

The Freethinker

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FREETHINKER READERS will be aware that the British Transport Commission recently removed from the London Underground an advertisement exhibited and paid for by the Family Planning Association. In a statement to the press, the Commission attempted to explain this action by declaring that it is not permitted to show posters which are religiously controversial. Letters of protest, presumably from Roman Catholics, were received; therefore the posters had to be removed. The posters in question, however, were not concerned with religion at all, but with a purely secular matter on which a religious body has views, which it is trying to foist on the community. If this decision of the British Transport Commission is accepted, the Roman Catholic Church is given a complete right of veto on advertisements merely having to state that *it* considers a matter controversial in order to prevent its being publicised. This illustrates the arrogance of the Roman Catholic Church, which claims that its opposition to birth control derives from "natural law", law binding on non-Catholics also. It also reveals the spineless attitude of British Transport Commission officials in face of pressure from a minority group of religious fanatics.

Irish Example

The Catholic Church is never slow to take advantage of such weakness. This may be seen very clearly in Eire. In 1951 a Bill was introduced by the Government of Eire to produce a free health service for mothers and children. This would have been particularly beneficial in Southern Ireland, where the infant mortality rate is a disgrace. At the last moment the bishops informed the Prime Minister that they considered a free health service contrary to the moral teachings of the Church. The Prime Minister promptly abandoned the Bill, assuring the bishops that "the government would readily and immediately acquiesce in a decision of the hierarchy". The vote of Parliament and the electorate counted for nothing, and the people would not even have known why they lost their health service, had not Dr. Noel Browne, the incensed Minister of Health insisted on publishing the correspondence. He also resigned in protest.

Need for Planning

Family planning is essential in the modern world, and those who hamper the work of the Family Planning Association in the name of religion are in the highest degree anti-social. Vast as the potentialities of increased food production are, at the present moment some two-thirds of the people of the world are under-nourished, and the number who can enjoy a decent standard of life on this planet cannot be infinite. Families must be limited by birth control, unless population is to be checked in the crudest and most cruel way possible—by the availability of food. To the Roman Catholic Church, however, the mass starvation of children—provided the infants are assured by baptism of their passports to heaven—is pre-

sumably not the tragedy it appears to us.

Cruelty

From the point of view of the individual also it is most cruel to deny information on birth control to those who want it. It is cruel to wife, husband and existing children. Worst of all is the cruelty to the baby born into a world where there is no welcome for him, for only loving personal care enables a child to develop in mental and physical health. How monstrous to tell parents of five or six children that they risk hell fire for ever if they use contraceptives! How monstrous to say this to a mother living in a single room with several children and unable to buy nourishing food for them; or to a woman who

knows that she has little chance of surviving the birth of a child, and perhaps already has children whom she fears to leave motherless. But such practical and humane considerations are blandly ignored by unmarried Roman Catholic priests and bishops, who claim to be divinely appointed guardians of family life.

Parents and Children

Certainly there are parents so gifted that they can make a happy home for a dozen children, but generally the efficiency and happiness of the home declines as the number of children rises above three. Worries about health, education and money wreck havoc with the nerves of many parents. Older children are given responsibilities beyond their years, and their intellectual development may be retarded because their parents have little time to talk and play with them. Often father takes to going out every evening to escape from the discomforts of home, while the wife's interests become more and more narrow, and the quality of the marriage deteriorates. People who have too many children often miss all the joys of parenthood, and have only the cares. In this century our standard of child care has improved immeasurably. Parents and public authorities alike now tend to regard the individual child as a personality in his own right. Parents can enjoy their children. Instead of being regarded merely as another mouth to feed, a child in this country is considered an asset to society. Birth control in fifty years has given children a status that Christianity, with its supposed moral standard, could not give in nineteen centuries!

Experience shows that the quality of family life is higher in planned families, but the celibate, exclusively male priests who claim divine authority to regulate marital relations are not concerned with realities. They base their opposition to birth control on abstract reasoning from assumed premises. They claim that the primary purpose of sex is procreation and hence conclude that marital relations with the possibility of conception deliberately excluded are contrary to God's "natural law". Some modern Catholic writers have rejected the teachings of such medieval theologians as St. Augustine, who considered it sinful for married couples to indulge in intercourse except for the purpose of procreation, but the pre-

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Catholic Church v. the Planned Family

By MARGARET McILROY

sent Catholic view of birth control clearly betrays the influence of these "saints", with their morbid fear of sex. **No Dispensation**

The prohibition of birth control is absolute, no dispensation being granted for any reason. Couples who have good reason for wishing to avoid the birth of a child are kindly permitted to make use of the so-called "safe period", whose unreliability is notorious. If pregnancy would be disastrous, the Church's only advice is to abstain completely from marital relations. The strain this must put on a marriage is obvious to all normal people, but the late Pope Pius XII argued to his own satisfaction that since God commanded abstinence, such abstinence must be within the power of a good Christian. On the other hand theologians have said that a woman should not refuse the "marriage debt" if her husband requires it, lest his unsatisfied desires lead him into the mortal sin of seeking satisfaction elsewhere.

It is worth noting that the Roman Catholic attitude to birth control is not based on biblical teaching, but on "natural law". Catholics are fond of quoting from Genesis (Chap. 38) the story of Onan, who, we are told, was killed by God as a punishment for an act of "birth control". Onan, however, had maliciously refused to give a child to a woman who desperately wanted one, so

opposition to family planning based on this legend is ridiculous and dishonest.

The Family Planning Association

The Family Planning Association is an organisation doing splendid social work, which has made life better for thousands of parents and children. Lord Chorley, a Vice-President of the Association, recently referred in the House of Lords to the vendetta which the Roman Catholic Church was conducting against the Family Planning Association. It is disgraceful that a public body such as the British Transport Commission should yield to pressure from the Catholic minority, and the Commission must be forced to rescind this high-handed and undemocratic decision.

What Can Be Done?

What can be done? There are several projects.

The National Secular Society has launched a petition, copies of which may be obtained from 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1, and every reader is urged to write a personal letter of protest to the Commercial Advertising Officer, British Transport Commission, Transad House, Leicester Square Station, London, W.C.2. Letters to MPs are also to be recommended while, on Saturday, March 11th, the NSS intends to picket the BTC offices in Marylebone Road, London.

The Holy Spear

By H. CUTNER

AMONG THE LESSER KNOWN "relics" surrounding Jesus is the Spear which pierced his side at the Crucifixion. It is a well known story and has often been illustrated though (I think I am right in saying) no one really knows which was the side pierced—left or right. But the truly amazing thing about the story is that only John relates it. No commentator has been able to explain why the three writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, appear to have known nothing about it.

The Church however soon made the story as well known as the Crucifixion itself. Though John evidently did not know, or was unable to invent, the name of the gallant Roman soldier who pierced the side of Jesus, a name duly appeared, Longinus, and his Spear was known as the Holy Spear. Even more than this followed. He was canonised, and Calvin in his *Treatise on Relics* tells us that the Church then provided him with two bodies—one at Mantua, and the other at Notre Dame de l'Isle at Lyons.

But before this happened, it appears that after piercing the side of Jesus with his lance, he was immediately struck with blindness, and therefore recognised that Jesus was the Son of God, and rubbed his eyes with the blood on the lance. This medical treatment was infallible, and Longinus immediately recovered his sight. He therefore—quite naturally—decided to become a monk (in Cappadocia) though, curiously, there were obviously no monks in his day. In any case, he was then taken to Jerusalem and beheaded; exactly why is not clear. His head was put on a gate in Jerusalem, and then thrown into a sewer.

As this was a too easy way of narrating the life and death of a saint of the Roman Church, some additions were made which prove the divinity of that Church. It appears that in Cappadocia there lived a poor old woman who was blind and who went to the Holy City of Jerusalem for a miracle to regain her sight. In a dream she beheld Longinus who begged her to find his head for, if she did, she would regain her sight. Needless to add, she had no

difficulty in finding it and thus regained her sight. Thereupon Longinus appeared to her again with her son "in glory"—a son who had died young. And everybody was happy. The story of St. Longinus is one of hundreds, all absolutely true, fully recorded by the Church for the edification of all believers.

But for us it does not exactly end there, for here it is that the all-believing Christian Hitler comes in. According to the *Sunday Dispatch*, the famous Spear used by Longinus at the Crucifixion was miraculously preserved, and for the Holy Fuhrer it was literally genuine. It had long found a home in Austria though, strangely enough, we have no records of any amazing miracles performed through its worship unlike so many other Holy Relics which regularly performed them by the dozen. Hitler was convinced that with the Spear at his side he would be as invincible in war as he was in everything else.

Not only Hitler, but a noted Austrian historian, Dr. Stein, vouched for its genuineness; and when Hitler eventually entered Austria as a Conqueror, he was presented with the famous Spear though it must be recorded that at least some of the Austrian nobility who saw the ceremony, "stirred uneasily", we are told. Though it is the fashion these days to claim that Germany's glorious Leader was *not* really religious, the *Sunday Dispatch* quotes Hitler as saying before he left Austria.

I would now give thanks to Him Who let me return to my homeland in order that I might lead it into my German Reich.

This should settle the question but, unfortunately, the writer of the article credits Hitler with a strong devotion to the occult, and wants us to believe that when he referred to "Him Who" he really meant the Devil—for which there is not a scrap of evidence. Even a criminal lunatic like Hitler could not possibly have believed that the Devil would bring him victories. In any case the Devil is part of Christianity.

No, Hitler was religious all right.

Testament from a Spanish Prison

By COLIN McCALL

ON DECEMBER 9TH, 1960, THE FREETHINKER published Señor G. Coca's moving personal testimony to "The Tragedy of Spain". "I come from its prisons, its tortures and its infamous inquisitions", he wrote. Now we have more testimony from its prisons, but this time from men still incarcerated, with the appearance of a new pamphlet, *Franco's Prisoners Speak*, published by the Spanish Ex-Servicemen's Association (General Secretary, A. Roa, 210 Bravington Road, London, W.9), price 1s. 6d.

The pamphlet consists of letters to the Spanish Minister of Justice and to an American clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Owens, and a list of political prisoners and their sentences in the Burgos Central Prison. "The problem of this prison is the problem of Spain", says the Foreword. "Here is the situation that Franco's regime is trying to hide from the world". And there can be little doubt that the prisoners who are listed have taken considerable risk in issuing the documents. Let us hope there will be a good response to their call for international solidarity. And in this connection all readers can help by buying "Freedom for Spain" stamps from Señor Roa at 4 for 3d., and sticking them on all their letters. And, of course, by getting the pamphlet itself.

The letter addressed to Mr. Owens sets out to correct what it calls "a tendentious account of the conditions in this prison and of the serious political oppression in Spain" as given by the Spanish Ambassador in Washington, Señor Areilza. The Ambassador had, it seems, set out to prove that the prisoners were "criminals", "traitors" who endangered the security of the State, but that their prison conditions were nevertheless good. According to the pamphlet neither of these statements is true. The 399 political prisoners at the time of writing were, in fact, "democrats, persecuted, condemned and imprisoned for defending in Spain the fundamental freedom of speech, the press, association, meetings and religion proclaimed by the United Nations and the Rights of Man Charter as well as the basic demands claimed by the International Labour Office for the workers of any country, such as a minimum wage for an 8-hour day, equal pay for equal work of women and young people, adequate unemployment insurance", etc. Some of them were also imprisoned for "having defended (at times with arms) the cause of the Allies in the war against Hitler Germany . . ." These are, of course, the kind of people that the Franco regime would regard as criminals and traitors; they are in fact a menace to the security of the State—when the State is a police state!

As for the Burgos prison. It is, the prisoners say, about 900 metres above sea level "in a region of extreme climatic changes, with winter temperatures reaching 14°C below zero (5°F), yet the prison has no heating".

Thus both solitary confinement cells and common rooms with 55 to 60 prisoners each are very cold during the long winter months. The majority of us suffer from chilblains and festering chaps, mainly on our hands and in our ears, yet we cannot enjoy, even in our beds, the minimum endurable temperature. Constant cold transforms the life of prisoners into a permanent suffering. Moreover, the premises are in a deplorable condition of disrepair: the windows do not close, a window panes are broken, and not being replaced, only a few badly constructed toilets, badly working showers with hot water provided only one hour per week, corridor floors which are never washed and, despite our efforts to keep them clean, have become sources of dirt and infection, inadequate electric lighting, etc.

They assert, too, that food is bad (they give specimen

menus), and that a whole book would be needed to describe the sanitary conditions, though they pay tribute to the efforts of the new Medical Officer, Dr. Luis Escribano. Things have improved, they say, since his arrival in April 1959. He takes an interest in the sick and strives to better the sanitary conditions, but he is obviously labouring under difficulties. To take but two examples: the X-ray apparatus is out of order; so too is the disinfecting chamber, so infirmary blankets and mattresses can't be disinfected and are never washed.

Señor Areilza claimed that prisoners had freedom of religion, but the pamphlet denies this. Presence at all the Catholic services is, it says, "obligatory for all the prisoners without exception, and it is considered an obligatory parade" announced by a bugle . . ." (italics in original.). Thus, "despite repeated statements by the overwhelming majority of the prisoners that they are not Catholics", they are "forced under pain of severe punishment to attend Mass and other services".

Several times, without result [they say], we have requested that the attendance at church services be made optional according to the official Prison Regulations. Our friend José Satué, in prison for the last 12 years and recently serving his sentence in the provincial prison of Salamanca, where on his request he was not obliged to attend religious services, was lately transferred to Burgos and made to attend the services despite his repeated requests to be excused from attending. He was even threatened with severe punishment if he persisted in his request. Neither is it possible to practise other religions since we have never had dealings other than with Catholic priests. Our Protestant prisoners, including several Germans, have no choice but to join the "compulsory parade" and attend Catholic services . . . In this prison Catholic religion is practised with inquisitorial intolerance.

Clearly there is a contradiction between the picture of Burgos Central Prison presented by the Spanish Ambassador in Washington and that presented by the prisoners themselves in this remarkable pamphlet. Who, then, is telling the truth? The prisoners suggest a simple way of finding out. They request "in the name of all the Spanish political prisoners" that:

International Commissions of the United Nations, or the Economic and Social Council, or the League of the Rights of Man, or the International Association of Lawyers, or Doctors, or the International Red Cross, or the International Association of Journalists, or any other responsible and reputable organisation, should be allowed by General Franco's government to visit the prison, speak to us freely and find out the truth for themselves.

And they call on all their friends to exert pressure on the Franco government to obtain permission for such an international commission to visit Burgos prison and to support the demand for an amnesty for all political prisoners and exiles.

This is a cause which all Freethinkers will wish to support, and I hope they will give it as much publicity as they can. Please write to Señor Roa for stamps and pamphlet now.

KERB CRAWLING

WHEN AN "office bearer" in a church appeared in Edinburgh Burgh Court on December 30th, 1960, on a charge of "kerb-crawling", he may have thought he would be more leniently treated if he sat in the dock "clutching a Bible". Or he may have been genuinely contrite, and the incident may have been, as an agent told the Court, "completely out of character". Yet eight women and a 17-year-old girl were involved in the offences, and Bailie George Hedderwick fined the man £10.

This Believing World

An awful tragedy has descended on the Lord's Day Observance Society. They have just lost their beloved President, Sir Cecil Wakeley, surgeon and cancer expert. Sir Cecil is still in full agreement with the Society as far as observing Sunday as the Lord's Day, but he now disagrees that Sunday should be made a day of misery—and, as everybody knows, the chief claim to fame enjoyed by the LDOS is that it has always done its utmost to make Sunday a Day of Misery *par excellence*, we are not surprised at Sir Cecil's resignation.

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All these years he has helped to perpetuate a miserable Sunday, and now he thinks it really is too much for his Society constantly to attack the Queen and Prince Philip because they prefer to act as human beings on the Lord's Day, or to attack Princess Margaret because she bought some sweets on a Sunday; and he now believes Sunday should be a happy day—exactly like naughty and sinful Secularists. In spite of this, we hope the LDOS will stick to its guns, and move heaven and earth to keep our Christian Sunday a nightmare of misery for ever and ever.

★

Well, well. After telling us that the Authorised Version of the Bible was God's Precious Word for 350 years, and savagely attacking all "heretics" who dared to say otherwise with fire, sword, and prison, our Christian guardians are now offering us a more or less different version based on a better translation, more up-to-date, and—holy of holies!—more intelligible. We may deal with this more fully later on when we have examined it, but in the meantime we applaud the resolve to make the Holy Word so clear that it can at least be understood. The more the Bible is understood the more it will be seen to be, not only a hotch-potch of Oriental myths, legends, and very dubious history, but also even more dubious morals. Do we still have to hate our parents as Jesus taught, and are all "witches" to be put to death as ordered by Holy Writ?

★

Continuing his search for God—not for himself of course, but for the apathetic readers of *Sunday Pictorial*—Mr. Norman Price poses the big question, "What Does God Look Like?" in a flaming headline. Now, this is a most unfair and absurd question. Every thorough-going Christian knows perfectly well what the Creator of the Universe looks like. He looks exactly like Jesus Christ does in the thousand and one portraits made so famous for us by the Renaissance painters—a white European completely *unlike* the swarthy, Arab-like inhabitants of Palestine in the beginning of our era.

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To picture Jesus a Jew would amount almost to blasphemy; and, naturally, if the Father looks like the Son, he—God Almighty—could never look like a benevolent old Jew with an enormous white beard as some mistaken artists have depicted him. More and more our Christian teachers insist that Jesus looks like God—is God in fact. So why ask such an absurd question? All Christians *know*.

★

ITV's Sunday religion the other week gave us pictures of Canon Southcott who believes in carrying Anglo-Catholicism into people's homes if they won't go to church. We had a delightful film showing him engaged in that relic of religious cannibalism—changing bread into the Body of Christ and wine into his Blood. And from the solemn and hapless features of the people who took part in the ceremony, it was rather difficult to see if they enjoyed

the meal. We should hazard a guess they didn't. But who knows?

★

A specimen of "The Sterling Tract Enterprise" has reached us, entitled "The Reason Why" by Mr. R. A. Laidlaw who calls himself "a Proprietor", and who wrote it for the members of his staff. It took us back to that ancient and silly type of pious Victorianism which filled millions of tracts with drivel about God, the Bible, and "Is there Divine forgiveness?" boiling it all down to the Bible. There is not an original line in all its 58 pages. Drearily and solemnly it tells us what God, Jesus or Paul said about God's love, or the love of Jesus, mostly with "Christ has done it all" type of argument. Are there people who are influenced by this rubbish? Why do we spend £100,000,000 on education if this kind of tract can be taken seriously?

Truth and Abuse

THERE ARE MANY TRUTHS to which mankind turns a blind eye, because they shake his complacency, or cause him to think for himself, thereby forcing him to reject what he has previously accepted as correct.

Jeremy Bentham, and others were laughed at, because, by laughing, calling such people eccentrics, and giving the word an unpleasant meaning, the common populace were able to carry on in their usual third-rate manner. It must be pointed out that "eccentrics" are often people of high intelligence. Those who deride them had better first make sure just which of them is in the right.

Progress! Ever onward! the great cry, but even a half-wit must have realised that progress is not achieved by sitting still and accepting whatever is given out as the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Be revolutionary in your mental activities, never mind what grandmother has to say, she probably does not know that Queen Victoria is dead. Age is not synonymous for wisdom, all too frequently the elderly have become so deeply entrenched in their rut that they cannot see over the top.

The man who travels to and from work every day, following the same old routine for years, soon loses interest in his surroundings, and he also misses anything that an alternative route might have to offer. It is the same with the mind. Travelling excessively over the same old, usually trivial, ground, results in disinterestedness; in course of time, thought comes to mean little, if any, more than reflex and routine.

The little trodden paths of the mind may prove difficult at first, but they are rewarding, as anyone who cares, or dares, to try will discover.

RODNEY BROWN.

KINGDOM OF THE BLIND

A True Story

A Catholic pedagogue's only retort
To secular logic and rational thought
Was a pitiful parrot-cry—all that he knew:
"I've been warned against list'n'ing to people like you."

By clerical veto his intellect bound
With shackles of iron, his gaze on the ground;
Of critical scholarship never a clue;
Forbidden to "listen to people like you."

Ear-stopped and blinkered, and blinded complete;
Nor attack nor defence, but a line of retreat
To a formula, fashion'd where thought is taboo:
"I've been warned against list'n'ing to people like you."

W.H.D.

THE FREETHINKER

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

TELEPHONE: HOP 2717

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 15s.; half-year, 17s. 6d.; three months, 8s. 9d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25.)

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1

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. (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, January 24th, 7.15 p.m.: Dr. D. STARK MURRAY, "Building Everywhere. For What?"

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, January 22nd, 6.30 p.m.: Councillor E. MARSTON, "Current Council Affairs".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday January 22nd, 7.15 p.m.: J. P. MURACCIOLE, "Archaeology and the New Testament".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, January 15th, 2.30 p.m.: B. BIGGINS, "Burns the Rebel".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, January 22nd, 11 a.m.: M. CRANSTON, M.A., "Francis Bacon in Science Literature and Government".

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11.) Thursday, January 26th, 7.45 p.m.: COLIN McCALL, "Freethought and Fiction".

Notes and News

ADRIAN PIGOTT left London last week for a stay in Malta, an island that he knows extremely well. In an accompanying letter to that which appears in our Correspondence column, Mr. Pigott informed us intriguingly that he was going "to work on something which might eventually interest you". Readers, we know, will be as interested as we are.

★
MR. PIGOTT'S three articles on "The Scandal of Sicily" (December 2nd, 9th and 16th, 1960) are to be reprinted in the Chicago bi-monthly magazine, *Ia Parola del Popolo*, which appears in Italian and English, and carries many articles against the Roman Catholic Church's interference in political and economic fields.

★
"THESE TALKS ARE ADDRESSED to the ordinary man and woman, whose attitude towards religion is that they do not quite know what they believe." Those were the calm

opening words that belied the storm to come seven years ago. They were, in fact, the first words of Margaret Knight's BBC broadcasts on *Morals Without Religion*, later issued in printed form with other essays and published by Dennis Dobson. We are pleased to report that this valuable little book is now available again (3rd impression), price 10s. 6d.

★
AMONG INTERESTING forthcoming theatrical attractions in London, will be the Mermaid Theatre's production of Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*, due to open on Thursday, February 16th. The part of Borkman will be played by Bernard Miles and that of Ella Rentheim by his wife, Josephine Wilson. *Borkman* will be directed by Julius Gellner and designed by Michael Stringer, who was responsible for the design of the notable Mermaid production of Brecht's *Galileo* last year. A new translation by Norman Ginsbury will be used on this occasion, but it is worth recalling that the well-known Rationalist, William Archer was responsible more than anyone else, for introducing Ibsen to English audiences.

★
THE BBC "BOOKMAN" programme on television on Sunday, January 8th, included readings from the famous Jesuit sermon on Hell from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which has recently been issued as a paperback, and which we hope to review soon in these columns. For the moment we content ourselves with an excerpt. "All the filth of the world, all the offal and scum of the world, we are told, shall run there as to a vast reeking sewer when the terrible conflagration of the last day has purged the world. The brimstone too, which burns there in such prodigious quantity fills all hell with its intolerable stench; and the bodies of the damned themselves exhale such a pestilential odour that, as Saint Bonaventure says, one of them alone would suffice to infect the whole world. The very air of this world, that pure element, becomes foul and unbreathable when it has been long enclosed. Consider then what must be the foulness of the air of hell. Imagine some foul and putrid corpse that has lain rotting and decomposing in the grave, a jelly-like mass of liquid corruption. Imagine such a corpse a prey to flames, devoured by the fire of burning brimstone and giving off dense choking fumes of nauseous loathsome decomposition. And then imagine this sickening stench, multiplied a millionfold and a millionfold again from the millions upon millions of fetid carcasses massed together in the reeking darkness, a huge and rotting human fungus. Imagine all this, and you will have some idea of the horror of the stench of hell.—But this stench is not, horrible though it is, the greatest physical torment to which the damned are subjected . . ."

★
The Observer (8/1/61) published a letter from our reader, W. E. Nicholson, correcting a repetition by Lord Brand of "the hoary old myth"—as Mr. Nicholson termed it—that Bradlaugh had refused to take the oath in the House of Commons. It is hardly to be expected that the myth will ever die, no matter how often it is exposed, said Mr. Nicholson, "but it is strange that it should apparently be believed by people who should know better", and he referred those interested to the *Life of Bradlaugh* by his daughter and J. M. Robertson.

—NEXT WEEK—

NATURAL THEOLOGY

By JAMES MacCLUSKEY

Communism and Catholicism

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

WORLD COMMUNISM is a vast organisation which, with no internal democratic restraints, is spreading its political power outside along with a dire threat to intellectual freedom. This tendency is important to Freethinkers of all kinds, Secularists, Humanists, Rationalists, etc., who can live and work happily and effectively only in freedom.

There is one aspect of Communism we must first examine because, as many Freethinkers are Atheists, unthinking and malicious persons deliberately confuse them with Communists simply on that ground. Religious publicists particularly, and many old-fashioned political thinkers, constantly refer to "Atheistic Communism" in such a way as to leave the impression that all Communists are Atheists which is near enough to the truth and that all Atheists are Communists which is very far from the truth. Bertrand Russell is both an uncompromising Atheist and an uncompromising anti-communist. I too am both.

There are, however, some ideas we share with Communists as, e.g. that food is good for you, that culture is desirable and that a prosperous society can be attained only through Science. But we are not on those grounds of agreement regarded as Communists or fellow-travellers. It is simply identity of thought about Atheism, which both Secularists and Communists regard as the only legitimate starting point for a proper view of the Universe, that has led to a fashion of speech in religious circles unjust to non-communist Atheists. But that is the sort of chicanery we expect of religionists.

As I think Atheism is a necessary part of the philosophy of any sound scientist may I shortly say why?

It is said, for example, that last year God deliberately caused the Agadir earthquake and the Chilean tidal waves. This only makes the problem of these catastrophes unnecessarily more difficult, since theologians have to set to and write books and articles trying to explain the senseless brutality of God's conduct, and the writings on the theology of the subject are sure to be contested by other theologians for years or centuries—theology is like that. But a scientist can give a simple natural explanation of the earthquake and tidal waves which dispenses with the clumsy God device. Again, we used to be told that epidemics of disease were due to God's anger with people, a preposterous and totally unproved and unprovable assumption, but theologians again have got into a huddle and provided acres of attempted justification for this view. But we now have a very simple scientific explanation for epidemics and still simpler ways of preventing them. If a scientist is on the job epidemics do not occur at all whether God is having tantrums or not. So that in attempting a view of the Universe we find the god idea is not only unnecessary, it is useless, cumbersome, a waste of time and money and a general nuisance, particularly as "God" has not been shown to exist but to be simply the survival of a primitive childish superstition.

For any pulpiteer to suggest that such an attitude is necessarily communistic is malicious lunacy; just as silly as to suggest that all redheaded girls are bandy. Or as foolish as to expect logic and honesty from priests and parsons.

What makes Communism such a menace for us is that it is the modern version of medieval Catholicism; the two faiths are but the two sides of the same authoritarian medal. But while modern Catholicism is now forced to live in more or less democratic countries, its power to punish the merest heterodoxy—swift, sure and redoubtable

in the past—is now confined to the mean and trivial threats of blackmail it so commonly employs, mostly without effect, except in benighted areas such as Eire, Quebec, Spain and Portugal. But Communism, within the borders or its vast domain, can still inflict the extreme penalty without appeal, on dissidents from the "party line" in any sphere of thought. It was a severe shock to admirers of Soviet Science to find the fantastic rubbish on Genetics put out by a charlatan named Lysenko, adopted by the Academy of Agricultural Sciences, and N. I. Vavilov, a world-famous geneticist who opposed Lysenko, banished to Siberia where he died in 1942. This exactly repeated the Galileo story. Stalin and the politicians on the side of Marxist orthodoxy were the Holy Office on the side of "Holy Writ". Soviet power over men's minds in Russia is as great as or greater than that of the medieval Church and just as ruthless. The Soviet Union is just another Catholic Church: the god is Dialectical Materialism, an abstraction like the Catholic god; the sacred books are the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin; the Kremlin is the Vatican; the present Soviet Pope is Krushchev; the Politburo is the Holy Office; the College of Cardinals is the Supreme Soviet; the Communist bishops and clergy throughout the world are the Party officials and bosses. The Communist doctrine as laid down in Marx and Engels and in the commentaries of Lenin and Stalin is there for total and absolute belief like the Christian Bible and the vapourings of the Fathers. And I am given to understand that the Communist sacred books are just as much open to challenge as the Bible and the Fathers. But for the Soviet or Chinese citizen it is a simple question of belief or be damned here and hereafter. Just as in the Middle Ages a Catholic heretic or unbeliever was tortured and burned or murdered in some way, so the Soviet citizen, no matter how valuable, who rejects the Marxist canon is sent to Siberia or denied employment or sent down a cellar to have his brains blown out by an assassin at the bottom step; he is purged like millions before him. It is the absolute and irresponsible power of frightened fanatics that counts, not truth.

In this there is no democracy. I cannot be a member of any community for the executive body of which I have no free vote by secret ballot and for the removal of which or of individual members I again have no vote. For that reason, if for no other, I cannot be either a Communist or a Catholic. When I have been called a Communist I have replied that I dropped one religion and do not propose to take on another. I cannot belong to a society in which I cannot read, think, speak or publish what I believe and like without punishment and above all I refuse to adopt a belief simply on the orders of somebody else.

All the evils inherent in these moral rejections are essential parts of the structures of Communism and Catholicism. The free mind repudiates both.

A TRIBUTE TO MR. CUTNER

As Herbert Cutner is in his eightieth year, the National Secular Society is making the 1961 Annual Dinner a tribute to Mr. Cutner's unique contribution to the British Free-thought movement. The Dinner will be held in the Pavilions Arms, Westminster on Saturday, March 4th, and will be followed by a Dance. Tickets will be one guinea obtainable from the Secretary of the National Secular Society.

Under the Yoke of the Tibetan Buddha

By M. DERNOS

(Translated from the French Freethought paper, *La Raison* by F. A. RIDLEY)

DURING 1958, when a revolt against his monastic regime compelled the Dalai Lama to take refuge in India, a howl of horror was raised in the West. Upon all hands one heard such statements as, "it is a veritable outrage to deprive the unhappy Tibetans of the presence of their spiritual chief".

Later, it became known that the Dalai Lama, a sovereign ruler in the Potala Palace overlooking Lhasa where, like the Pope in the Vatican, he combined the spiritual and secular power, had taken along with him several hundreds of thousands of francs of the old coinage, an act of genuine compassion designed to correct the too obvious accumulation of treasure by a professedly spiritual hierarchy.

Just at present the veil is lifted over the hitherto mysterious Buddhist regime in Tibet; a statistical inquiry has at last become possible which a number of European journalists have recently commented upon—e.g. J. E. Vidal in an article that appeared in the December, 1959, issue of the journal *Economy and Politics*. The net result of which has been to bring into sharp relief the obscurantist features of this Tibetan theology. In connection with which, we may relevantly cite the testimony given by another famous observer, Saint Simon, who in 1825 visited the Royal States [of which the Pope was then the secular ruler—F.A.R.] where he noted "the lack of agriculture, of industries, and of labour and the simultaneous existence of hordes of beggars. Both these Christian and Buddhist theocracies, whilst separated by a century in time, present remarkable points of similarity.

In Tibet, out of a population of around 1,200,000, we note the existence of: (a) the governmental entourage of the Dalai Lama, (b) the noble families, and (c) the monastic hierarchy.

Together, the above groups constitute about 3 per cent of the entire population. In addition, we must add to the above computation 150,000 monks and nuns, Buddhism's Church Militant. Of the remaining (97 per cent) of the population, 94 per cent were serfs and 6 per cent were slaves.

The land [Tibet's Real Property in an agrarian economy F.A.R.] was divided in the following proportions: 38.9 per cent belonged to the government; 24.3 to the nobility; 36.8 to the monasteries. Thus, all told, the Church owned 75 per cent of the total landed property.

To the Church also, legally belonged the persons of the land-workers and of the shepherds and herdsmen. All such serfs belonged to the landed estates, and could be sold or loaned to forced labour along with those estates, any time that their proprietors desired. The proprietors were legally entitled to break up their families, hire them out and flog escaped serfs to death. The status of the slave was hereditary. No wages, only the most scanty rations and the sparsest clothing were allotted to them.

No one need spin us the yarn that the above social conditions represent necessary economic evils. In our 20th century such excuses will not hold water. Exactly the opposite! It is precisely the kashd (the Lamaist hierarchy) which, as soon as it acquired power, imposed a regime of the most reactionary economic nature, forbidding the attachment of wheels to the ploughs and the exploitation of the mineral resources of the country.

But, let us emphasise it afresh. What a shocking exploitation of men submitted to this social order in the ostensible

service of religion! The Catholic "Corporative State" can be relevantly compared with this Tibetan feudal regime. In neither is any kind of progress safe. Labour, industry commerce, agriculture, all are in equal danger from regimes of such a nature.

As in the case of Christ, so Buddha also has given expression to some fine ethical sentiments. But for whom were they intended? Obviously for the man in the street. They carry no weight with the clerical hierarchies who continue to ignore them. Such hierarchies devote themselves exclusively to the exaltation of the Celestial Lord and Master, whence their own absolute power derives by a logical deduction. Between the Christian and the Buddhist religions, there is no real difference in nature but only in the methods employed.

For in both cases a spiritual monopoly represents the common basis of this exploitation, one which does not tolerate either indifference or opposition.

Every clerical hierarchy labours unceasingly in order to create such an absolute theocracy, no matter what may be the name of the religion to which it pays lip-service.

[Translator's footnote: The above article may serve a salutary purpose in enlightening our contemporary Theosophists who have taught their dupes to regard Tibet as the Holy Land of the Mahatmas, mystics, and similar mountebanks—F.A.R.]

CORRESPONDENCE

NEW YEAR PLEDGE

As one who is fond of animals to the point of being maudlin, I am saddened by the tales of unbelievable cruelty to our dumb friends which have come to my notice over the years.

Since its inception nearly a century ago, the National Secular Society has been a sedulous opponent of cruelty to animals. It has a record in this field worthy of the highest possible praise. As we enter 1961, let all members of the Society and animal lovers in general pledge themselves anew to the highly laudable task of protecting our evolutionary animal friends. It is truly one of the most honourable jobs to which man can direct his energies.

KENNETH WHITE.

ROMAN CATHOLIC PRESSURE

In your issue of January 6th, Dr. J. V. Duhig has revealed a very important truth about the Roman Catholic Church which is not usually realised, viz. that the "Holy Church" is far less formidable than it pretends itself to be. Too many non-RCs become disheartened as they listen to the plausible papal propaganda which is dished out. In reality it is a collection of half-truths which serve as a facade to conceal the fact that the Church is on the down-grade.

As a concrete example of the deceptive papal propaganda with which Britons are inundated, we are frequently told of the increasing number of Romanists in Britain; these figures do look imposing, but the losses sustained are very seldom mentioned. Every year 3,500 Roman Catholics transfer to the Church of England and Eire loses thousands annually by emigration to Britain. Losses through "lapsing" are extensive. (In 1955 it was found that half the flock in Holland had lapsed. *Universe*, 18/11/55).

But these European losses are trivial compared with the tremendous defections elsewhere. In 1960 alone, the Vatican has lost millions of its adherents in China, Cuba and the Congo; but the greatest backslidings are occurring in South America. *The Guardian* of January 21st, 1960, published a most significant report from a Belgian Jesuit who had spent 3 years examining conditions in the various republics. He was a sociologist, and he came to the reluctant conclusion that the "Roman Catholic religion in Latin America is a decaying creed": and, that unless some drastic remedies were introduced immediately there would

be a second Reformation in South America, with fatal results for the Vatican. He recommended the immediate importation of 170,000 priests! However, as the Vatican cannot produce enough clergy for Europe, this request cannot be satisfied.

Dr. Duhig ended his excellent article by emphasising the necessity for "calling the Church's bluff. It's easy; let's try it". How very true this is! Your letter column is commendably open to opinions from all and sundry. Yet how seldom does a Catholic correspondent have the courage or ability to reply to the many anti-Vatican items which you publish. The truth is that when Romanists are confronted with unpleasant facts, they find themselves entirely unable to give any logical reply.

ADRIAN PIGOTT.

"PRIESTLINESS"

That scholarly and grave Mr. Bennett and unscholarly and flippant Mr. Snook should agree in their aversion to parsons, is not so odd as might at first appear. There are two main reasons for the unpopularity of the parson.

The first is that priestliness is the quality which distinguishes man from the animal—we are therefore all of us priests in so far as we are human; and the priest has therefore chosen the most difficult of the professions—the one in which he is most likely to fail, and the one in which his failure is most likely to be spotted.

The second is that those of us who have not chosen to be priests are secretly ashamed of our failure to accept the challenge of our humanity. Consequently we tend either to introject ourselves into the priest-image and grovel, or else to project our shame at it and sneer.

(Dr.) RICHARD HOPE.

REPLY TO THE ABOVE

Dr. Richard Hope's letter, of which he very kindly sent me a preview, misled me at first into thinking that by *priestliness* he meant a high regard for ethical principles. If that is just what he did mean I should have been with him, though I could not agree that priests have any monopoly of virtue. I asked my friend to define his use of the word *priestliness*. But I was disappointed when he wrote that by it he meant "man's obsessive interest in the Great Unknown, and of the scientific, philosophical, and religious systems into which that interest has burgeoned out". If he meant ethics to be included he did not say so. And that is unfortunate, as a regard for ethics is, I think, a very important characteristic of a mature human being.

Now I confess I have no "obsessive interest in the Great Unknown", although a not uncommon experience of mine has been to stand, as it were, on the brink of the unknown. I believe that the truth should induce in us humility, and I am a humble man in my quest for the truth so far as it can be ascertained.

For my part, I neither "grovel" nor "sneer" where men of the Church are concerned. But the "challenge to our humanity" seems to me to be that which Schweitzer has posited—to think. Through thought we acquire what he has called *inwardness*. We gain knowledge of ourselves and of other people. We become individuals with personalities of our own. We become enlarged. Our sympathies are quickened, and we find ourselves in almost mystical unity with those human beings and those forces in life that would preserve and enhance life. Thinking becomes feeling in a profound sense, and a man or a woman who both thinks and feels deeply is to me a human being worthy of our admiration and love.

G. I. BENNETT

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11th, 1961. Present: Mrs. E. Venton (Vice-President) in the chair; Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Trask, Messrs. Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornbrook, McIlroy, Mills, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths), and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Ridley, Arthur, Corina and Johnson. New members were admitted to Birmingham, Marble Arch and North London Branches which with 1 individual member made 7 in all. It was agreed to try to sell the pamphlet, *Franco's Prisoners Speak* (published by the Spanish Ex-Servicemen's Association and reviewed in this issue) and "Freedom for Spain" stamps. An encouraging letter had been received from the San Juan (Trinidad) Branch enclosing a donation to the Building Fund. It was agreed to despatch a gift of books to the Branch to form the basis of their proposed library, and to ask readers to send books direct to the Secretary, Mr. J. Birbal, 19 Saddle Road, San Juan, Trinidad, West Indies, if they could spare them. The British Transport Commission banning of a Family Planning Association advert was discussed at some length. The petition against the ban had met with a good response, and further copies would be produced. A Working Committee consisting of Mr. and Mrs. McIlroy and Mrs. Ebury would prepare plans for a poster-parade outside the offices of the BTC on the second Saturday in March. Leaflets and handbills, as well as posters, were envisaged. It was unanimously agreed that the 1961 Annual Dinner on Saturday, March 4th, should take the form of a tribute to Mr. H. Cutner for his unique services to the movement. It would be followed by a dance. Mr. Ebury handed over the usual monthly £5 from North London Branch for the Building Fund. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, February 15th.

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