

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXXI—No. 6

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE to imagine that the problem of the pressure of population on the means of subsistence was virtually unknown before Malthus took it in hand from what was then a scientific standpoint. In Professor Norman Himes's *Medical History of Contraception* (1936)—now a classic, by the way—will be found detailed surveys of the work of very early pioneers and it would surprise many people to find how many of these old sociologists were on the right track.

In any case, we must not forget that for Malthus it was what he called the "Law of Population" which he pressed. He insisted that population tended to grow faster than the means of subsistence, but, as a clergyman, he had one remedy only—late marriage. Hence the almost immediate "split" in the ranks of his Malthusian followers, those who favoured artificial contraception, and those who were in favour of late marriage or complete abstinence. And it was only a little later that quite a lot of "family planners" (as they would be called now) began to see that one need not be a Malthusian to believe in the necessity of Birth Control.

## Birth Control Not New

Here again it would be quite a mistake to imagine that the "ancients" knew nothing of Birth Control. Himes gives the names of many writers going back many centuries, among them the illustrious name of Soranos of Ephesus who flourished 98-138 AD. Soranos had an astonishing knowledge of contraceptive technique, and so had many of his successors. But there was little scope to put these measures into universal practice. The knowledge was hidden in abstruse medical works nearly impossible to obtain. Moreover, Christianity was at last (even if slowly) making headway, and sex and everything connected with it were obviously the work of the Devil. The Devil then—and in some quarters even now—was as real to an earnest Christian as is God Almighty to a bishop.

Although the work of Malthus attracted people like Francis Place and John Stuart Mill, they were just as earnest in their advocacy of contraception; though actually they knew very little about the technique. Even Richard Carlile's *Every Woman's Book* was unsuitable for the then average working wife, though no doubt it helped a little.

The best two books of the early nineteenth century were Dr. Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy* and Robert Dale Owen's *Moral Physiology* though they, like all contraceptive information, had to be sold "under the counter". With them came the masterly *Elements of Social Science* by Dr. George Drysdale—a work which sold thousands of copies in many languages and which, incidentally, was a "godsend" to the Christian Evidence Society. The CES having failed so miserably in meeting the Freethought case, found in the "beggarly" (as they called it) *Elements* some forthright opinions on sex by a doctor, and immediately started to squeal. They would be still squealing if

the book had not gone out of print, and thus had fewer and fewer readers.

## After Forty Years

Why the Knowlton pamphlet and Dale Owen's were not prosecuted during their forty years of undisturbed existence has always been a mystery. I suggest that our lynx-eyed policemen seeing the word "philosophy" on one, and "physiology" on the other, felt that they must be quite innocuous.

However that may be, after the two books—and many others—had sold for something like 40 years, the "authorities" became horrified! Could anything be more terrible than teaching the working classes how to limit their families? And

Knowlton was immediately put on the rack. The publisher pleaded guilty and was let off; but the authorities had reckoned without the one man they should have feared—the redoubtable Charles Bradlaugh.

Nobody in England had been then so much to the fore as Bradlaugh in propagating Birth Control, but he was not concerned so much in this case with contraception as with the right of free publication. He immediately ordered (I think) the printing of 100,000 copies of *The Fruits of Philosophy* and awaited results.

## The Bradlaugh Trial

The authorities had two reasons for arresting Bradlaugh, and Mrs. Besant, who at that time (1877) was working courageously with him. The first was to stamp out Birth Control for the poor at all costs; and the second was to do their utmost to convict Bradlaugh of some criminal offence so that he would be unable to take his seat in Parliament. The latter object was very discreetly veiled; but that it is true can be seen in the attempt to get Bradlaugh charged with "blasphemy" when Foote was indicted. It must have broken the hearts of our authorities when no evidence could be trumped up against Bradlaugh.

The whole sorry tale of the Trial can be read in the pages of the *National Reformer* or in the verbatim report of the trial later published in book form. From the Lord Chief Justice to the merest Christian hack at Court, the whole weight of the law was hurled at Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant—but they got off all the same. This was a terrible blow; and a worst one came when poor 70-year-old Edward Truelove was tried for selling *Moral Physiology* and the jury disagreed. However, another jury was hastily called, and in the new trial—God be praised!—Truelove got four months and a £50 fine. After that, it was easy for the authorities to fine or imprison (or both) anybody else telling the poor how to limit their families.

## Freedom At Last

World War One brought a courageous fighter into the movement, Dr. Marie Stopes (not a medical woman however), and Dr. Norman Haire, and with their books, the problem of the right to give contraceptive information was solved. The authorities were obviously scared of Dr. Stopes who was always bursting for a fight. At first,

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## The Struggle for Family Planning

By H. CUTNER

she was inclined to go for the Freethought Party as well, but a little more experience proved to her that it was Roman Catholicism which was the enemy *par excellence*. She got the shock of her life when she found one of her working committee was a Roman Catholic lady.

In any case, with Margaret Sanger in America and Marie Stopes here, the battle was almost won. I say "almost" because in both countries there is the vicious strangle-hold of Roman Catholicism. Its followers got into key positions—in our national journals and influential magazines or on the staff of prominent encyclopedias. And, let us face it, they are ready to invade any public or private institution. So long as they get their way, the means are of secondary importance.

We do not know who in the first place allowed the posters sent by the Family Planning Association to be put

## Ritual Slaughter

By RONALD DENYER

On entering a slaughter-house you will see a contraption very much like a large drum. This is for the use of the Rabbi. It is known as the Casting pen. Into this pen the beast is driven. Once it is inside, two large steel plates are brought into place to stop the poor animal from falling over when this pen is turned. It is then secured by two more plates, one above and one below the neck.

Pity this poor animal bought for the Kosher butcher. How much more humane our methods of killing are! Carried out, at any rate swiftly, and causing the least possible suffering to the animals which are pre-stunned. In fact carried out as stated by law, and enforced by the attendance of an RSPCA officer.

But back in the casting pen the poor beast is now awaiting the pleasure of the Rabbi, who has made sure that the knife is really sharp. He walks over to the pen. The beast is now upside down, its eyes sticking out like organ stops. The Rabbi bends forward, and with one or two, or three movements of the knife cuts the animal's throat. No pre-stunning for this creature; he is conscious of it all. Then the wait. He cannot be removed until every ounce of his blood has drained away. The poor animal I had the misfortune to watch was pumping out his blood for at least four minutes before I was asked to leave. It had lashed out most painfully before it seemed to fold up on the floor of the pen. I must add that young calves die very quickly (their heads are cut off completely) and I think this is the same with sheep.

Spending the next hour with the superintendent of the slaughter-house, I told him that I thought the method of slaughter of these animals for the Kosher butcher, carried out by the Rabbi, was most ghastly and inhumane; indeed the most appalling thing I had ever seen. Surely something should be done to make people adopt our methods of slaughter, I pressed. He told me I was not the first person to state such views on "Ritual Slaughter". "Why then, hadn't something been done about it if I wasn't the first person?" I asked. The matter had been brought to the notice of various MPs, he told me, but in his opinion nothing further had been done because of interfering with the Jewish faith.

Surely if humane laws are drawn up in this country they should apply to everyone, Jewish faith or no faith. If it is laid down that animals must be pre-stunned, surely it should mean all animals.

The superintendent's next reply shocked me more. I asked him if he didn't think the Kosher method painful to the animal. "It has been proved," he said, "by taking statements from people who have attempted to cut their

up, and who gave way, undoubtedly to Roman Catholic influence, and had them banned. The real story we think would not bear the light of day. People—rich or poor—have the right these days to know how to limit their families. Nobody is forced to do so of course, but it is time that a comparatively small minority body in this Protestant country should be told to mind its own business. And this is what we expect the officials of a nationalised industry to tell all interfering minority bodies.

Bradlaugh fought the whole might of English law and a bench of English judges and won. The Society he founded, the National Secular Society, now takes up the struggle with the British Transport Commission. By petition and picket it intends at least to make a protest against an absurd and deplorable ban. Don't forget March 11th.

own throats, that there is no pain attached to it". Now how can one accept the testimony of a person who is beside himself with pain or worry, and is only interested in putting an end to his life?

The RSPCA, I am told, fear no individuals or organised groups. If this is the case why don't they get on with the job. Is it that difficult? And incidentally, while they are at it, it is time they had a go at the so called "sports". Fox hunting, Stag hunting and the rest! But if it's one thing at a time, let's go for "Ritual Slaughter" first.

## CATHOLICISM IN SCOTLAND

AT A RECENT CONFERENCE in France, stated the official Church of Scotland magazine, *Life and Work* (January, 1961), "there were forty former Roman Catholic priests present, now in training for the ministry of the Reformed Church". And continued the writer, the Rev. John R. Gray, the number of priests throughout the world who have cast off the burden of Rome "comes to many thousands". "In Italy alone, more than five thousand have left the Roman Catholic Church in the last fifteen years and in France an estimated two thousand have left since the war. Six out of every ten priests in the United States fail to finish the course". But in Scotland things are very different said Mr. Gray. It could certainly be said that for every apostasy to Rome there are a hundred converts from Rome; that Rome loses in the great majority of mixed marriages; and "a not inconsiderable number" renounce the Roman faith from sheer conviction ("One Glasgow congregation has two former Roman Catholic nuns as devoted members"). Nevertheless, because of the far higher birthrate there is "a steadily increasing proportion of Roman Catholics in the population". For the first time the Roman Catholic school population of Glasgow has risen to one-third of the whole, and almost 15 per cent of marriages in Scotland are conducted by Roman Catholic priests. So Mr. Gray called for a "continuing Reformation". The Church of Scotland, he said, was not content "tamely to become a minority sect in a Roman Catholic country".

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 55th ANNUAL DINNER

in honour of H. CUTNER'S 80th Birthday

Followed by Dancing

SATURDAY, MARCH 4th, 1961

at the PAVIOURS ARMS, Page Street, Westminster, S.W.1

RECEPTION 6 P.M. DINNER 6.30 P.M.

Vegetarians catered for

Evening Dress Optional

TICKETS 21/- from the Sec., 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1

# "The Ecstasy of Owen Muir"

By COLIN McCALL

I KNOW VERY LITTLE about Ring Lardner Junior. He is of course the son (the third son, I now learn) of a well-known American author of the same name. He was educated at Princeton and has won awards for film-writing. He also suffered imprisonment for refusing to answer questions of the Un-American Activities Committee. But I know the most important thing: that he wrote *The Ecstasy of Owen Muir*. I read it when it first came out in 1954; I have now read it again in most attractive and durable paperback (Seven Seas Books, 3s. 6d.), and I am confirmed in my original view that it is the most brilliant American satirical novel of the last decade. I hasten to add that it was highly praised by *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, and the *Daily Telegraph*; that the *Birmingham Post* compared it to *Candide* and that Dr. J. V. Duhig, in a letter to me, has called it "tremendous".

One might have thought that a novel with many contemporary references—among them McCarthyism and Pius XII's instructions to surgeons on mother and child—would date quickly. But Lardner chose his historical components well. Of the two just mentioned, the second is as much alive as ever, and the first too much so for the peace of America and the world.

It is Lardner's concern for peace and human rights that forms the righteous basis for his indignation: the necessary foundation for his merciless satire. It is because he feels so deeply that he can strike so surely. And above all, Lardner's satire is directed at the Roman Catholic Church and its generally infamous role in American life in late years. One of the characters, Monsignor Stephen A. Frasso, is almost certainly based on a real priest—and a prominent one at that. He enters the story, promising with the help of the Mother of Grace Divine to expedite Owen Muir's conversion to Catholicism, and he dominates every page on which he appears. Scarcely surprising, since he hardly gives anyone else a chance to speak and hardly listens if they do manage to get a word in edgewise. He is intensely vain, and the brief pause in his lengthy first private sermon to Owen lasts only while he takes from a drawer "a small mirror and a container of Max Factor make-up number 7-N". "I'm doing a short film today," he explains.

Frasso is his Church's chief spokesman in the book, and here are two illuminating excerpts from his perorations:—

"Either you believe that man is simply another stage in the evolutionary process, with no fixed point at which you can say 'This is a brute and this a human being', or you believe in a divinely ordained and revolutionary leap from the animal to the human, occurring at only one place and time and providing all mankind with a single pair of first parents, endowed with souls and free will and earning for themselves and their descendants the awful burden of original sin. There is no compromise between these two conceptions. Rejecting the materialistic and embracing the sublime one, it follows inevitably that every human life is sacred and the injunction 'Thou shalt not kill' admits of no qualifications. Except, of course, in case of war or capital punishment."

"Civil rights and civil liberties are attractive-sounding theories but you should remember that many great minds have never accepted their validity. You can't equate them with the all-important issue of the survival of Western civilisation . . . if we seize the initiative and never let go of it, the ultimate struggle when it does come may be blessedly brief, and it will not be our land or our people that will suffer the main damage. Then and only then will we have realised, with God's help, the dream of the generations: a genuine and enduring peace."

He is the spiritual adviser and motive-force behind CACACACS—the Catholic Action Council Against Communism and Creeping Socialism—for whom the bulletin

editor is a Nazi partisan, Allen Mulvaney. And when Owen objects to Mulvaney as "an extremely unsavoury character", Frasso asks, "Where is your Christian charity, my son?" And adds, "Spain might not be a Christian country today if General Franco had had your scruples".

Owen Muir *has* scruples. He is honest and sincerely humanitarian, however misguided. Restless and insecure, craving certainty of belief but disliking the authoritarian side of Catholicism, he meets April, a cradle Catholic who treats her religion more or less as a matter of convenience. ("But I've always felt it was a ridiculous waste of my time and his [the priests's] to confess anything until the moment when I was ready and willing to give it up. That's why I didn't say anything about Gene and me until we were through, and then I did penance for the whole two years at once. Any other way of going about it seems hypocritical to me.") But her mother is (in April's words). "Practically a one-woman chapter of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith." The daughter wouldn't mind marrying outside the faith, but the mother feels very differently. Fortunately for the latter's peace of mind, Owen is converted (how, the reader must discover for himself). Unfortunately for April's peace of mind he can't "take religion in moderation . . . be satisfied with a swig of it now and then . . ." ("You've got it bad, haven't you?—damn my idiot mother!" she exclaims.) It is he who now insists upon a Roman Catholic wedding and getting baptised for it, with complete abstinence until then.

Owen indeed, "gets it bad", and he won't let his wife use a contraceptive. "Look," she argues, "can't you get it through your head that it's my sin, not yours?" But he doesn't fall for that. Not that he has any "compelling urge toward fatherhood". "But artificial prevention was a mortal sin he could no longer countenance . . ." It is when April conceives that the alternative of saving mother or child arises, but a miscarriage (about which the reader will learn more) eventually obviates the choice. Then Owen wonders if "in the midst of her pain and fright" April "had remembered to give instructions for the baptism of the embryonic clot which her body had rejected"; and Monsignor Frasso declares, "How wise we are to entrust to the Immaculate Heart of Mary what the unbeliever would assign to the fallible hands of a mortal surgeon".

Yes indeed, Owen takes his religion seriously, and in less than five years he amasses an impressive total of indulgences—"approximately eighty-four thousand years", not counting 142 plenary ones. He ends up where he belongs—in a monastery—and April tells him, "You'd be surprised how much less my religion means to me now that I've seen what it's done to you".

I hope I have conveyed some of the delicious flavour of *The Ecstasy of Owen Muir*. It is a novel that even habitual non-fictionists should read. It is a plea for freedom, love and understanding; an arraignment of the enemies of liberty in America (today as in 1954). It is written by a man who has studied Catholic theology as well as Catholic politics, and it is a masterly satire on both. It is, as Sean O'Casey said, "so quietly biting, so warmly sympathetic, so true, and piercing, it is like a spiky cactus that is topped with beautiful blossoms". And it will be cherished by all Freethinkers, who must surely be justified in numbering Ring Lardner Junior among themselves.

## This Believing World

**So here they come again!** The dear old Protestant tracts which were published—and read—in their millions during Queen Victoria's blessed reign, all with the supreme if pious object of bringing sinful man to Christ. Here half a dozen of them are before us—the same old imbecilities and drivel, not even the lapse of a century has changed a comma.

★

**All or most of them contain some allusion** to the "Blood" of Christ which for some occult reason appears to fascinate the writers. They seem to revel in the idea of getting washed in the Blood of the Lamb. And, no doubt whatever, would do so literally if any were about. At all events, if you—the sinner—are not immediately washed, you are sternly warned—"No blood, no redemption!" You will frizzle in Hell for ever and ever.

★

**In spite of all this terrific battle for Christ however,** some unlucky but undoubtedly very devout clergymen got the surprise of their lives recently. In their efforts to stem the tide of gambling—an offence against Christ of course—they lodged some objections to giving a licence to a book-maker. Alas, God Almighty this time was not on the side of the angels—and the nine clergymen had to pay costs for lodging frivolous complaints! Fancy the Devil getting the better of some of our saintly clergy!

★

**Bournemouth has proved itself years ahead** in spiritual matters. If you want spiritual advice of any kind, just ring up Bournemouth 25566 and you will get it saintly clear. Instead of looking up yourself, say for example, how Jesus said you should treat your parents (a gem which you will find in Luke 14, 26), just ring up the above number and you will be told forthwith. Or at least that is the general idea. Perhaps the parson behind the phone will prefer Exodus 20, 12. But who knows?

★

**We do not know the exact number of people** who have been raised from the dead by Gods—a feat which, as he was God Almighty himself or his Son, was child's play to Jesus; but it is interesting to note that the Russian Professor Negovski, Head of the Soviet Experimental Laboratory, claims so far to have "raised 3,000 from the dead" and all this without, alas, Divine Help but by purely secular means. This must be a slap in the eye for all Gods who, to prove their divinity, make a speciality of restoring dead people to life. And it even beats our eminent faith-healers who have never got beyond a little "healing"—mostly of the "faith" kind.

★

**Although it is time that a Roman priest** went into raptures about *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as great literature, we note that Malta, stoutly Roman Catholic to the backbone, always seizes books on marriage, birth control, etc., sent to our British servicemen. Why? Are we losing all sense of Freedom of Speech, Thought, Publication, just because a bunch of Roman Catholics wills it so? Is Canterbury under Rome at last?

★

**So doubts about the "Virgin" birth** can even affect the Bishop of California, who belongs to the Georgia Protestant Episcopal Group of clergymen. Perhaps "doubts" is the wrong word; it should be "disbelief", and we must congratulate Dr. James A. Pike for seeing a little light at last. That this utterly discredited dogma of the Christian Churches should still persist proves what a strangle-hold Christianity has on presumably sane people. But do they

—can they—really believe it? Don't most if not all Christian married women ridicule it?

★

**That very distinguished archaeologist,** Sir Leonard Woolley, has given us a magnificently illustrated volume entitled *History Unearthed*, and as Sir Leonard is almost always quoted for unearthing decisive proofs of the unerring accuracy of Bible records, it may prove of interest to learn what he really says. For example, every Biblical scholar, perhaps without any exception, is prepared to believe in the "fall" of Jericho as so carefully described in the Bible. Most of them indeed will appeal to archaeology in proof that it really happened.

★

**And what does Sir Leonard say?** "It can be shown", he says, "that the walls were overthrown—probably by the Egyptians—about two centuries before the Israelites crossed the Jordan. The excavations have not thrown, and never can throw, any light upon the Old Testament story of Joshua . . .". But will this stop Bible believers from appealing to "archaeology" to prove that every word of Joshua is true—or even quoting Sir Leonard in support? Not on your life!

### JUNGLE JANGLE

WE REGRET WE HAVE NOT been able earlier to introduce readers to Father Mariano Gagnon from Manchester, New Hampshire, USA, but the issue of *The Boston Sunday Globe* which featured him (March 20th, 1960) has only just reached us. Father Gagnon is so obviously a man of resource that we hasten to repair the deficiency.

Presumably he is now somewhere in the middle of Peru, fulfilling a boyhood ambition to be a jungle priest, and enabled to do so by the fund-raising activities of his 123 relatives, who "sponsored dinners, sold cakes, and passed the hat", high school buddies who ran dances, and former girl classmates who "sold kisses". (The motto of this Franciscan Father would seem to be "the end justifies the means"!)

Anyway, in August 1958, he left an assortment of "dime store jewellery dangling from vines and trees in the Peruvian jungles along the headwaters of the Amazon as lures for Indians he hopes someday to Christianise", and with the jewellery "he left notes scribbled in Spanish and the old Incan language, Quechua". That first lot of jewellery having been "accepted" by the Indians—or at least having disappeared—Father Gagnon amassed a second collection for distribution, this time it seems, rather less haphazardly during an expedition "to convert Indians who are not above flipping poison darts at strangers". The last missionary to venture into these jungles was also a Franciscan who, we are told, "was saved from martyrdom by friendly Indians". Seven predecessors had been martyred since the arrival of the Spanish some three centuries ago.

Father Gagnon's plan was to parachute into the jungle with his second jewellery collection and a radio which he "will tune to its loudest volume", and to stay there until he makes contact with the Indians. It seems that there's to be no peace anywhere these days, even in the jungles of the Amazon. And, while we don't wish this boa-killing, monkey-eating Franciscan any harm, we could make out a pretty good case for a poison dart in his radio.

C.McC.

NEXT WEEK

MUMBO JUMBO INCORPORATED

By F. A. RIDLEY

# 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

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, February 12th, 6.45 p.m.: EDMUND TAYLOR, "What Christianity Has Borrowed".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, February 14th, 7.15 p.m.: DR. MARGARET BLAIR, "Sex Education: When, Where, How?"

Humanist Group of S. W. London (Mulberry Lodge, Barnes Common, S.W.13), Sunday, February 12th, 8 p.m.: "Mormon Beliefs", by a Member of the Church of Latter Day Saints.

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 12th, 6.30 p.m.: B. HAYLETT, "The Guilt Complex".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, W.1), Sunday, February 12th, 7.15 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, M.A., "The Mature Personality".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, February 12th, 2.30 p.m.: F. WATSON, "Logical Philosophy".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, February 12th, 11 a.m.: DONALD G. McRAE, M.A., "The Revolution in the Social Sciences".

Sussex Branch N.S.S. ("Place Pigalle", 1 Waterloo Place (The Level), Brighton), Sunday, February 12th, 3.30 p.m.: DEBATE, "Freethought v. Christianity".

## Notes and News

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY is committed by election promises to substantial aid to American public (state) schools, but believers that the principle of Church-State separation precludes such aid to parochial schools. The powerful Cardinal Spellman of New York (whose diocese is the wealthiest in the world) does not share the President's view. "It is unthinkable", he said (*Time*, 27/1/61) "that any American child be denied federal funds because his parents choose for him a God-centred education". Aid to public schools would mean that many millions of parents "will be taxed more than ever before for the education of their children, but they cannot expect any return from their taxes". Switching to the "freedom" theme, the Cardinal argued that denying equal aid to children in parochial schools would deprive them of "freedom of mind and freedom of religion guaranteed by our country's Constitution". Finally and supremely, though unconsciously, ironic, he declared that, should Congress confine

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED £28 11s. R. H. Scott, £5 4s.; S. Clowes, 4s.; J. Scarlett, £1; F. Brown, £1; Mrs. E. A. Guelk, 5s.; W. J. Bennett, 5s.; A. V. Montagu, £1 5s.; R. Stewart, 6s.; W. Scarlett, 10s.; S. G. Leech, £1; W.H.D., 10s. Total to date, February 1st, 1961. £40.

its aid to the public schools, it would breed "thought control" by compelling a child to attend a state school as a condition of sharing in education funds".

★

"LET CARDINAL SPELLMAN speak for himself," said Dr. Oswald C. J. Hoffman of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, which operates the largest US Protestant school system. "Federal assistance should be restricted to public schools." But, as *Time* pointed out, "the issue will sharpen" because Catholic parochial school enrolment is growing faster than public school enrolment, and "About one out of every three US babies is born to a Catholic family".

★

WE CAN'T HELP THINKING that the Editor of *The Universe* must have smiled to himself as he published (27/1/61) Father Reginalio Fracisco's findings after a study of modern dancing. Writing in *Vita Pastorale*, a monthly review for the clergy, Fr. Fracisco declared that most Latin-American dances, like the rumba, samba and cha-cha, "are not just occasions for sin, they are in themselves sinful", the postures, movements and swayings notably offending "the virtue of modesty". Some dances—God be praised!—like rock 'n' roll, were less sinful, but only the waltz, polka and mazurka passed the Father's scrutiny with a clean bill. Even the fox-trot, Boston, tango, one-step and Charleston, while not indecent in their nature, should be considered as occasions near to grave sin". Which leads us to ask how near Father Fracisco himself came to grave sin. Did he, in fact, experiment, or was his study purely theoretical?

★

FOR A MAN who describes himself as "a reformer not a rebel", Lord Altrincham can certainly cause quite a disturbance. He recently had another go at royalty (notably Princess Margaret and the Queen Mother on the occasion of the former's visit to Ireland) in *The Guardian*. Then, speaking on the theme, "Theology is Bunk" at the Strand Unitarian Church, London, he criticised the appointments of Drs. Ramsey and Coggan as Archbishops of Canterbury and York (*Daily Mail*, 30/1/61). He had nothing against them as individuals and it was "not a matter of whether the one is High Church and the other Low"—these were "vagaries of temperament". What was serious was "that they are essentially academic men in this bogus theological context", who had not had very much experience in pastoral work. So, he feared, the appointments might lead to a "further narrowing" of the bounds of "what is still called the Church of England".

★

ON THE SAME DAY (Sunday, January 29th) that Lord Altrincham complained about Dr. Coggan's appointment, the Archbishop-designate of York also had a complaint of his own. Preaching in Oxford he blamed the Welfare State for the shortage of missionaries. "The idea of security was so prevalent", he said (*The Guardian*, 30/1/61) "that men were reluctant to offer themselves for the younger Churches overseas". Dr. Coggan also touched on the revised catechism and the commotion over the exclusion of the devil. He hoped that the Church would not be side-tracked by this controversy. "To side-track us," he said, may well be one of the devil's "more wily devices".

## Fictions Stranger than Fact

By D. H. TRIBE

IT IS A GREAT COMPLIMENT to Mr. Cutner to observe that he has a catalytic effect on other writers. As the cinematic blurb says of Elmer Gantry, they either bless him or damn him. They cannot ignore him.

After reading Mr. Cutner's "On Controversial Questions—6" (THE FREETHINKER, January 6th, 1961), I wanted mainly to murmur blessings. Surely every Rationalist, indeed anyone with any pretension to commonsense, deplores the flood of sensational, pseudo-scientific journalism, with its flotsam of clichés, gush, and bogus "experts", that has become so tawdry a feature of this superficial, gadgetolatrous age.

Most of the flood springs from America, where, notoriously, almost every religious, mystical, and quasi-scientific body sports a planetarium—which, incidentally, bears the same relation to an observatory as the local flea-pit does to a movie studio—and where you can buy a Ph.D. for a few hundred dollars from any "school of esoteric science". Sometimes, in cynical moods, one almost wonders whether minor scientists sell theories about "phenomena", as television personalities sell testimonials to patent medicines. But often, no doubt, misconceptions arise inadvertently: the busy scientist forgets to state his reservations, or the bewildered reporter fails to quote them, or the desperate sub-editor cuts them out to squeeze in a last-minute "story". Once a statement, however inaccurate, makes the *papers*, then for millions of people it approaches gospel truth, and should it later be copied into a book, the result is practically canonical.

I would therefore agree with almost everything Mr. Cutner says. But he seems to me to have reached the right destination by a very dangerous path; and this is where my damns come in. I suspect that he has little real knowledge of, or interest in science. He speaks, for instance, unless misprinted, of "thousands at least of other and similar galaxies", where *thousands of millions* would be nearer the mark. He asks, "But how could we breathe on the moon? Would we be forced to take our atmosphere with us?" As if he had never heard of the science of astronautical medicine (or mountaineering and high altitude flying, if it comes to that). He is unfair to his opponents, whose silliness, God knows, hardly needs to be exaggerated, when he speaks of "flying aircraft capable of fantastic speeds coming from planets which may be millions of light years away". I have never come upon any suggestion that "Flying Saucers" originate outside the solar system, and they are usually confined to Mars and Venus. The source of Mr. Cutner's scientific information seems to be press comments and interviews, rather than the appropriate journals and monographs and one gets the impression that he not only gasps at the rapid accumulation of new knowledge (don't we all?), but almost resents the obligation it entails of constantly revising old opinions. This is, of course, a perfectly natural reaction. Indeed, a strong case could be made out to show that man's political, cultural, and moral development is not keeping pace with his technological, which may be a grave embarrassment in the future. But this position is not a fruitful soil for articles on popular science, nor does it help us to distinguish between the genuine and the bogus.

I trust that these criticisms will not be considered idle carping. My sole concern is that Mr. Cutner's outstanding contributions to Rationalism should not be invalidated by unacceptable documentation. As an old campaigner he will know that in polemic evidences must be unimpeach-

able. And we should be careful lest in the bathwater of Scientism, Scientology, Science Fiction and Christian Science, we overlook the baby science.

Let me now join forces with Mr. Cutner to urge upon scientists and established experts everywhere, greater standards of vigilance. In a world of the apotheosis of statistics and the adoration of "authorities", even when talking outside their professional competence, accurate initial observations are particularly important. For the mathematical precision of analysis often obscures the fact that there is no tool for assessment of the validity of the data to be analysed other than old-fashioned commonsense. Diversion of attention from observation to classification and interpretation explains the currency of such bogus institutions as spiritualism, faith-healing (save for psychosomatic diseases), hypnotism, fortune-telling, astrology, and especially that god-child of all old wives' tales: parapsychology.

So often in reading about religious conceptions, flying saucers, the Yeti, and the Loch Ness Monster, are we struck by the ingenuity with which scientific men have co-ordinated various reported observations into some great, statistically significant theory, on the assumption that all these observations can be taken at their face value. Not only is there a failure to understand the psychology of motivation, but, worse, ignorance of what any village lawyer means by *evidence*. Even in the inadequate reportage that appears, obvious lies can be traced—obvious, that is, to all but these theoreticians. A degree in science is no substitute for sagacity.

What is the value of testimony from "ordinary people who have nothing to gain from inventing sensational stories"? We cannot generalise; but it is certain that this testimony cannot be accepted automatically. In many cases it is untrue to say that these "ordinary people" gain nothing financially, which is what the foregoing statement implies. Newspapers often pay quite large sums for sole rights to stories and photographs. There is a netherworld of publishers willing to lend an imprint to any book, however dubious. Wealthy cranks will pay for the endorsement of pet superstitions. At the lowest level, drinks are stood for village celebrities. But there are innumerable psychological factors. "Evidence" comes in waves, illustrating suggestibility. Invention need not be venal. People will fabricate through crude exhibitionism; pathetic longing for status; wish to escape loneliness; spiteful attempt to embarrass rationalistic relatives; practical joking, suddenly magnified by the press and becoming difficult to disavow; desire to corroborate the testimony of friends—reasons noble or ignoble, but equally unsatisfactory scientifically.

What principles can help us to steer safely between crass gullibility and sniping cynicism? For it is important we should not be guided by prejudice.

If the theory is capable of laboratory investigation, reproducibility of results is the main criterion. Sometimes we are entitled to some fairly clear-cut demonstration. Spontaneous movement of dice, for example, instead of "influence" on dice that are already moving, would convince the most sceptical of the truth of psychokinesis. Similarly, a restored limb at Lourdes, or a flying saucer fragment.

Occam's Razor is a useful tool for interpretation. Is the accepted explanation the *simplest* that will fit all the observed facts? When uncorroborated testimony appears, an analysis of the physical, mental, and emotional life of

the witness at the time is indicated. Where this is impracticable, we must ask if the alleged event fits in with general experience, and particularly with the normal experience of the witness. If we find that a medium, clairvoyant, teacup-reader, mystic, prophet, revivalist, astrologer, crystal-gazer, precognitive parapsychologist, or whatever other name the foreteller trades under, is unable to tell when he himself will become husband or father, what number will win the sweep-stake, or whether he should have brought an umbrella, then we may feel uneasy when he forecasts our biography or the end of the world with expansive self-assurance.

It can be objected that in this way we may fail to recognise casual interventions of "spiritual" power. But every theory which invokes these—platonism, spiritualism, theosophy, anthroposophy, yoga, mysticism, and the ordinary religions—has always stressed the *primacy* of spirit. We may be pardoned for thinking that something which is prime should be a little more evident!

## Far From The Madding Crowd

By RUSTICUS

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth ere gave,  
Await alike th' inevitable hour;  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

—Gray

ONE OF MY FAVOURITE HIDEOUTS is the village church— one of the very few places left where solitude and peace can still be enjoyed. It would be a tragedy if our beautiful old village churches ever fell into complete ruin: I invariably place a coin in the "maintenance" box when visiting old rural churches—never in the foreign missions box!

Although the main Bath and Bristol road is only a few yards off, it is still possible to retreat into the remote past, sitting or wandering in our grey and grizzled old church or churchyard. The first item to strike the eye on entering our rural temple is a slate-coloured slab, immediately inside the door. This slab is inset in the stone floor, and bears the following inscription:—

SVB HOC MARMORE SEPVLTVM  
JACET CORPVS GVLIELMI ZOVCH  
HVJVS PAROCHIAE RECTORIS OBIIT  
DIE 23° AVGVSTI ANNO DOMINI  
1679°

In spite of the passage of thousands of feet over the slab—including those of Romney and Garrick—the Latin engraving is as legible today as when first carved in the days of the Merrie Monarch. Another feature is the massive Norman pillars: one of the latter bears the Fleur-de-Lys on its base, of the 12th century.

Wandering in the churchyard recently, with its masses of snowdrops, I was struck with the numbers of female Christian names on old tombs which are rarely met with in these days: Honoria, Susanna, Angelina, Eliel, Emmile, Augusta, Alison, Emeline, Penninah, Letitia, Lavinia, to mention but a few. Cynical Charles, bigoted James, dour William, the '15 and the '45 Waterloo—these names and events were known to the Honorias and Lavinias of our village churchyard. They were also known to numerous others, whose humble mounds of turf have sunk into the earth these many years, leaving not a blade of grass to commemorate them. If one may quote Ecclesiasticus in these freethought pages:

Some there be, which have no memorial;  
Who are perished, as though they had never been,  
And are become as though they had never been born,  
And their children after them.

Many a village churchyard contains the mortal remains

of forgotten fighters, in the long and dusty battle for barely tolerable living conditions:—

Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast,  
The little tyrant of his fields withstood.

One of these obscure men was known to me. A radical, he was once dismissed from his employment for refusing to give an undertaking to his arrogant Tory employer to support "our" candidate.

The fact of the matter is that rural workers are looked upon by the world at large as little better than animals. Yet farm workers and their kind never strike, or contemplate striking. Their loyalty to the land, and to the animals in their care (not to the farmer), is the least appreciated phenomenon in society. Farm workers are the hardest worked and the worst paid section of manual workers. To city slickers and slackers the farm worker has always been, and remains, "Hodge". He is still ridiculed by so-called comedians, and by Cockneys holidaying in country villages. His natural dignity, innate intelligence and integrity, are things apart—apart from the general run of workers. The entire human race depends for its existence on the top six inches of the globe's soil, patiently and faithfully tended by rural workers. From Tolpuddle to Tonga, they and their fellows are the salt of the earth.

In conclusion, let us take a brief look at the congregation of the village church.

In my experience of the West Country, it seems that most village churches count one or more representatives of the armed forces of the Crown in their meagre congregations. Here, we have three or four such Christians. Captain O. Howe-Dopie, for instance—as witless a warrior as ever begged a sergeant-major to "carry on". Also Major X and Colonel Y, typical examples of bone-headed loyalty to the Crown, Holy Church and the Establishment in general: bigoted laymen, uncompromising Tories, fierce patriots.

Patriots! Patriotism is not enough!

Patriotism is bunk.

A typical example of the female of our betters is Mrs. Cholmondeley-Plumley. She attends church with commendable regularity. Marching up the village street with what she no doubt considers great poise and dignity, she looks neither to the right nor the left. Thus, her eyes are not offended by the sight of the peasantry, whose existence she might be forced to acknowledge if she glanced at cottage doors or windows. She speaks to nobody beneath the rank of major, major's wife, children or first cousins. And should the local Labour agent appear in the village street she will gather up her skirts and pass by on the other side of the street, her delicate nostrils quivering with offence, apparently at the obnoxious effluvia emanating from the ranks of the proletariat. Meeting the agent of the Left in the village shop, she was surprised to discover that he was wearing a clean collar. Her surprise turned to astonishment when the representative of the lower orders asked for a packet of cigarettes in quite intelligible English. Astonishment was followed by incredulity when the agent politely raised his hat, and gave her a frank and friendly smile as she left the shop.

Mrs. C-P has a lot to learn.

### 90th BIRTHDAY

WE HAVE RECEIVED an encouraging letter from Mr. Sydney G. Leech of Sanderstead, Surrey, a reader of THE FREETHINKER for nearly half-a-century, and still as keen as ever. Mr. Leech regrets, however, that age prevents him from taking part in Freethought activities. He will soon be 90, and we send him birthday greetings.

## Ideological Retreat

By WALTER STEINHARDT

"SO HELP ME GOD!" declaimed Herr Willy Brand, candidate for the German Federal Chancellorship, newly elected leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and present Lord Mayor of Berlin. The words were spoken at the end of his speech, closing the last Party Conference in Hanover, Western Germany.

Nothing like this had previously happened in the long and varied history of the SPD, which was founded as the German Workers' League by Ferdinand Lassalle in 1863. It illustrates a significant retrograde change, not merely of emphasis but of attitude.

With the resolution accepting the Party Programme at Godesberg in November, 1959, the following became party policy: "Socialism is not a substitute for religion. The SPD esteems (*achtet*) the Churches and religious communities and their specific collaboration . . . , etc.;" It is not difficult to imagine what the great pioneers of German Socialism and Humanism would have made of this neat turn in modern political opportunism.

True, historic conditions alter and so do scientific and philosophical conceptions. But it is surely hard to see, how present social conditions challenge the broad validities of such sentiments and notions as: Religion is the opium of the people. The critique of religion is the pre-requisite of all critique (Marx); Religion is Anthropology (Feuerbach); Religious beliefs are superstitious beliefs (Haeckel); Religion is an illusion (Freud), etc., etc., including Strauss, Bebel and Kautzky.

Or was it mistaken of the SPD to declare in 1891, in the Erfurter Programme: "Religion is an entirely private affair. No public funds for religious or Church purposes. Religious communities are to be regarded as of purely personal concern. Schools to be run on secular basis only . . .".

Similar views, often expressed in identical terms, were agreed in 1869 at the Congress of Eisenach, the Gothaer of 1875, the Goerlitzer of 1921, the Heidelberger of 1925 and, undoubtedly, various others.

The Berlin *Voice of the Freethinker* faces the present baffling and disappointing religious policy of the party in an undaunted manner: "For a movement as ours, this new development entails a substantial increase in our difficulties. The Social Democratic Party, once our greatest support, now fails in its traditional role. We have to recognise the resolution and act accordingly. We must continue the fight against the idea of religion and the power of the Churches with our own resources. Of the SPD we can merely ask to be granted the same rights of public expression as accorded to the Churches. We are entering the new task with the firm conviction, that the progress of time will aid our efforts and that the future belongs to the freedom of the mind".

**WANTED.** Robert Taylor's "Syntagma", "Diegesis" and "Devil's Pulpit". State price.—Box C.S. 62.

### BETTER THAN EVER !!

NEW REVISED FOURTH EDITION

Adrian Pigott's **FREEDOM'S FOE: THE VATICAN**  
A collection of Danger Signals for those who value Peace and Liberty. Now available, 3/- (plus 6d. postage).

**Special Offer**—two books of poems by

**BAYARD SIMMONS**

*The Pagoda of Untroubled Ease*  
and *Minerva's Owl*

Hard Covers 3s. 6d. each, postage 8d. each.

## THE HOLY GRAIL

It must have come as a surprise to many Christians (and non-Christians, too) to read in a Sunday newspaper that the Holy Grail now reposes in Nanteos House, near Aberystwyth. True, it is not the delicate, chased silver vessel of medieval legend, merely a cracked wooden bowl, but its authenticity is proved by the miraculous cures it is responsible for today.

The Grail, Graal, or San Greal, is the bowl supposed to have been used by Christ at the last supper, and afterwards, in the hands of Joseph of Arimathea, to have been used to catch the blood of the Saviour as he was taken from the cross. Joseph is said to have kept the bowl in prison for forty-two years, and to have brought it to Britain with him when he founded the church at Glastonbury. His son, Josephus, instituted the order of the Round Table, but the Grail disappeared when the Knights fell from virtue. The quest for the Grail was, of course, immortalised by Tennyson in the *Idylls of the King*.

The cup was alternatively reported to have been made from a giant emerald dropped from the crown of the fallen Satan, but this is probably traceable to the green glass dish known as the San Graal kept at the Cathedral of San Lorenzo at Genoa. Whether of silver or of emerald, the cup of legend bore no resemblance to the cup at Nanteos, which Sir Mortimer Wheeler has suggested is a medieval mazer-bowl of maple or sycamore; though Sir Hubert Savory, of the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, thinks it is more recent.

Nanteos will soon be opened to the public, and readers will be able to form their own opinions as to the authenticity of the cup. The vicar of Glastonbury is already satisfied that it is genuine and he has made a request for the return of the Grail to the Church. If it is the Grail, it is a priceless object and should be guarded with care. If!

H. A. ROGERSON.

**THE CULTURE OF THE ABDOMEN** By F. A. Hornibrook. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

**THE PAPACY IN POLITICS TODAY.** By Joseph McCabe. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

**A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP.** By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

**THE DOLLAR AND THE VATICAN: Its Character, Methods and Aims.** By Avro Manhattan. 3rd. Edition—Revised and Enlarged.

Price 21/-; postage 1/3.  
**ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING.** By Chapman Cohen. Series 1, 2, 3, 4. Cloth bound.

Price 7/6 each series; postage 7d. each.  
**PRIMITIVE SURVIVALS IN MODERN THOUGHT.** By Chapman Cohen.

Price 3/- (specially reduced price); postage 5d.  
**FRANCO'S PRISONERS SPEAK** (from Burgos Central Prison). Price 1/6; postage 4d.

**THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (10th Edition).** By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4/6; postage 6d.

**AGE OF REASON.** Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen.

Cloth 4/-; postage 7d.  
**THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK** By Hector Hawton.

Price 5/-; postage 7d.  
**HUMANITY'S GAIN FROM UNBELIEF.** By Charles Bradlaugh. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

**IS SPIRITUALISM TRUE?** By C. E. Ratcliffe. Price 1/-; postage 2d.

**ROBERT TAYLOR—THE DEVIL'S CHAPLAIN.** By H. Cutner. Price 1/6; postage 4d.

**PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE.** 18 of Chapman Cohen's celebrated pamphlets bound in one Volume. Indispensable for the Freethinker.

Price 5/6; postage 8d.  
**CATHOLIC IMPERIALISM AND WORLD FREEDOM.** By Avro Manhattan. 528 pages, paper cover

Price 20/-; postage 1/3.  
**LECTURES AND ESSAYS.** By R. G. Ingersoll.

Paper covers, 5/-; Cloth bound, 8/6; postage 10d.  
**FAMILY PROBLEMS AND THE LAW.**

By Robert S. W. Pollard. Price 2/6; postage 6d.  
**MATERIALISM RESTATED (Third edition).** By Chapman Cohen. Price 5/6; postage 7d.

**MEN WITHOUT GODS.** By Hector Hawton. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

**JESUS, MYTH OR HISTORY?** By Archibald Robertson. Price 2/6; postage 5d.