

# The Freethinker

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## The Christian Saturnalia

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN THE PAGAN WORLD OF ANTIQUITY, one of the recurring highlights of the calendar was the great festival of the Saturnalia celebrated annually on (our) December 17th-23rd. This festival, a kind of April Fools' Day and Christmas Day rolled into one, included not only the whole free population of the Roman Empire, but equally

*Maximus*" (Greatest and Best), an honorific title by which he is referred to in surviving Pagan classical inscriptions. With the advent of Jupiter as supreme god in the Olympian pantheon, the long reign of Saturn came to an end. But the memories of Old Father Time and of his fabled age of gold, lived on amid the harsher realities of the



SATURNALIA, ERNEST BIONDI, GALLERIA NAZIONALE

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the (probably) much more numerous slaves, who it must be remembered, were not classed as citizens nor even as human beings in the legal systems of ancient states, but rather as inanimate objects (Latin *res*) and were, as such, excluded from the normal life of free citizens, witness the Roman proverb: "A multitude of slaves does not constitute a State". But in the Saturnalia, the slaves also were given their head—if not their freedom. (*cf. Collier's Encyclopedia, "Festivals": "Since Saturn was supposed to have ruled over the Golden Age, masters served their slaves in token of the equality of rank and the lack of class distinctions during that period."*)

### The Golden Age

The choice of the name *Saturnalia* for the slaves' peculiar festival, is in itself both interesting and significant. For the *Saturnalia* was named after the god Saturn, an ancient, indeed a superannuated god; quite literally an old man with a brilliant past. For in classical Pagan legend, Saturn had been the Great Original, the equivalent of Old Father Time, the King of the Gods; a position which he had occupied until the time came when he was too old and decrepit to perform his divine duties. He was thereupon incontinently relieved of his function by his son, Jupiter (or Zeus), who thereafter ascended the throne of Olympus as supreme god: Jupiter, "*Optimus et*

Age of Iron which followed. In particular, the Saturnian Age was remembered in the classical legend as a primeval "Garden of Eden"; an era of social equality in which "none was for the party and all were for the state". In this halcyon age of the Pagan Golden Legend, war and private property were alike, unknown, including in particular, the institution of slavery which—or so it was believed—only grew up in the Iron Age of Jupiter. Hence the name given to the Roman Saturnalia during which the slaves were free in memory of the old communal god whose reign of primitive equality and of social justice had so unaccountably given way to a harsher social regime under the aegis of a less benevolent Deity. Was all this a mere Pagan myth? Or is there here concealed under the cloak of mythology some genuine recollection of some primitive age of communal solidarity? Of some form of primitive Communism obscured by the mists of time? Be that as it may, the feast of Saturn, the annual feast of equality, continued to be celebrated down to the end of the Age of Jupiter, and along with it, until the final passing of the Pagan gods from the human scene.

### Who Will Succeed Jupiter?

In one of his most brilliant satires, Anatole France has depicted an after-dinner conversation of a group of intellectual Roman aristocrats led by the proconsul, Gallio,

the brother-in-law of the great Seneca. (cf. A. France—*The White Stone*.) The conversation turned on the intriguing theme of which god would eventually succeed Jupiter, who was obviously getting past the efficient performance of his duties as King of the Gods, a melancholy state of things made only too painfully obvious by the current lunatic reign of the Emperor Nero. Gallio pronounced in favour of Hercules, when the proconsul was summarily called away on official duty. Presently he returned, apologising for his absence. He had, he explained, had to pass summary judgment on a crack-pot Jewish agitator named Paul (of Tarsus) who, with a fanatical obstinacy only possible to a Jew, insisted that he had a new god, one Jesus Christ, who was destined to succeed Jupiter but of whom he, Gallio, had never even heard. However, concluded Gallio, the arguments in favour of Hercules are quite overwhelming and no one need pay any heed to all these new-fangled Oriental gods in whom only the ignorant lower orders believed.

#### December 25th—The Christian Saturnalia

However, Paul, not Gallio, proved ultimately to be correct. For whilst Saturn had been succeeded by his own son Jupiter, Jupiter himself was not destined to pass on the sceptre of the gods to his own son, Hercules. An alien cuckoo in the Olympian nest, none other than Jesus Christ (or rather the Holy Trinity of which Jesus Christ formed 33.3%), took over the celestial sceptre, and both Jupiter and Saturn were soon forgotten men—or rather,

gods. With them also passed away the Saturnalia along with its legendary memories of the Age of Gold—and of social equality. But human memories cling tenaciously to their old traditions, and in the place of the Pagan Saturnalia which commemorated the passing of the old god, Saturn, came the Christian festival of Christmas, which commemorated the arrival of the new God, Christ: a festival which by one of the most obvious examples of religious plagiarism on record, was eventually fixed upon the already recognised birthday of another Oriental god, Mithras, "The Unconquered Sun" and—by another plagiarism—within a few days of the old Saturnalia. And around the new Christian festival gathered many of the traditions and customs immemorably practised at the Saturnalia: the exchange of gifts, general jollifications and, most significant of all, the temporary suppression of artificial distinctions of social rank and fortune between rich and poor. As Collier's notes, "Many Christmas customs have been derived from the Saturnalia". More and more the Christian festival has approximated to the old Pagan feast, reminiscent of Saturn and his fabled age of gold. Under a Christian veneer, Christmas Day has become, particularly in Protestant lands, an almost Pagan Saturnalia of social equality in jollity, in which modern class distinctions are suspended for the duration of the festival. As such, and whether in the name of Christ, Saturn, or Santa Claus, we hope that all our readers will again enjoy it!

## Points from New Books

GEORGE BUCHANAN comments on his own new collection of poems, *Conversation With Strangers* (Gaberbochus, 8s. 6d.), in illuminating prose reflections. He declares that in his poems he has tried to say "only what has to be said, but not too earnestly . . . the way a cat pretends not to notice the mouse within reach of its paw". Perhaps this is rather a careless statement: for the poems have not the double-cross of a cat's gambit. Mr. Buchanan does not let the mouse gain confidence in order to catch it and kill it; but he establishes a pretence to maintain a rational tone to a clarification of complexities, and to provoke solutions in non-violence. His is the voice of a concerned and cultured man.

Here is a short poem called "The Anticipators":

Laugh at utopia, it's a far-fetched, too utterly different State:  
but bring it close—next stop, Utopia!

not appearing as perfect, with today's toothache cured, a  
broken chair mended;

then we can work for it. One step at a time,  
close alteration, not a wide jump.

We aren't trying to drag society over *there*, we stay,  
change this slightly, go a little beyond the facts.

There is a prose gloss on the distillation suggesting that our society may be like a capsized boat, bottom up: manual workers being the new leisure class, served and maintained by the overdriven brain workers. "Teams of doctors, managers, technicians keep them well, slightly but sufficiently employed; with some money to burn". The new young café society after all resembles "other leisure classes of history; loves conversation, sex, assemblies, dancing, stylish dress: has a hint of Byronic ennui". While photographs of boards of directors show sad men "lost in a dream of their economic burden".

"Socialists, laudibly obsessed with equal humanity, were mistaken in foreseeing a homogeneous working-class. What has happened is the diversification of the employed classes. Trade unions failed to absorb all employees who became responsible, even managerial in fact, rejected many; too often equated responsibility with ex-

clusion from the trade union movement; conversely, irresponsibility with inclusion in it. The brain-workers (executives, etc.) are, in the main, detached, overworked, nervous of dismissal: from this point of view, in the unprotected position of manual workers 100 years ago".

Such is the material of George Buchanan's meditation, and it produces a poetry not of faith but of rational integrations of complexities.

Many serious young men keep a journal, but not so many have the pleasure of seeing their diaries published in the most attractive format. So *Gimani* (Gaberbochus, 15s) will have a special appeal to those who are seeking, or who remember having sought for, the whys and the wherefores. Edmund Héaford's notes are, in a way, particularly touching; for this young research ballisticsian, who visits all the public libraries to find philosophical books, is essentially a lowbrow in intuition. He is simply amazed at the things he reads, and he has to copy out nuggets of wisdom in his own notebook. Yet even if he endears to us because as a thinker he is more earnest than profound, he is still capable of saying profound things *en passant*. For instance:

The first lesson is that science is not to obtain the truth: science is not for the sake of inquiry itself; science is for use (power, control) and beauty.

There is no such thing as "truth". There is action and there is meta-speculation. Law is a therapy. Natural laws are simplifications of what transpires such that memory capacity is increased.

A thought: what is meant by religion, faith, belief adherence, etc., is the abandonment of care, worry, thought, struggle of mind, inquiry. "Stop running, come to my ledge and rest, you will kill yourself if you go further."

Otherwise, the book records the titles of art films which the author viewed, the political meetings he attended, the difficult cross-word puzzle clues he tackled. A few ambiguous references to himself are slipped in, with happy naivety, to hint at an intriguing personality; and geographical co-ordinates are given at times to places to imply a sense of wider vision. All of which is really most nostalgic, and will remind many freethinkers of their own first quests.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

# Some Thoughts on Miscegenation

By J. CHAPLIN

FOR THE purpose of this essay the word miscegenation is being used to describe the physical and emotional attraction of people of one skin colour group for those of another group. The problems arising from marriage between two such people are not being discussed, nor is the subject being considered for the Western European milieu (although it is of some relevance), but within the colonial framework, with especial reference to the English-speaking areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

As the natural result of physical and emotional attraction will be sexual relations between the two people concerned, we must briefly refer to the legal aspect of such conduct. As is notoriously well-known, such acts in the Republic of South Africa are prohibited by an Immorality Act. While in the popular thought of many other peoples, "immorality" ignores the six other deadly sins, and restricts the term to sexual matters, the South African law still further narrows the definition to intimacies between people of differing skin colours (though, as yet, the logical end-point of preventing English/Afrikaans, Zulu/Sotho, affections, has not been reached).

In Central Africa, until very recently, the absurd situation existed whereby, in Southern Rhodesia marriage between such groups was legal, but extra-marital relations (at least where the man was black-skinned) were not; in Northern Rhodesia, marriage was (and still is) illegal, but illicit relations are not. In East Africa and the Protectorates it seems that the only damper to either form is public opinion, though this (as one recalls with shame concerning the private lives of Seretse Khama and Miss Ruth Williams), can still bring about unwarranted interference at high levels.

Let us now turn to the main point of this paper, the purely personal aspect. At once there must be a clear distinction between two categories, and we must consider the question from the point of view of (a) the white male, (b) the black male. The words "black" and "white" are only used for convenience. One can hardly keep on referring to, "the pinky-brown with white patches beneath his clothes, male" and the "uniformly smooth brown coloured, though varying in shade with individuals" male.

To take the more usual association first, that of the white man with a woman of the indigenous people. Historically it is the usual habit of conquerors to take to wife, or at least to bed, the womenfolk of the people they have beaten in war. This situation is as common in Europe as it was in the more local inter-tribal fighting of Africa; but there is one considerable difference. For the most part, conquest at tribal level led to the assimilation of the women into the victor's group as a wife, albeit one by capture. The resulting children belonged to the group, had status in it. As a by-product important changes in the alteration of languages and customs resulted, through the conservative tendency of women in such situations to retain much of their past tribal culture in their new surroundings.

Conquest by colonisation whether by Bible or Sword had quite different results. Both the Boer invasion of South Africa in the 17th century and the British of Central and East Africa in the late 19th century, brought solitary males into unfamiliar surroundings, yet with needs as urgent as in their homelands. These they satisfied, for the most part, with acts at least as peremptory as those arising from the *droit de seigneur*, though in the course of time some form of more permanent establishment was often set up. The offspring (the "Coloureds" of Southern African parlance)

might be lucky in having their father not only acknowledging his responsibilities for their welfare, but also regarding them with affection. So it is that many names appearing in the Colonial Office lists are echoed in those of Coloured citizens. After this pioneer phase, when women of the same white stock entered the lands concerned, such liaisons, were less frequent, though more temporary activities continued. In this later situation the children are almost always neglected by their father and grow up within the tribal setting, or the compound life of the larger towns.

But now that there are third generation Rhodesians and tenth generation South Africans, what is the answer to the harassed mother's cry, "Why can't he keep with some nice white girl, there's plenty of choice?" Or to pose the question in a more answerable form, "What is the basis of such cross-colour attraction?" Laurens van der Post in his book, *The Dark Eye in Africa*, has partly answered the question, and Alan Paton, in *Too Late the Phalarope*, has also done much to analyse it. Both books are to be read with deep admiration and thanksgiving for their insight (as well as being enjoyable in their own right). To follow up van der Post's ideas on the symbolic meaning of colour, one must realise that for all but a very small minority of Whites, whether in Africa, Europe or elsewhere, sex is bad; it is hidden; it is nasty; it is indecent; it is something discussed secretly, in the dark. It is something mothers and sisters never indulge in, for all that they produce brothers and nephews from time to time. While it is probably more honoured in the breach than the observance, this is the firmly upheld code of the professional class from which so many colonials are drawn. If sex is dark, then let us satisfy it darkly, and how better than with someone of dark skin.

Chirupula Stevenson, a North Rhodesian pioneer who eventually married, with full tribal consent, several African girls, tells how an older man had once warned him lest he should be tempted in this way, with the advice, "look at their feet". But why should one look at feet when there are other far more desirable attractions displayed! The magnificent carriage resulting from the carrying of head-loads; the carefully tended, flawless skin; the rich full figure. To this add the long and intimately detailed training all girls receive in how to please their husbands, and contrast it with the embarrassed mumbblings of a white parent on a girl's wedding-eve, and there can be little surprise that the virile male returns again to the fountain. Here this dark deed can be darkly done, and the great satisfaction derived from an experienced partner can be enjoyed, and the great guilt (for such is the sorry state of our civilisation that pleasure almost always produces guilt) can be calmed with such excuses as, "she's only a kaffir", really meaning, "she's black, she isn't a sister or a mother; they're white, she's black, so my activity can't possibly be incestuous". It is, of course, well known that incest fears lie behind much impotence.

For the girl or woman involved, providing the association has not been forced on her, there is the satisfaction any woman has of having attracted any man. Moreover there is the sly humour (and humour is an important element in the African personality) of knowing that these "gods-by-day" Whites, are no different from other men at night, save that they are probably not so satisfactory as men of her own group.

What then of the situation where the man is black, the  
(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

The yearly reminder this time comes from Canon B. Woodhams of St. Jude's, Mapperley, who pleads—"Please don't write Christmas as Xmas—it misses the whole point of the sacred season. After all, X really stands for anonymity". It is obvious that the worthy Canon does not go much to the cinema—otherwise he would have seen that X really stands for "Horror"! In any case, the word ought to be "Xmas" for it is actually a Pagan feast, celebrated long before "our Lord" ever came on to the scene.

★

It is some time since the newspapers gave details of a "weeping" statue of the Virgin Mary, or of a statue which bleeds at sight; so we are pleased to report from the *Daily Mail* (December 4th) that a statue of St. George at Langenhoe, Essex, has been caught distinctly coughing. Not only has the rector, the Rev. E. Merryweather, heard it cough; he has so impressed the BBC, that it is sending a ghost-hunting squad to investigate and report. The producer is Mr. B. Burwood who has "an open mind" about ghosts. Well, we are delighted that even ghosts can get fair play on the radio. But why can't we see one on TV?

★

We have often wondered why Shakespeare is so very rarely called up from the mighty deep by Spiritualists—or if he is called up, he never comes. At last, in a book by a Mrs. Roberts entitled *Elizabethan Episode*, our greatest poet has proved he is still alive in Summerland, and has gracefully—or is it gratefully?—proved that he writes as well as ever. Here is a specimen of his incomparable and dramatic prose—"I can write a few ideas. This Julius Caesar was a man I knew in another life, and not in England. I was the boy Lucius; I know that I was he. This is a strange tale . . . my spirit's first time on earth as Lucius . . .", and so on *ad lib*.

★

Mr. W. F. J. Knight, M.A., who reviewed the book for *Psychic News*, considers this and similar messages "entirely authentic, important, and also in the main, though even spirits can make a mistake, true, when rightly interpreted and understood". As the late Beerbohm Tree once said in another connection, this is funny without being vulgar. But, alas, poor Shakespeare . . .!

★

That very religious national newspaper, the *Daily Express* tells us (December 9th) that some ministers of the Church of Scotland "are worried about the success of the Mormons in winning converts". But, says the writer, the Mormons "are a dedicated, sincerely religious people who seek to spread their faith", and therefore "the Kirk's attitude ought to be that if a man cannot be a Presbyterian it is far better that he should be a Mormon than nothing at all". But why stop at Mormonism? What about Shintoism or Buddhism or Hinduism or the religious beliefs of the Pygmies or the Australian aborigines? Are not all these (and many more) far better for mankind than downright unbelief? The four million readers of the *Daily Express* must lift up their hearts now and sing for sheer joy.

★

The 32 theologians who recently addressed an Open Letter to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York have had a half-page with portraits devoted to them by *The Observer* (December 3rd). They have, we are solemnly told, "started more than they know". In fact, "controversy has been whipped up". And what is it that has been

"started up"? Why that almost forgotten word in the Churches—"Unity"! Since they wrote their Open Letter they have been "inundated with letters", and "inter-communion has become almost a household word". The operative word here is "almost".

### SOME THOUGHTS ON MISCEGENATION

(Concluded from page 403)

woman is white? This is a far rarer situation, the unreasonable double-standard of the jealous white community which breaks into irrational and bestial hatred in this connection, is a powerful social barrier. Jealous is the operative word. It is more than a white folk-fantasy that the black races are generally more potent and satisfying than the white. (Even if this has psychological reasons, it is none the less true.) And there is definite evidence of greater physical development, greater potency and greater amatory skill. To many women the scent of African skin is exciting, as is the smooth hairless, patchless skin and the body usually muscular from manual labour. Many Negroes during the last war could tell of being pursued by English girls of all social degrees. In fiction one can recall Peter Abrahams's *Wreath for Udomo*, and Michael Innes's *City of Spades*, where this situation receives accurate treatment. Even in Africa it is quite frequently the woman who makes the initial overtures, some take fright and cases of alleged rape arise, but in fact the number of cases in which the rapist is the white male are many times greater.

Allowing that the woman initiates the association, why does the black man respond? How does he overcome the fear that he must have of retribution should he be discovered? Ordinary conversation between the groups is regarded with sufficient suspicion, that any intelligent African is always wary and on the alert to avoid hurt—physical and emotional—from this cause. The incidents the white politician calls "pin-pricks", are mule-kicks to the man who has to endure them constantly. First help towards agreement is the thrill of the forbidden; the obvious eagerness of the partner, being asked rather than asking is satisfying to any man's self-esteem. But above all is the satisfaction that here at least is one inter-racial\* situation in which he is naturally and in reality the dominant partner. Such an emotional release is difficult to realise in a land where social standing is not decided by some quite irrelevant criterion such as skin colour, but it is very great. Probably herein lies the satisfaction of the relationship as, initially at least, the physical side is usually profoundly unsatisfactory owing to the ignorance of the *ars amoris* of the woman. If the association continues for any length of time the man takes to himself the duty of instructing his girl.

To sum up: for the whites of both sexes, the attraction lies in being confronted by physical perfection unhampered by guilts and restraints, in a group that accepts all things as good in themselves; there is contact with a community so different from one's own that guilts can be swallowed up in that difference; there is the opportunity to discard, if only briefly, the evergrowing chains of conformity. For the blacks there is the satisfaction of the knowledge that in truth there are no basic differences to mankind and that in certain important areas of conduct, they excel. A commonly heard phrase, holds the whole matter: "In the darkness of night, all people are dark".

\* I have tried to avoid the use of the word "race" in this essay as I am completely opposed to and unconvinced by the attempt to divide Mankind into compartments which equate skin colour with ability, as is being done, for example, by the group writing in the *Mankind Quarterly* of Professor Ruggles Gates.

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### To Correspondent:

Will P. J. Gilmartin please send his address.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

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London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m. MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCIOLE. (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

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

## Notes and News

AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR we hear a great deal about human brotherhood, human fellowship. But genuine international (including inter-racial) fellowship can only come about from human understanding. In this issue an article by Colin McCall describes a children's picture-story book from Lithuania, sent to him by one of our readers who regularly corresponds with a Lithuanian schoolteacher. Another article, "Some Thoughts on Miscegenation" by J. Chaplin should help us towards understanding a subject that is bedevilled by ignorant emotionalism. Mr. Chaplin writes with authority and experience of anthropological work in Africa.

★

NEXT WEEK, having given Christians time to centre their gaze upon the child in the manger, we turn the spotlight upon his foster father. Readers will find Mrs. Eva Ebury's article on Joseph both amusing and revealing.

★

RETURNING TO HUMAN, and especially inter-racial understanding, we recommend the paperback of short stories by the young negro writer, Alston Anderson, entitled *Lover Man* (Pan Books, 2s. 6d.). It gives a remarkable insight into the life of the negro, especially in the Southern states of the USA, and it has a foreword by Robert Graves. Mr. Anderson was born in Panama of Jamaican parents, was educated in Jamaica and North Carolina, served in the US forces and attended North Carolina and Columbia Universities and the Sorbonne. *Lover Man* may be obtained from the Pioneer Press.

★

H. J. BLACKHAM AND M. L. BURNET, Secretary and Assistant Secretary respectively, of the Ethical Union, were injured in a car crash the weekend before last. Mr.

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged £133 5s. 10d. Mrs. M. Beesley, £1; A. Hewitt, 10s.; S. Trent, 7s. 6d.; E. Cybart, 12s. 6d.; Miss A. Lloyd, £1; Mrs. Evans, 3s. 6d.; A. Georgetti, £3 2s. 6d.; F. M. Canada, 15s.; A. W. Laing, £3 7s. 6d.; W. Wilkie, 5s.; A. Addison, £1. Total to date, December 15th, 1961: £145 9s. 4d.

Blackham suffered concussion and is having to rest; Mr. Burnet has fractured ribs but is managing to walk about slowly and painfully. We wish them both a full recovery. Lady Virginia Flemming, who was also in the car, fortunately escaped unhurt.

★

TWO APPEAL COURT judges recently decided that a nine-year-old girl should live with her mother—the guilty party in a divorce action—rather than with her father, a university lecturer, because the latter didn't believe in God (*Daily Herald*, 6/12/61). Mr. T. Pigot, for the mother, said that the girl "should not have her Christian beliefs taken away from her at an age when she cannot think for herself, by a father who is obviously highly intelligent". Lord Justice Davies said: "I suppose that at school she is taught to fear God. Then when she gets home she is told it is a lot of rubbish". And Lord Justice Pearce said that the girl's mother would be able to help her with sewing and similar things. "It may be that this is of far greater value at this stage in her life than anything her father can do to help her". This, despite the fact that the divorce had been granted because of the mother's adultery with two men. Mr. Pigot remarked that, "It is often a disadvantage to have too intellectual a father", but the disadvantage in this case was surely the father's. He came before Lord Justices who considered atheism worse than adultery. The National Secular Society has protested to the Lord Chancellor.

★

POAU (Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State) is strongly protesting against bills before the US Senate and House of Representatives proposing to give 79 acres of "valuable Federal land" in a Chicago suburb to the Jesuit Loyola University for the purpose of erecting a medical centre (*Church and State*, November, 1961). The site, formerly part of the area of the Veterans Administration Hospital, Hines, Illinois, has been declared "surplus" and marked for donation to the Roman Catholic order, but POAU has "cited decisions of the US Supreme Court barring the use of public assets for the benefit of Church enterprise", and has "urged that the proposed give away receive careful appraisal in the Congress and not be hastily passed without 'due process'". Sponsoring the bills are Senators Paul Douglas (Democrat, Illinois) and Everett McKinley Dirksen (Republican, Illinois) and Representative E. R. Finnegan (Democrat, Illinois).

★

ALTHOUGH THE FEDERAL proposal doesn't directly concern the State of Illinois it is worth noting that the State constitution says: "Neither the general assembly nor any country, city, town, township, school district, or other public corporation shall ever make any appropriation or pay from any public fund whatever, anything, in aid of any church or sectarian purpose, or to help support or sustain any school, academy, seminary, college, university, or other literary or scientific institution, controlled by any church or sectarian denomination, nor shall any grant or donation of land, money or other personal property ever be made by the State or any public corporation to any church or any sectarian purpose".

## They Liked It Here!

By COLIN McCALL

FOLLOWING THE RECENT DISCUSSION on atheism in the USSR, one of our readers, Mr. F. M. Blake, of Mitcham, Surrey, has kindly sent me a most interesting and delightful children's picture-story book, *Dangus Zemeje* ("Heaven on Earth"), printed in Lithuanian and published in 1959. Mr. Blake corresponds in Esperanto with a Lithuanian schoolteacher (who incidentally reads from THE FREETHINKER to her English class) and she has translated the book into English.

God, we learn as we see a baldheaded, white-bearded old gentleman on a cloud examining an artificial satellite through a telescope, is troubled. Some strange phenomena are taking place under his very nose, so he decides to send one of his saints to earth to investigate. The saint in question is fast asleep on a genuinely soft-as-air mattress, but he is awakened by Gabriel's trumpeting and tickling on the foot by a young angel. "Get up! God is asking for you!" says the latter; who adds, "Won't He give us a dusting?" as they skip hastily across the sky in response to the summons.

"Is the Chief busy?" they ask God's glamorous and slightly décolleté secretary. Not too busy to see them, obviously, for the next picture shows them in the Holy of Holies, with the clouds most effectively shaped into arm-chairs for them and into chair and desk for the Heavenly Chairman. "You are to go to the earth on business", He tells them. So, off to the cashier for an advance (one hundred days' indulgence), then it's farewell to St. Peter, who lets them out of the massive gate, and off on the journey to earth.

Down they fly together, the bald and bearded, hairy-legged and haloed saint, and the young, freckled, bewinged angel (little more than a cherub, the dear!), encountering a sputnik ("I haven't seen such stars before!") and a jet-plane ("See, birds! The earth can't be far!") en route. But surprises really begin after landing. A young man giving his friend an apple causes the wee angel to shout, "Don't take it Eve. You'll get into trouble," and a tractor with female driver evokes "The devil turned into a woman!" from the saint. Even a boy on a bicycle can be startling to Heavenly visitors, but doves are harmless enough — "saintly souls", in fact — and cruciform electric pylons only gigantic crosses—"to the greater glory of God, I presume", says the saint.

Fishing methods, he finds, have changed since his day — and are more effective. So, too, has farming, with its "monster" of a combined harvester. The social order isn't what it was, either, for the palatial buildings house collective-farm workers and not bishops. There are still ascetic hermits, however — or drunken tramps in the wood, who are virtually the same animal. Can it be night, though, when the street lamps are turned on? Things really are puzzling. A priest must be sought quickly.

Sought he is, and found, with his "heavenly drink complete with stars" — three-starred brandy — and not averse to feminine company, judging by the high-heeled shoe on the floor. But it is plain that things are not well for the Church. "This is our active body", the priest explains, pointing to a few simple peasant women: and "this is — passive"; indicating the men and women of all ages entering the sports and cultural centre. Collecting boxes may continue to do well at a miracle shrine (the water being a "spring of income") but on the whole, as the priest remarks, "looking after sheep doesn't pay nowadays". The saint may get some consolation from imagining that

children on a nature-study ramble with their teacher are going to their first confession, but it is only a temporary relief.

"Hellish noises" surround him and the fires of Hell seem to be breaking out of the factory chimneys, while a hydro-electric scheme stirs awful memories of the Flood itself. In the city, the traffic scares both saint and angel, and at night the lighted windows appear to be stars. The Lithuanian Young Communist League building is a place to be avoided, even if it means stepping off the pavement, but a trip to Trakai, a place of pilgrimage, is worth while. Alas, the bus is full of tourists, not pilgrims, and the miracles occur in the city park, where water sprays supernaturally out of a fountain.

Fools abound as ever, though. Fancy a man talking (on the telephone) as if somebody could hear him! Mathematical ideas are silly, i.e. non-canonical; and people read library books and watch television. The saint is not to be tempted by any charming singer on TV, will borrow no book but the Bible, and wants nothing but holy water from the vintner. But, oh dear, those shocks! Prayers to God don't stop the bathwater, and there seems no way of stopping the electric kettle except cutting the flex. Workmen come out of the ground through manholes, and the devil himself appears on stage singing. They may still be torturing witches in the hairdressing saloon, and no doubt the ambulance is rushing a priest to the sick, but modern contrivances are exasperating. "Where has the man hidden himself?" The radio is smashed to bits yet he can't be found. Automation means one can get one's bread without sweat of the face. Today a building is going up where yesterday there was a grave — a miracle indeed.

Let us not forget God's miracle of life, however: tell the anatomy class which of Adam's ribs was used to make Eve, even if the students laugh at you. Destroy those blasphemous posters announcing a lecture on "Is there a God?" And correct the meatless day notice outside the butcher's shop. It should be Friday, not Sunday, as all the faithful know. Earth, one may imagine, can be very trying for God's representatives. A saint can't even sit contentedly under his halo in the cinema without the lady behind asking him to take his cap off because she can't see. And a poor angel can so easily get his wings injured in a door.

Surprisingly enough, though, the health service is free. Come to think of it, too, the shop windows have some lovely toys and tasty drinks. Why shouldn't a young angel play football with boys and an old saint have a pint at the pub? It's good fun. And it marks the beginning of the end. The Chief may send his urgent telegram by lightning flash (in Lithuanian they call them "lightning telegrams"): "Return to Heaven. Stop. God", but His emissaries are becoming quite endeared to earth. "I don't want to go to Heaven", cries the angel. "I want to go to school". The saint is not averse to work. So they put it to the vote. "Who is in favour of the proposal not to return to Heaven?" Unanimous.

And so we come to the last picture. No caption is needed, as halo, wings and saint's medallion go hurtling into the river. It's better on earth than in Heaven. They like it here.

I hope I have conveyed something of the charm and liveliness of this — to us — so very unusual book for children. I consider it admirable, and I think it augurs well. So does the friendship between the two FREETHINKER

readers, Mr. Blake and his Lithuanian correspondent, and I want to thank them both for making it possible for me to summarise *Dangus Zemeje*. Their friendship shows the way towards a real heaven on earth. Politicians please note.

## Memories of the Holy Land

By F. E. PAPPS

IN THE WINTER OF 1917, I found myself at the base at Kantara, Egypt, as one of the reinforcements to General Allenby's army which was chasing the Turks out of Palestine. A military railway was in course of construction, and the railhead had now reached Bela, winding its way over the treacherous sands of the Sinai peninsular. Heavy rains had dislodged sleepers, distorted the track, and had played havoc with bridges and crossings; so our journey was necessarily slow and not without incident, humorous and tragic. Our first glimpse of the Holy Land was of barbed-wire entanglements on which we could discern the unburied bodies of men and horses fallen in recent battles.

The battery of Siege Artillery, to which I was posted, was somewhere in the hills of Judea, across a flat plain, which at the time was a sea of deep thick mud. (This plain, I was told, was the scene of the fight between David and Goliath.) We reached our respective units by day marches, mostly in pouring rain, finally reaching Ludd or Lydda, where we spent a more or less restful night in a monastery attached to a Greek Orthodox church. In the church itself several groups of soldiers were gambling on the altar beneath a huge crucifix, while a number of priests were gravely looking down from the balcony above. It was certainly a most unusual sort of congregation in a Christian church. Some of the troops were brewing up daxies of tea to wash down the iron rations, and their language may be imagined but not repeated here.

We moved up from time to time, and when the Turks capitulated, we were within a few miles of Jaffa, among groves of orange and almond trees. Then came the chance of a week's leave to visit Jerusalem, which — like Rome in the last war — had not been bombarded.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is shared by many sects, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Coptic, Roman Catholic. There are lamps made of gold and silver, and studded with diamonds and rubies. Vast riches are here. One chapel allegedly founded by the Empress Helena is called the Chapel of the Invention of the Cross — to my mind a very apt title! The Via Dolorosa, or Fourteen Stations of the Cross also caused me to do some thinking. Each of the Stations is marked by a chapel, with luridly coloured, life-size pictures or statues, some, like the Chapel of the Scourging, positively horrible in their realism. The old walled city was certainly picturesque and mysterious — as well as dirty and sordid. I was an interested spectator at the sight of orthodox Jews, mostly old men, at the Wailing Wall, the great stones of which are reputed to be the remains of Solomon's Temple, while a building of outstanding architectural beauty is the wrongly-called Mosque of Omar, which stands on the alleged site of the famous temple. It is really the "Dome of the Rock", and its many windows catch the sun from sunrise to sunset, thus illuminating large words from the Koran made from purest gold.

I was amazed at the hundreds of priests, most of them obviously well fed at a time when most of the inhabitants were at the point of near starvation due to the ravages of war. Hundreds of nuns were also to be seen, while shops, whether Jewish, Muslim or what have you, all sold Christian relics, rosaries or holy handkerchiefs.

We climbed up the Mount of Olives, visited the Garden

of Gethsemane. There is a monastery here where one may buy holy wax tapers, while from the top towers of the Church of the Ascension one can see the Jordan and the Dead Sea. An indenture in a rock was said to be Christ's footprint (he must have had a big foot!) and ancient tombs abound. Most are empty, and most have Biblical traditions. My impression was that Christianity was distinctly fraudulent, and this was confirmed by a visit to the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem — complete with manger. The most lucrative trade for priests and people in Bethlehem is Christianity. It is Christmas every day.

During my stay in Palestine, I kept up a correspondence with the secretary of a Quaker Adult Sunday School (of which I was a member) here at home. Naturally, in these letters I described things as I saw them, and my references to the obvious frauds brought a considerable amount of protest. On my return to England, I was visited by the secretary, who asked me if I would give a brief talk on my experiences. Though no orator, I consented to do so, and thereby caused quite a sensation. However, I got some applause, and after the meeting I was stopped on the way out by a man who asked me if I had read Paine's *Age of Reason*. I told him "No", whereupon he thrust a copy into my hand. What remaining religious beliefs I may have clung to, disappeared from then on, and my reading became more and more inquiring! So, I shall always be glad that I made that pilgrimage to the home of Christianity.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 1961. Present: Mr. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornbrook, McIlroy, Mills, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Johnson and Tribe. Members stood in silence in memory of Albert Edward Arthur whose tragic death occurred on the eve of the last Executive Committee meeting. Five new individual members were admitted. Humanist Council minutes were before the meeting, and it was agreed that the Society should urge the Home Secretary to invite the Council to participate in conferences on crime and morality. A protest to the Lord Chancellor was authorised in connection with the Appeal Court judges' decision that an adulterous mother should have custody of her 9-year-old child in preference to the father, a university lecturer, who was an atheist. Mr. W. Shannon was appointed EC representative for Wales in place of the late Mr. Arthur. The following leaflets had been printed or reprinted for distribution: "What is Secularism?"; "How I Became an Atheist" by C. H. Hammersley; "A Critique of Theism" and "The Common Market and the Holy Roman Empire" by F. A. Ridley; and "The Catholic Church v. the Planned Family" by Margaret McIlroy. Annual Dinner arrangements were agreed. Mr. Ebury handed over the usual North London Branch monthly contribution of £5 to the Building Fund. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, January 17th, 1962.

### Preference

Christ's teaching is full of life and dynamic. The secular doctrine is dreary and negative. Just dog-in-a-manger stuff.

Letter in *Leicester Evening Mail* (4/12/61).

*Obviously prefers god-in-a-manger stuff.*

### PAPERBACKS

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**Miss Lonelyhearts and A Cool Million** by Nathanael West (double vol.) 2s. 6d.  
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**Has Man a Future?** by Bertrand Russell, 2s. 6d.  
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## WETHERSFIELD AND JUDAS

After two hours observation duty near the junction of the NATO base approach road and the B 1053 road to Wethersfield village, I needed a walk to restore my circulation. So I set off for the village. It was there that I saw the minibus with "Church of Judas" in large letters on both sides and, standing by it, large, bearded, jovial Kenneth Saunders, first missionary of the Church.

Mr. Saunders assured me that his Church was a reality. It had been in existence for about 18 months. How did he come to be in Wethersfield? Some CND friends had asked his Church to help with welfare work; hot drinks, that sort of thing. His Church had a life membership fee of thirty pieces of silver or the equivalent. Churches, he said, had been established in the names of all the other apostles but none so far as he knew, in the name of Judas, who had only once betrayed Jesus and had attempted to make amends. The other apostles had repeatedly betrayed Jesus directly and by implication, and Peter had denied Him at least eight times.

There was a good chance that if the apostles had spoken up and denied Jesus's guilt, the centurion on duty would have contacted Pontius Pilate, who was particularly apprehensive about sparking off a Jewish revolt at the time. It was most probable that Jesus would have been reprieved at this juncture and the horrible consequences of Judas's betrayal of Jesus set at naught.

To the freethinker of course, this "if" is fascinating. If there had been no murdered Jesus, would another Jewish radical have taken the scene? Would Mithraism have spread? Or would orthodox Judaism have triumphed? However we are told that Jesus was killed, and the Church of Judas follows Jesus's own injunction to "forgive seventy times seven". Anyway, Mr. Saunders and his group confess that they have betrayed Jesus positively and negatively many times more than did Judas, Peter and the ten others.

Were they in favour of civil disobedience? Mr. Saunders doubted whether provocation of the agents of the law was worth while, but if the Committee of 100 were banned then his Church would rally 100% to its support. He supported the National Council for Civil Liberties and affirmed that, although his Church had no dogma, doctrine or creed, it was in the radical tradition of first century Judaic Christianity as against the conservative Pauline variety.

The material side of life was essential towards achieving the spiritual ends said Mr. Saunders, and 3 hours later he and his Church officers were still dealing out freshly brewed tea to demonstrators.

C. W. MARSHALL.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### SPINOZA AND THE JEWS

I made a technical error in saying that the Jews would have burned Spinoza. Actually they would have stoned him, though had he lived in Spain, the Inquisition would have burned him. The Jewish law prescribes death by stoning for apostasy or blasphemy, and many examples of its application (e.g. James the Just, brother of the so-called Christ, was stoned to death by the High Priest) are given by Josephus and other Jewish historians.

It may be relevant to point out that while there is no example of stoning to death in modern Jewish history (probably due to lack of opportunity) the very similar Muslim law (which no doubt derives from the Jewish) has actually been applied in the present century. As late as about 1920, members of the heretical Ahmediya sect were stoned to death in Afghanistan. There is no reason to believe that the Jews of the 17th century would have acted any differently with regard to Spinoza.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### IMMIGRANTS

I cannot share Mr. P. G. Roy's view that it is unwise of the National Secular Society to protest against the Government's Immigrants Bill, or that the protest should have been on other grounds. Racial discrimination is the essential feature of the Bill, and the N.S.S. is pledged to fight racial and colour discrimination in any form. I think the Executive Committee of the Society is to be commended.

ROBERT DENT.

### NEXT WEEK

## ETHICS AND THE COSMOS

By F. A. RIDLEY

## POINTS FROM NEW BOOKS

My appreciation to Oswell Blakeston for his instructive book reviews.

A. GREGORY

### SUFFERING

I became an Atheist after seeing the suffering in a mental hospital. It convinced me that a loving Creator did not exist.

J. HAYMAN.

### ATHEISM ON THE B.B.C.

Though they may not yet have been mentioned in Mrs. Dale's Diary (F. A. Ridley, 1/12/61), Atheism, Agnosticism and Humanism are occasionally referred to in Woman's Hour on the BBC. And Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* is currently being read by Alec Clunes.

(Mrs.) NAN CROME.

### HUMANISM

Permit me to comment on "Humanism as a Philosophy" (p.388).

The term "Humanist" is used in contradiction to "Theist". The Theist's first duty is to his god. He will commit the most horrible crimes if he thinks they please his god.

The humanist denies any such duty, asserting that his concern is for his fellows only; not excluding the higher non-humans. I personally would prefer the term "Rationalist" but "Humanist" is much preferable to "Secularist". Mr. Bennett gives us his own peculiar meaning to this word but to many others it means "One without a religious order, as the secular clergy".

The word was adopted by Atheists nearly a century ago to throw dust in the eyes of the followers of "Gentle Jesus" by whom avowed atheists were in real danger of being hanged drawn and quartered. In these more enlightened days there would be no serious danger in boldly calling ourselves Atheists, if such we be.

W. E. HUXLEY.

F. A. RIDLEY'S

### POPE JOHN AND THE COLD WAR

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