetuated.

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Books like Mr. Schonfield's can always find a public, while those of us who can find no evidence anywhere outside the Gospels for any of the events there narrated will always find it difficult not only to have an anti-Christian book published, but if published, to have it sold by reputable booksellers. Yet the fact remains that secular history has no record whatever of any trial of Jesus by Pilate or Herod or anybody else. And all that Mr. Schonfield tells us about it comes from the Gospels, or is pure speculation.

★

With pain do we note it—but the all-believing Franco is having trouble with his Divine Church. The Vatican has always ruled Spain, and insists on doing so now; but that very reliable newspaper in these matters, the *Daily Express* (24/11/60) tells us that "a long-simmering power struggle between General Franco and Spain's Catholic Church over the validity of degrees from Church universities and schools is now reaching the boiling point".

★

The Church wants its own university degrees to be considered the equal of those given by the State-run universities, and woe betide Franco if he doesn't give in. How powerful the Vatican still is in Spain can be seen in the fact that the Church's weekly journal, *Ecclesia* is the only publication there uncensored. Who will win the struggle? It may well be Franco—but no one can yet know.

## Roman Catholicism in US Army

THE NOVEMBER ISSUE OF *Church and State*, organ of Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State (POAU), gives a glaring example of the way Roman Catholicism is infiltrating the US Army.

It prints a photostatic copy of an apparently official certificate bearing the references, "FS Form 724 (Secy) 24 Jun 57" and "L135 Army-Ft. Sill, Okla.", and is headed: "US Army Artillery and Missile School, US Army Artillery and Missile Center". In the top centre is an image of Saint Barbara, named underneath, and the certificate reads:

This is to certify that ..... having associated with field artillery men of all ranks during the period ..... to ..... is hereby declared an HONORARY GUNNER. He is to be numbered among the trusty members of this brotherhood of Stonehurlers, Archers, Catapulters, Rocketeers, and Cannoneers, and hereafter is entitled to invoke the aid of Saint Barbara when in danger or distress.

Given at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

It is signed by E. S. Hartshorn, Jun., Brigadier General, USA, Assistant Commandant.

*Church and State* also points out that "a guide for personnel devotes pages 10 and 11 to the story of St. Barbara, the Roman Catholic patron saint of artillerymen", and "A large painting of the Saint hangs in the museum there".

POAU has previously succeeded in quashing patron saint programmes at Fort Benning, Georgia, and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where Col. J. T. Corley and Col. Franklin R. Sibert respectively promoted St. Maurice as the patron saint of the US Infantry. POAU protests were upheld by Major General R. V. Lec, adjutant general, and Roman Catholic zealots were ordered to confine their patron saint programmes "to unofficial and voluntary participation by those interested". As *Church and State* says: "Apparently a similar order is needed for Ft. Sill".

Another illustration in the November *Church and State* is a photograph of a nun with a collecting plate, and the caption reads:

A sectarian privilege irritating to many is enjoyed by a French order of nuns, the Little Sisters of the Poor, who as regular as pay day can be observed soliciting for the Roman Catholic Church at the Pentagon. They have enjoyed a monopoly on this privilege for many years. Some years ago, after numerous complaints, they were ordered out by Pentagon officials. Strong pressure from Roman Catholic congressmen re-established them and they have been there ever since. POAU headquarters are at 1633 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington 6, D.C., USA.

C.McC.

## THE SCANDAL OF SICILY

(Continued from page 395)

Sicilian children are dying today.

Dead, Your Majesty!

Dead, My Lords and Ladies!

Dead, right Reverends and wrong Reverends of every order!

And dying thus around us every day."

One can parody the indignant words which Dickens used towards smug Victorianism, to suit the current disgraces in Sicily.

Dead, Your Holiness!

Dead, You selfish landlords and you avaricious slave-drivers!

Dead, You sinister clergy

who thrive on Superstition, and who do nothing to minimise the scandals!

And dying unnecessarily in Sicily every day.

Farmworkers have to rise at 3 a.m. and trudge for miles through the darkness to the work-centre, hoping that somebody will employ them.

(To be continued)

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.
- London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. MILLS and WOODCOCK. (Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria statue.)
- Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch). — Meetings every Sunday, from 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

- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, December 13th, 7.15 p.m.: DR. ELEANOR MEARS, "Artificial Insemination and the Faversham Report".
- Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 11th, 6.30 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "What Christianity Has Borrowed".
- Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, Edgware Road), Sunday, December 11th, 7.15 p.m.: PETER COLES, "Television and You".
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Educational Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, December 11th, 2.30 p.m.: J. R. HAMMOND, "Ideas of H. G. Wells".
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, December 11th, 11 a.m.: R. W. SORENSON, M.P., "Behind and Beyond Politics".
- West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11), Thursday, December 15th, 7.45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY (against), DR. D. A. NORRIS (for), Debate—"The Bible Divinely Inspired?" Tape Recording.

## Notes and News

"NO FUSS, NO PICTURES," said *The Guardian* (3/12/60) after the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to the Pope. "What words passed between the two men may never be revealed." Personally, we doubt if the conversation was momentous; certainly its effects seem unlikely to be so. Those who saw the meeting as the first move towards healing a great breach in Christendom will now be disappointed, but it was always clear—at least to impartial observers—that they would be. At the same time, Dr. Fisher might have been a little more consistent in his comments at the British Embassy afterwards. He said, *The Guardian* reported, "that he had gone as an ordinary individual to meet another ordinary individual and they had greeted each other as ordinary people do in the West". That, of course, is rubbish, and he not surprisingly contradicted it later, saying: "I am Primate of All England and also Primate of the whole Anglican communion, and I am clearly coming in that capacity". He also remarked to

the Pope: "Your Holiness we are making history", and the Pope had agreed. So do we, but not very important history!

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"BOOKS OF BLACK MAGIC are still best sellers in remote districts" of Germany said the *Leicester Mercury* (1/11/60) and "70 cases involving witchcraft have come before the [German] courts in the past year". A Hamburg folklore student, Dr. Herbert Auhofer has recently published a book, *Superstition and Sorcery*, in which he cites modern crimes traceable to beliefs in magic and witchcraft, of which we may mention the latest. In 1959 a young farmer murdered his 12-day-old child because it was born prematurely. Such children are supposed to become witches.

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THE FOLLOWING DAY the *Mercury* gave some details of the censorship of books in various countries. Australia (more than 1,000 books banned), South Africa (10,000 books, magazines, etc., including *Black Beauty*), Eire and Spain, are, of course, well known, but some of America's surprised us. *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, is banned in public libraries in Denver because it is "immoral and sacrilegious", in Omaha because it "puts wrong ideas into youngsters' heads", and in Brooklyn because "it is a bad example of ingenuous youth". And a young Michigan secondary school teacher, Franklyn Olson was recently sentenced to three months' imprisonment for introducing his pupils to Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. A mother claimed that there were obscene passages in the book, and a magistrate told Olson: "Young man, your crime is as serious as if you had given them marijuana cigarettes". Olson was later freed by an appeal court judge who commented that any purple passages in *The Stranger* were minor compared with many in the Bible.

★

NORTH OF THE BORDER to the *Daily Record* for November 4th, where we find a series of letters under the heading "I Believe!" One, sees God everywhere and in everything; another begins, "I was an alcoholic" and goes on in time honoured fashion; a third tells of a "confirmed drunk"; and a fourth believes simply and solely because the Bible teaches it. The two remaining ones, both from women, call for consideration together. One woman believes because her husband was ill; she prayed and he recovered: the other believes because her husband died leaving her with three children—as she puts it, "Christ said I am the husband of the widow and the father of the fatherless."

★

A FEW DAYS LATER (7/11/60) the *Record* printed a letter from an Atheist, Mr. A. Beattie of Glasgow. "I abhor the thought of a celestial big brother", he wrote, "and my mind repels the idea of a heavenly dictator who manoeuvres all beings like puppets . . . It would be laughable but for the fact that millions accept it". And another item in the same issue gave the numerical strength of the Kirk in Scotland. Its membership stood at 1,315,466 in 1958, against 1,297,817 in 1928, an increase of 17,649. But the population of Scotland rose by 326,000 in the same time. As for churches, nearly 800 have closed in the last 30 years, and only 130 have been built.

★

ON NOVEMBER 11th, we referred to a direction sign in Bognor Regis, "To Catholic Church", which a reader had noticed and complained about to the local Council. The Roman Catholic Church, he argued, should not be advertised at the ratepayers' expense. We are now pleased to report that the sign has been removed, and we congratulate our reader on his prompt and effective action.

# On Controversial Questions—5

By H. CUTNER

THE MORE I LOOKED into Buddhism, the more I was staggered at the paean of praise written so often in articles in our Freethought journals. It is true of course that we get from Buddha—or at least so we are told—no appeals to God Almighty, while in Christianity we are urged to “do good” in the name of God or Jesus or both. But in practice, what does the difference really amount to? Nothing at all. As there is neither a God nor a Jesus living, “doing good” is really a matter for oneself. Most normal people hate crime, cruelty, injustice, war, and so on, and prefer to carry on in a normal way—which means simply that they have an ethical code handed down to them from past generations which works. Calling upon God or Jesus or not calling, or relying on the precepts of say, Judaism or Confucius, or not really amounts to much the same thing.

In any case, I once saw on TV a pictorial representation of Buddhism and Buddhists presented by Mr. Christopher Mayhew, and it depicted Buddhism in a far worse light than I had realised. Buddhists were taught to *beg*, and eminent Buddhists gave us an exhibition of sheer grovelling before statues which sickened me. Was this the marvellous teachings of the great Gautama? You will find in the articles on Buddha and Buddhism in our Freethought journals very little said about his callous desertion of his wife when their only son Rahula was born. Rhys Davids tells us that he “reluctantly” tore himself away so that he could study some form of Brahminism, and for six years he lived in a forest much like the much admired monks of other religions. Like Jesus, Buddha had to contend with the “Tempter”, that is, the Devil. Jesus was put on the pinnacle of the Temple after flying with the Evil One through the air, and here is what happened to Buddha:—

When the conflict began between the Saviour of the world and the Prince of Evil, a thousand appalling meteors fell; clouds and darkness prevailed. Even this earth with the oceans and mountains it contains, though it is unconscious, quaked like a conscious being—like a fond bride when forcibly torn from her bridegroom—like the festoons of a vine shaking under the blasts of a whirlwind. The ocean rose under the vibration of this earthquake; rivers flowed back towards their sources; peaks of lofty mountains, where countless trees had grown for ages, rolled coming to the earth; a fierce storm howled all around; the roar of the concussion became terrific; the very sun enveloped itself in awful darkness, a host of headless spirits filled the air. (Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, pages 36-7.)

All this seems to me to be exactly the same kind of hopeless nonsense we find in the Gospels; and just like the way Christians hastily turn over their pages when confronted with such specimens of Oriental rubbish, and concentrate on the way Jesus went about “doing good”, so I suspect that Buddhist champions prefer to concentrate on the fact that after all Buddha never *never* appealed to God Almighty.

Naturally, we are asked to remember “the Five, Eight, Ten, Commandments” or “the Ten Precepts” or “the Three Refuges” or “the Pitakas” or various “Suttas”. “Mendicants” are given minute directions how to behave—anything, anything than try and get work. For instance, “A mendicant should not go to the village for food at unreasonable times; let him not go in the night time. . . . A mendicant should take his noonday meal in time . . . One who follows the Buddha, in seeking for food, lodging, bed, seats, and water for cleaning robes or personal ablutions, should attend to the Law as preached by the Buddha”. This most irreverently reminds me of

the way Mother Eddy insists that all Christian Scientists should never forget, when they mention Christian Science, to mention also Mrs. Eddy and her book, *Science and Health*.

Buddhists of course have to take “vows”, and some of these are most amusing. “I take the vow” says one injunction, “to abstain from dancing, singing, music, and stage plays”. On a Buddhist TV, poor Victor Sylvester or Harry Davidson and his “old-time” dancing would be completely barred. Beethoven, Chopin, and the rest would be jammed if broadcast to Buddhists; and as for Shakespeare—well, his works would no doubt in addition be burnt. Nor must a good Buddhist use scents or ornaments, and naturally he must *never* use “a high or broad bed”.

Buddhist monks must beg, beg, all the time. They must “beg straight from house to house” though “they must say nothing” except “a pious wish on behalf of the giver”.

The great word in a Buddhist's life is “contemplation”, that is, doing nothing except “a life of self-conquest”; and this is best done in a forest. How sitting on a tree in a forest contemplating one's navel conduces to “self-conquest” I find it difficult to see, but no doubt all Buddhists will disagree with me.

Decent clothing seems one of the *bêtes noires* of pure or true Buddhism. Monks must be dressed in “cast-offs”; but here again a better way was to tear up good clothes and sew up the pieces. Sex was of course as beastly as murder and theft, and poverty was a virtue—though Rhys Davids admits that “in Buddhist countries at the present day the church is often as wealthy as it is among ourselves”. If it were worth it, I could show what a mass of hypocrisy is modern Buddhism—though it would perhaps be difficult to credit any of it to Buddha himself. How much or how little of it should influence Freethinkers is for them to find out for themselves; but in the meantime, let us have a look at one or two other aspects of Buddhism. How much can we trust the accounts handed down to us by his followers?

Rhys Davids agrees that a good deal of the Buddhist “legends” are made up from older and similar legends associated with Krishna, Rama, and Agni; but one Buddhist authority, M. Senart, “holds that Buddhism like every other system must have had a human founder and an historical origin”. On this, J. M. Robertson satirically remarks, “like the cults of Dionysos and Osiris and Herakles all of which had a historical origin. But what was that origin; and who was their human founder?” And Robertson adds,

Clearly there was no one “founder”; there was not even a group or school describable as collective founders; we are dealing with a long process of evolution from simple primitive forms. If then we reject as we do the pseudo-historical Osiris and Dionysos, why do we accept as historical Buddha and Jesus? Shall we say that behind the mythic figures of Osiris and Dionysos there may have been some remote actual man who communicated certain culture and was later worshipped by certain rites?

Needless to say that his answer to his own question was a contemptuous rejection. The late Sir J. G. Frazer however believed that both Buddha and Jesus actually lived, though much later he wrote a very appreciative preface to Dr. Couchoud's *Enigma of Jesus* which stoutly denied existence to Jesus. Robertson claimed that Frazer's argument was on a par with “that of the clerical apologists who

declare that the Resurrection of Jesus is as well attested as the assassination of Julius Caesar".

In his *Pagan Christs*, Robertson deals very fully with "the Problem of Buddhist Origins" as he calls it, and he admits that while some of the Buddhist teachings are "atheistic", yet "the legends of his own birth, and many of the narratives concerning his life, are in terms of the supernaturalist beliefs of both earlier and later beliefs". Personally, I cannot see how we shall ever be able to dis-

entangle the supernatural from any of the records of the life of Buddha, and I am really very little interested. For me, most of the teachings of Buddha, true or false, are valueless. We are not living in the days of the "mendicants", in the days when food was undoubtedly hard to get, and begging was part of the life of the times.

In other words, it is not Buddhism but Science which is saving us. The world Saviour is not Jesus or Buddha or Krishna or Osiris or any ancient God. It is Science.

## The Tragedy of Spain

By G. COCA MEDINA

I WILL BE passionately proud if THE FREETHINKER publishes this, my first article written in English, for it was in the Spanish Freethinking weekly, *El Motin* of Madrid, that I saw my first literary work printed thirty-seven years ago. That I have found in London an organ with the same living philosophy brings back to me the feeling of freshness in the old struggle, now that in Spain all is lost.

State prisoner in 1939, at the end of the Civil War, I have been twenty-one years under the incredible oppression of General Franco's Roman Catholic regime, and in this my first public statement, I want to express my fervent gratitude to the British people for the asylum that they have granted my wife and myself.

But it is difficult to explain to the British public the precise significance of Spain's political problem. I have known British intellectuals quite unable to understand it. They fail because the Spanish political problem is, paradoxically, not a political problem at all, but a religious one, and a most sinister one at that.

Great Britain was and is, the champion of reform, Protestantism and freedom. Spain was and is the champion of counter-reform, Catholicism and absolutism. In the course of time, the struggle for freedom in Britain produced a liberalism, a mutual respect for liberty that smothered hatreds: in Spain the Roman Catholic Church, true to herself, has now re-established a medieval inquisition for the practical exclusion and annihilation of every known dissenter.

The Spanish regime is essentially like that of England when Queen Mary was married to a Spanish prince, the future Philip II, King of Spain and the Universal Monarch. The ghost of bygone nightmares has become corporeal.

Wherever she is, and whatever her status the Roman Catholic Church is always alert to her opportunities. Historically outstanding among these have been St. Bartholomew's Eve, the annihilation of the Knights Templar, and Spain, 18th of July, 1936, all of them successful conspiracies, alike in design to the frustrated English plot of Guy Fawkes.

Despite the terrific slaughter of the Jews, the expulsion of the Moors and the Holy Inquisition; despite Roman Catholic "unity" relentlessly achieved, the Spanish Freethinking movement became one of the most brilliant in the world. Towards the end of the Nineteenth Century, the most illustrious Spanish intellects hoisted the flag of Freethinking with the foundation of that glorious weekly, *Las Dominicales del Libre Pensamiento*, on whose editorial staff were the Professors don Odon de Buen, don Demo'filo Lozano and don Francisco Giner de los Rios. And as this unmistakably high-minded and intellectual journal died, there jumped into the Spanish arena the formidable popular weekly, *El Motin*, genial creation of don José Nakens, whose two mottoes were: "Religion is degrading

and brutalising" and "One does not ask for Freedom; one takes it".

*El Motin*, like physical organisms, underwent enthusiastic expansion, brilliant zenith, but, alas, ultimate decay. When in 1923 I took a trip to Madrid and called on don José Nakens, to hand him my first article, he was already a bent, aged man, and deaf. My youth pleased him. "You are the only youthful man I have met in years", he said. "They are keeping out of my reach, and they do not know what is in store for them!"

In 1926, during my term as a King's soldier in Barcelona, don José Nakens died in Madrid. His daughter Isabel, following his path, published *Reflejos del Motin*, but this weekly only lasted a few years. After that, in 1930, at the downfall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, the Spanish intellectuals founded the National Laical League, but this was largely a speculative society, aiming at the legal separation of Church and State, but destitute of conversive zeal. And when the Republican Constitution of 1931 enacted a sham and postponed separation of Church and State that never became effective, the National Laical League stated that its objects were attained and dissolved itself.

Owing to its wrong approach to the basic Spanish problem, the Democratic front was left unguarded on its most sensitive flank and the circumstances were ripe for the 18th of July, 1936. The perennial Papism took advantage of the support of Hitler and Mussolini and prepared to re-establish its monopoly. The Vatican crusade against Spain had begun.

Like the Protestants of France, and the Red Cross Knights before them, Spanish Democrats and Freethinkers went to bed as usual—law abiding citizens with nothing to fear. Then came the tocsin, the terrible hour. One half of Spain was overridden by armed conspirators and thousands of Freethinkers and Democrats, men and women, were dragged from bed to market place or cross roads to be killed in a crazy carousal of bigotry, a hideous auto-da-fé. Fire, guns, sickles (it was harvest season and they were in hand), stones, cudgels; anything would do—and did.

There was still hope: still half of Spain remained. The Spanish Civil War was the obverse of the Roman Catholic crusade and the aggression was halted. But we had no help to match the German and Italian aid, and three years later the adjourned massacre was completed in the other half of Spain.

Make no mistake, the Roman Catholic crusade of the 18th of July, like its historical precedents, is of unforgiving terrorism; of theocratic bitterness. But I come from its prisons, its tortures and its infamous inquisitions. As a volunteer I met the enemy face-to-face in the trenches; they have been bitten by my fire and my mitraille. Now—my pen.

## CORRESPONDENCE

## UNFORTUNATE IMPRESSION

My I be allowed an attempt to rectify an unfortunate impression which, aided by his "brilliant student", Mr. F. A. Ridley may have given in his article "Freethought in an Age of Conformity"?

Most of us interested in our system of education (peripheral bodies like Public Schools not included) are deeply concerned about the unfortunate effects of cramming for examinations. We are, however, also aware of the great problems standing in the way of any wholesale replacement of this system. Attempts at reform have been made, particularly in the technical stream of further education where a narrow formal curriculum is widened by the inclusion of social studies as a compulsory, non-examination subject. In presenting these studies, all views are encouraged and controversy actively stimulated. There is no taboo on any opinion, all that is asked is that it be reasonably defended, based on fact, with an awareness of the logical consequences.

Is this, perhaps, where Mr. Ridley's "brilliant student" falls into error? Does he confuse "expressing real views" with expressing dogma and prejudice? Maybe he makes the mistake of thinking "real views" are a substitute for answering the questions asked; a common failing amongst examinees. It remains true, particularly in further education, that *when the question allows* a student is encouraged to give his views, but always on condition that these have been thought out. The examination papers themselves are designed to prevent the "crammer" from merely regurgitating his notes, and demand independent thought. It is also true, that in the appropriate faculties, the better degrees tend to go to the independent-minded non-conformists. As an "agnostic" and "left-winger" I received great encouragement from

## Christmas Cards

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# Have Faith!

a Catholic Professor and a Conservative tutor and only discovered their attitudes by mere chance. Again, this business of non-conformity is a wee bit overplayed. These non-conformists can become tremendous bores, airing hackneyed views as if they were great revelations, selecting facts to suit their case, and fighting battles which were won fifty years ago.

If heretics are hard to find, it might well be that the demand has fallen off. If so, why blame education? If Oxbridge can give its Firsts to the Palme Dotts, and its posts to A. J. P. Taylors, and Redbrick give its Chairs to the Asa Briggses, men of varied opinions, but all critically analytical in social appraisal; surely it may be said that our education is not failing in the task of providing critical thinkers?

L. CORINA.  
"MURDER NO CRIME"

I thank Eva Ebury for her article under the above heading in *THE FREETHINKER* last October, drawing attention to Griesinger's *History of the Jesuits*. The book is out of print but I obtained it easily enough through our County Library.

Mrs. Ebury says the book gave her many hours of undiluted pleasure. In my case, however, my pleasure in reading the 823 pages of regicides, murders, poisonings, torturings, scourgings, flagellings, thefts, etc., etc., was somewhat "diluted", as I couldn't detach myself from the victims' sufferings, the viciousness, and the horror of the whole business.

But *History of the Jesuits* is a great work and could do with some of the publicity much less worthy books have been getting lately.

It ends in 1872, unfortunately Jesuitism and Catholicism continue, and in view of their record as shown by Griesinger from official sources, it would be folly to imagine they won't use a loyal Catholic President, or anybody, or anything, else, to achieve their ends, which, by the way, they may attain if the rest of the world doesn't watch out.

DAVID L. WEBSTER.  
GUESS WHERE?

If Atheists, Freethinkers, Humanists and similar goddess scoundrels can spare a moment from their blasphemy and debauchery, I should like to draw their attention to a wall in a certain city in the British Isles, which portrays the true Christian altruism. Two touching expressions of religious sentiment have been presented for public inspection by some unknown mural cuphuists. No more than half a dozen bricks apart they read: "God is Love" and "Kick the Pope!" Further comment, I feel, would be superfluous.

KENNETH WHITE.

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