

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXII—No. 25

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF THE MOST important events during the course of the present century has been the emergence of Africa into the full light of world history. Future historians will no doubt regard the current acquisition of political independence and of full cultural autonomy as an event of world importance and significance far transcending the local feuds and petty scandals which make up so much of the journalistic news. For Africa is now fulfilling the notable prediction made 1900 years ago by that great Roman Humanist thinker, the Stoic philosopher, Seneca (BC 4-AD 65): "Out of Africa something new can always be relied upon to appear". In point of fact, nothing quite comparable with the present emergence of the hitherto Dark Continent has ever been known in the entire course of the evolution of human civilisation. For positively the first time in recorded history, Africa, in its continental integrity, is entering into world politics and world civilisation. For unlike Asia, Europe, and to a certain extent at least, America (as witnessed in the colossal antiquities bequeathed by the Incas of Peru and by the Mayas of Central America), Africa apart from its northern fringe (which may be regarded culturally as part of Asia rather than of Africa), has never yet pulled its continental weight within the scope of world civilisation.

A Continent Without Gods

To discourse upon the political prospects and the cultural perspectives would be somewhat superfluous. The African Revolution—by virtue of the fact that it has been successful—has become respectable, though those of us (including the present writer) who were actively associated with its earlier phases, can remember the time—and a time not so long ago either—when this was emphatically not the case. By 1962 the term "Africa" has at last transcended its immemorial status as merely "a geographical expression". However, whilst Africa has arrived in the political sense, there is another aspect, and one we imagine of more direct interest to the readers of THE FREETHINKER, that presently receives virtually no notice at all in contemporary literature and—it goes without saying—in the contemporary popular press. From the religious angle, Africa is a vacant continent, a continent without gods. For negroid Africa, that is the bulk of the continent, is still in the magical, animistic pre-religious stage of cultural evolution. The cultural level of pre-colonialist Africa—i.e. of most of Africa prior to this last century when Dr. Livingstone ("I presume") and his contemporary explorers began to open it up—perhaps roughly corresponded with that of the white savages who overran the Roman Empire during the early centuries of the Christian era, when our barbaric forefathers worshipped sticks and stones and animistically personified the inanimate forces of nature. Nowadays however, this pre-civilised phase of African cultural evolution is pretty obviously on the way out. The famous prediction made by Karl Marx at the time when modern means of railway communica-

tion were first introduced into India, that this inevitably implied the eventual collapse of India's immemorial Hindu superstitions and the ultimate disappearance of the ancient gods of Hinduism—"of Hanuman the Ape, and of Suraste the cow goddess"—can be applied with equal force and probability to the Africa of 1962, a primitive continent emerging at long last into the mould of a modern technical civilisation based on science. In such an advanced phase of African culture, the extremely primitive fetish-gods of Benin and the Voodoo deities of Dahomey will inevitably follow their Aryan predecessors, Odin, Thor and the Hindu gods of the Swastika into oblivion. Who will take their place?

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Gods over Africa

By F. A. RIDLEY

Celestial Competition

At the moment, just as its former white conquerors are leaving Africa, the gods are entering the fetish-ridden continent. For, pursuant upon the famous Positivist "Law of the Three Stages" (as laid down a century back by Auguste Comte), with the advent of civilisation in darkest Africa, African society simultaneously quits the pre-civilised animistic phase in which the Negro races have so far existed, for the first of Comte's three historic phases. As the fetishes move out, their theological successors, the gods, move in. The spiritual sceptre of the vacant continent is now unattached. A vast field of spiritual conquest is now open to Africa's religious invaders. As Europe and, to a certain (and increasing) extent, Asia and America, are moving forward beyond Comte's first two stages (the theological and the metaphysical) into his third scientific post-religionist phase, the gods are entering Africa in force. For in its present continental stage, Africa seems as ripe for conquest by one of the "higher" religions as was the post-Roman Europe of the German Barbarians by Christianity in the centuries which followed upon the demise of the Roman Empire, or as was Asia in the 7th and following centuries for the all conquering crusaders of Islam and the Koran. Religions, like more terrestrial phenomena, also acknowledge the evolutionary law of the survival of the fittest: that is, of course, in the appropriate epoch and historic milieu.

Christ Versus Muhammed

At this present time, the two main contenders for the vacant spiritual sceptre of the present-day African continent are Islam and Christianity. The Koran versus the Bible; Christ versus Muhammed. At the present moment, to judge from all available accounts, the religion of the Holy Koran is (to lapse into sporting vernacular) well in front on points! Its current African converts are coming in much faster amongst the African races, and Muslim theology, more comprehensible and much less metaphysical than that of orthodox Christianity, appears to be much better adapted to the still semi-primitive Negro masses. In addition to which, Islam has a double advantage over its major rival. It is already firmly established in Egypt and North Africa in general. And—

a most important advantage in a post-colonialist continent newly emancipated from the Imperialist rule of the former European masters of Africa—unlike Christianity it is not indelibly associated with past and colonialist regimes in Africa (e.g. Portuguese Angola, etc.). I must repeat the opinion that I have expressed in these columns before, that of all still-existing religions, Islam has been the most successful in eschewing unnecessary accretions (such as, for example, abound in both Hinduism and Christianity) and has consequently a greater degree of adaptability and resulting survival value than has any other contemporary religion. Certainly, I should contend, more than has any form of extant Christianity. In view of these advantages which are peculiarly relevant to present-day Africa, I should be inclined to risk the prediction that the Crescent will eventually prevail over the Cross: Muhammed over Jesus and the Unitarian Allah over the most Holy Trinity. The Christians are acutely aware of this proximate danger for, not only has the Roman Catholic Church (as already noted in this paper) opened seminaries here and elsewhere in order to train an *élite* of Christian Negro leaders for the new post-Colonialist Africa, but we were recently informed that Rome has now sent all its former missionaries in China—now expelled by the prevalent Communist regime—to Africa.

However, if, as George Borrow once asserted, "the roots of Ararat are deeper than those of Rome", we are afraid that in the Africa of the immediate future, the roots of Mecca will likewise appear more solid than those of both Rome and of its Protestant contemporaries.

Islam Versus the Atheistic Revolution

Nevertheless, times change. The historic conditions that enabled Islam (or for that matter, Christianity) to conquer and to hold for a lengthy period so much of the world, are now past, probably never to return. For if the immediate prospects of Islam are bright, the same cannot now be said of its long-term prospects. For as Africa enters into world civilisation she simultaneously enters the domain of world-science and along with it of the present world-wide Atheistic revolution. To revert to Comte's "Law of the Three Stages", Africa having entered the first (theological) one and (we hope) by-passed the second (metaphysical) one, will, we hope speedily pass into the third (scientific) one. Then the Atheistic Revolution will presently submerge Africa along with the rest of the civilised world. Both Jesus and Muhammed, Holy Bible and Holy Koran will follow the African witch doctors and medicine men, who were their historic predecessors, into the "Mausoleum of dead religions", as Grant Allen once aptly termed it.

Points from a New Book

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

MEN MOULD RELIGION to fit their desires and ambitions, but few are quite so brazen as John Hugh Smyth-Pigott who simply announced that he was "The Beloved One" with a right to claim any good-looking, rich female disciple as a "spiritual bride". The spiritual unions, in fact, often produced material children; but naturally, the new Messiah, being above sin, was able to preach himself out of any scandals.

Had his "Abode of Love" been founded without a religious pretext, it is doubtful whether it would have survived the frequent newspaper disclosures. It just shows what the cloak of religion can do, even when conventional citizens are outraged; for Smyth-Pigott kept out of prison until his death in 1927.

Donald McCormick tells the whole story in *Temple of Love* (Jarrolds, 25s.); and, once again, one is amazed at the way a religious pretext is able to dupe educated people. An old lady was tempted to part with her money on the promise that she would become a bride of "The Beloved One" in the next world. Young virgins were assured immortality in return for favours. And who could doubt the charlatan's word? for, as one educated woman declared, only a man who was genuine would dare to proclaim himself as God!

Mr. McCormick deals, too, with similar sects which preceded, rivalled or followed the "Abode of Love". He mentions Barthelemy Prosper Enfantin who, as part of his religion, saw the world as one vast dormitory for free lovers. One of his disciples, Leonore Labilliere, took "the message" to America in 1836; and there she teamed up with a renegade priest. In England, the Reverend Henry James Price spoke of "spiritual marriage feasts" and officiated in a church which was a strange combination of bar parlour, lounge and chapel.

Smyth-Pigott also began by taking holy orders, and at his seminary he formed an inner society to pray for the conversion of the principal! He moved on to working for the Salvation Army among West End prostitutes before he had the notion of shouting: "I am not a man. God is

in me". But God, it seems, was very much of a man in the sensual sense, and he was also pretty sly at business. If Smyth-Pigott-God found that his "sisters waiting for the coming of the Heavenly Bridegroom" were not contributing sufficient funds to his coffers, he was not above snapping, "God does not wish to hear any excuses". The great festival in his church was his birthday, when all were expected to give him presents. Meanwhile, wooing became the orthodox religious instruction.

When the journalists started to put "The Beloved One" in the pillory, there was a bizarre reaction in Norway. A Lutheran minister wrote to the community at "The Abode of Love": "My dear friends, I greet you as friends because there is so much evil spoken against you that God must be with you". Thus was the Norwegian branch of the sect founded, and thus does religion flourish on this earth like a green bay tree!

In America, Thomas Lake Harris was telling his "soul-brides" that "the life of Christ in man causes strange physical sensations". He made his followers labour for love in his vineyards, and he sold "mystic wine" as an aphrodisiac.

Yet, asks Mr. McCormick, were the Early Christians practising their semi-pagan love feasts, Barthelemy Enfantin, Leonore Labilliere, Henry Price, John Hugh Smyth-Pigott, Henry Lake Harris any more feeble-minded or eccentric than St. Peter, John Knox, Charles Wesley, the Welsh evangelists of the nineteenth century, or Dr. Buchman? "The answer must surely be", the author writes, "that none of these people in their prime was feeble-minded, that they all possessed remarkable powers and that eccentricities could be matched by those of the religious leaders and philosophers with whom they are compared."

WITHOUT COMMENT

"Coach operators and organisations have protested because the cathedral will be closed on Whit Monday for a service. We are fearful of what will happen that day."—The Provost of Coventry Cathedral (*Daily Herald*, 8/6/62).

Lucian, Erasmus and Rabelais

By VOLTAIRE

(Translated by H. CUTNER)

[As perhaps not many readers know the once famous *Dia-logues* of Voltaire, they may find this one interesting. It is typically Voltairean.—H.C.]

LUCIAN, some time ago, made the acquaintance of ERASMUS, in spite of his repugnance for everything which came from the frontiers of Germany. He did not see why a Greek should stoop so low as to speak to a Batavian; but as this Batavian seemed to him to be good company, they began the following discussion:

Lucian. So you have followed in a barbarous country the same calling that I followed in the most refined country in the world; you have laughed at everything?

Erasmus. Alas—I should have liked to do just that. It would have been a great consolation for such a poor theologian as I used to be; but I was not able to take the same liberties as you.

Lucian. You astonish me; men just love it when they are shown some of their follies in general, so long as nobody in particular is mentioned. Everybody likes to fasten his own stupidities on to his neighbour; and we all like to make fun of somebody else. Wasn't that the case with your own contemporaries?

Erasmus. There is a great difference between the fools of your day and those of mine; you had to deal with gods who acted in a theatre, and with some philosophers who had less credit than gods. But for me the truth is I was surrounded by fanatics, and I had to take the greatest care not to be burnt alive by some of them or assassinated by others.

Lucian. Well, how did you manage to poke fun at them in such a quandary?

Erasmus. Actually, I didn't poke too much fun. And they looked upon me as being much more amusing than I really was. In fact, as being very gay and very ingenious because everybody else was so sad. They deeply studied stupid ideas which made men gloomy. Those who thought, for example, that a body could be in two places at the same time were ready to butcher those who explained the same thing in a different way. It was even worse. A man like me who didn't take one side or the other was looked upon as a monster.

Lucian. Certainly there were strange men in the midst of the barbarians with whom you live! In my day, they were much more rational. And by the way, what was your profession in your dreadful country?

Erasmus. I was a Dutch monk.

Lucian. A monk! Whatever is such a profession?

Erasmus. It's one in which you haven't one—you have to swear to be someone quite useless to the human race, to be a slave, and always to live on other people.

Lucian. That seems a pretty poor profession! How in the world, with your intellect, did you take up something which so dishonours human nature? Leaving aside having to live on other people, what about taking a vow not to have plain common sense, and to lose one's liberty!

Erasmus. The truth is I was very young, and having neither parents nor friends, I allowed myself to be seduced by scoundrels who were anxious to increase the number of similar scoundrels.

Lucian. Do you mean to say that there are numbers of these people?

Erasmus. In Europe there must be at least six or seven hundred thousand.

Lucian. Good heavens! The world has certainly be-

come more idiotic and more barbarous since I left it! Horace well said—everything would get worse.

Erasmus. What consoles me is that in the era I lived, all men were mounted on the last step of folly. It was well that some came off, and that a few among them found at last a little reason.

Lucian. I beg to doubt it. Tell me, I pray, what were the principal manias of your time?

Erasmus. Here they are—a list that I always carry with me. Read it.

Lucian. It's pretty long.

Lucian reads it and bursts into laughter. Rabelais comes along.

Rabelais. When people laugh I know I am welcome. What is this all about?

Lucian and Erasmus. Follies.

Rabelais. Ah—then I'm your man.

Lucian (to Erasmus). Who is this queer fish?

Erasmus. He's a man far more daring than I, and far more of a jester. But then he used to be a priest and so could take far more liberties than I who was only a monk.

Lucian (to Rabelais). Yes, but did you, like Erasmus, take a vow to live at the expense of other people?

Rabelais. Doubly—for I was both priest and doctor. I was born wise, I became like Erasmus a scholar, and seeing that wisdom and science would probably take me to the workhouse or to a gibbet, seeing that even half the banter of Erasmus was sometimes persecuted, I thought it best to appear madder than all my compatriots put together. I wrote a huge book of rigmarole, full of filth, in which I turned into ridicule all the superstitions and ceremonies I could, everything we revered in my country, from Kings to Popes, to that of a doctor in theology who is the lowest of them all. I dedicated my book to a Cardinal, and I made everybody laugh—even those who despised me.

Lucian. But what is a Cardinal, Erasmus?

Erasmus. He's a priest dressed in red who gets £25,000 a year pension for doing just nothing at all.

Lucian. But you do admit that even some of these Cardinals were reasonable people. It does look as if not all your co-citizens were so mad as you make them to be.

Erasmus. Perhaps M. Rabelais will allow me to answer. Cardinals had a particular type of madness—that of wishing always to dominate. And as it is much easier to subjugate idiots than intellectuals, they took care to prevent any reasoning which had begun to raise its head. M. Rabelais, whom you see here, imitated the first while Brutus pretended to be mad to escape the mistrust and tyranny of the Tarquins.

Lucian. Everything you say confirms my opinion that it was better to live in my century than in yours. These Cardinals of yours then were the masters of the entire world since they governed the insane?

Rabelais. No, for there was an old lunatic above them all.

Lucian. What is he called?

Rabelais. A Pope. This man's madness consists of thinking he is infallible, and the master of kings; and he has had this so often said, so often repeated, so often yelled about by monks, that at last he has persuaded nearly all Europe to believe it.

Lucian. Ah, how you do get carried away by such

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

In a recent broadcast for schools, the BBC dealt with "Heaven" and "Hell" — were they really "places" or not? As a start, the speaker described the conventional pictures we all have been taught for centuries, Heaven with its Pearly Gates and Pavement and eternal life for all Christians, and Hell with its Laughing Devils spending most of their time shovelling coal into enormous furnaces to frizzle sinners. This was all wrong, and we have now "outgrown" such crude ideas. Heaven was a *real* place where you would eternally be with God and Jesus, and Hell simply meant that you were shut out of their Divine Presence. Just as simple as that!

★

But what about "the weeping and gnashing of teeth" so generously bestowed on all who incurred the wrath of "our Lord"? What about the Devil Jesus met on a few occasions — where did he come from? What about the Hell from which the "Pharisees" could never escape? Was this merely a "place" outside the Pearly Gates? The truth is that modern Christians — or at least some of them — are ashamed of the credulous twaddle true Christianity has taught for many centuries about both Heaven and Hell, and they are now desperately trying to abolish them; and this is in spite of the fact that Christ Jesus believed in both *literally*.

★

The "Daily Mail" (June 4th) reports that the Primate of Poland has called on its 24,000,000 of people "to oppose the spread of Atheism, preserve the Faith, and pass it on for another generation". It will be noticed that the enemy is "Atheism", not Communism or Atheistic Communism, which is rather remarkable considering that Poland is under a Communist Dictatorship. But of course Cardinal Wyszycki is right. In the ultimate, it is Atheism which the Churches fear. The final battle will be—as Bradlaugh foretold—between Atheism and Rome. And Atheism is bound to win.

★

In the meantime, some of the most cherished religious beliefs Christianity has fostered for centuries are being metaphorically wiped out. For example the Holy Sabbath idea. In Scotland in particular, nothing was so frowned upon as playing games on a Sunday—you had even often to suppress smiling. But now the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has voted "that physical recreation should have a natural place on Sunday". The Rev. G. Gray declared that "Christ came that men may have life more abundantly — not on six days of the week but on seven".

★

Those dreadful heretics, the Jews, who have for nearly 2000 years stupidly and obstinately refused to recognise their own Messiah, Jesus Christ, specially sent by God Almighty to save them, and who must have been for this reason butchered and tortured during almost the whole of the Christian era by genuine Christians, may, it appears, be asked to attend the Ecumenical Council convened by the Pope for October next. Jewish Committees have been asked by the Vatican to "outline their feelings" (according to *The Observer* May 27th) and Rome seems to have agreed to delete from the Easter Liturgy, "*perfidis Judacis*".

★

The Vatican appears also "to want to give a gentler interpretation of the old doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church". The "old doctrine" is of course thoroughly Biblical and cannot be thrown over; so that any

"new" interpretation can only mean that if once the Jews (and Protestants) make some kind of "deal" with Rome, they are at least on the road to Salvation. But does any Romanist really believe that the Jews as a body will ever be inveigled by this kind of "walk into my parlour"?

LUCIAN, ERASMUS AND RABELAIS

(Concluded from page 195)

insanity! The fables of Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto, which I have so often mocked at, were quite respectable compared with the nonsense by which your world has been so infatuated. I simply can't understand how you were able to ridicule unmolested anybody who feared being laughed at even more than a conspiracy. For in the ultimate, we can't ridicule our masters with impunity; and I was wise enough not to say a single word against our Roman Emperors. But really—your people adore a Pope! You allow this Pope to be as silly as possible, and your nation tolerates him! You are very patient.

Rabelais. I had better tell you something about my nation. It is composed of ignorance, superstition, stupidity, cruelty, and mockery. We begin by hanging and burning alive everybody who speaks freely against the Popes and Cardinals. The country of Touraine, where I was born, has swum in blood; but as soon as the executions are over, everybody dances, sings, makes love, drinks, and roars with laughter. So I followed them in their weaknesses—I wrote about drinking and filth, and with these, everything was allowed me. The clever people took this for my finesse and were grateful to me; the coarse ones saw nothing but filth and enjoyed it; and so all the world, far from persecuting me, loved me.

Lucian. You make me very anxious to read your book. Haven't you a copy in your pocket? And you, Erasmus, could you not also lend me your witty writings?

Here Erasmus and Rabelais give copies to Lucian who reads bits here and there, while the two philosophers continue their discussion.

Rabelais (to Erasmus). I have read your books though you haven't read mine because I came a little after you. You were perhaps a little too reserved in your mockery and I a little too bold in mine. But I always begin laughing when I see a doctor arrive in this country.

Erasmus. As for me, I feel sorry for him. I say, here is a miserable wretch who tired himself out all his life trying to deceive himself, and who could learn nothing here to escape from his errors.

Rabelais. Do you mean it doesn't matter to be undeceived?

Erasmus. It amounts to very little if you can't undeceive others. The great thing is to point the real way to those friends who have lost their way, and not to dead people who can never ask the way.

Erasmus and Rabelais continued their discussion for some time. Lucian joined them after having read some pages of *Torcheculs* and *The Praise of Folly*. And then, having met Dean Swift, the four supped together.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH ANNUAL DINNER

The Birmingham Branch National Secular Society Annual Dinner at the Stork Hotel, Corporation Street, Birmingham, on Saturday, June 30th, at 6.30 p.m. Tickets 12s. 6d. each from W. Miller, 62 Warwards Lane, Selly Oak, Birmingham, 29

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

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North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead)—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

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

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, June 24th, 11 a.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "Dostoevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*".
Tyneside Humanist Society (100 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle, 1), Wednesday, June 27th, 7.30 p.m.: F. R. GRIFFIN, "The Integration of Knowledge".

Notes and News

"UNARMED, they were brutally suppressed, some with bloody heads and broken ribs." "Again they were disbanded by the police and their gun-stocks, and again there were bloody heads and arrests". Those are two excerpts from an article on "The Strike of Portuguese Students", written by one of them, "Spartacus", which we printed on May 18th. Mr. Albert Lodge, the British Lecturer at Lisbon University, who recently left Portugal under an expulsion order, described in his letter of resignation how he saw his colleague, Professor Lindley Cintra "receive blows from the police until blood began running from his head" (*Daily Telegraph*, 12/6/62). Mr. Lodge had already decided to leave at the end of the school year because of the Government's method of treating students. But now that he had seen how professors were treated by the police he had decided to resign immediately. Mr. Lodge's letter will help—in "Spartacus's" words—to "show the students of free countries the true nature of the Portuguese 'tranquility' defended by Salazar and still believed in by the disingenuous".

"CASSANDRA" of the *Daily Mirror* was in his best debunking form on June 4th. *The Observer*, he noted, had "gone fishin'" after Fleet Street's most time-worn whopper of the annual silly season—the Loch Ness Monster", which was "practically patented by the *Daily Mail* about thirty years ago . . ." He regarded *The Observer's* discarding of "the

heavy cloak of dignity" to "cast a worm and bent pin" as "a sad lapse in journalistic taste". There may be grand talk about electronic underwater detection apparatus but, as "Cassandra" said, "bunkum is bunkum and baloney is baloney no matter how thin you slice it".

A FEW DAYS later (*Daily Mirror*, 7/6/62), "Cassandra" reported Dr. Billy Graham's observations on the Wall Street slump and the Paris air crash. The former, Graham said, was the Almighty telling investors to give their money to God "because it will be worth a lot less several years from now". But it was in relation to the air disaster that Graham really showed his Christian callousness. Commenting on the fact that the churches in Atlanta, where the majority of the dead came from, were crammed after the crash, he said that God had spoken to the world and as a result many people were being converted. A sort of Profit and Loss Account: Debit—130 dead; Credit—many converted; Profit on the transaction . . . !

A SURVEY by the Bishop of Derby, Dr. Geoffrey Allen has shown that "fewer than two in every 100 people in his diocese of 800,000 regularly attend church on Sundays" (*Daily Express*, 7/6/62).

A FEW months ago a lady wrote to the *Manchester Evening News* asking if a religious service was compulsory with cremation. Her five-months-old daughter had died and, as the lady and her husband were both atheists, they did not want a Christian service, "but my husband was told by the funeral director concerned that there had to be one". Jane Dawson of the *Manchester Evening News* made it clear that this was not so, and told the mother that either "not all funeral directors are aware of this, or else one of them rather exceeded his duties in your case". The correspondence was reprinted in the *Funeral Service Journal* for April.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND has started a recruiting drive. The number of young applicants to join the Ministry has dropped, the Bishop of Guildford, the Right Rev. George Reindorp, told the *Daily Herald* (8/6/62), and a full-time "recruiting officer" is to try to encourage school-children to consider entering the Church. Posters are to be sent to every boys' secondary school urging "Pray more for your clergy—pray for more clergy" and over 20,000 booklets, *Christ and You* have been issued for the same (vain) purpose.

"MANY PEOPLE, maybe a majority, will be shocked by and hate this anti-Christian act of sheer anarchy," wrote Paul Rotha in *Films and Filming* (June 1962). "But no one who has the courage to see it can ignore it . . ." He was referring, of course, to Luis Bunuel's *Viridiana*, made and then banned in Franco Spain, with its notorious "Last Supper" scene (Notes and News, April 27th). "To all Roman Catholics and, I suppose, many Christians", said Mr. Rotha, "this film will be a monstrous work of blasphemy. To others it will be a stripping bare of the cant and hypocrisy that masquerade in certain forms of religious faith—and not only in Franco's Spain". Here, he added, "is a film really to argue about night without end".

ON JUNE 3RD, *Reynolds News* reported that the Singapore Business House Employees' Union was "demanding a Friday prayer-break for Muslim members plus three months' leave on pay-and-a-half for those wanting to make the pilgrimage to Mecca".

The Devil's Ancestors

By P. G. ROY

WHEN A RAY of sanity threatened to eliminate the Devil from the Prayer Book, the majority of the Anglican clergy rallied in pious zeal to his protection. Some of these champions of His Hellish Majesty may have feared the loss of a valuable scoop, but others actually believe in devils, demons and exorcism.

The Devil was completely alien to the Old Testament; the late poem of Job has the figure of Satan—one of the “sons of God” and Public Prosecutor of man; his name, from the verb *shâtan* = to be opposed, hostile, means the “adversary” and was translated in the Septuagint as *diabolos* = he who throws across, i.e. slanders, and hence our form “devil”. He is neither a rebel nor God’s antagonist; they are even on quite good terms, as can be the case between a Public Prosecutor and the Counsel for the Defence.

Lucifer is a misnomer from Isaiah 14, 12, where a “fallen” king of Babylon (verse 4) is equated to a “brilliant star, son of Aurora”.¹ For this the Septuagint renders *Phosphoros*, and the Vulgate *Lucifer* = Light-Carrier. The next step was the fable of the “fallen angel” (Luke 10, 18; Revelation 12, 9); yet Hesiod mentions *Phosphoros*, son of Aurora (the goddess of dawn), and least of all is he a demon.

We repeat: Satan was a son of Jahveh, descending from time to time from *Heaven* to take a stroll on earth; *Lucifer* is a poetical metaphor for a human being. And a third term, *Beelzebub*, stands for *Ba'al Zebûl* (2 Kings 1, 2), the god of the Philistine city of Ekron.

Most scholars think that the idea of the devil originated in Persia about the third century B.C. By then the Old Iranian religion of the Zend Avesta—a nature religion pure and simple—had grown into the Zoroastrian dualism of the Pahlevi scriptures. By this time Zarathustra—one of the old heroes—had become regarded as an exalted prophet, Zoroaster. By the Kavis, priestly governors of the land, he had been driven away from the holy shrines and wandered in the wilderness preaching with scant success. Eventually he was tempted by the Serpent, Ahriman, to forsake the Good Religion of the worshippers of Mazda for the promise of all earthly fortune. The story of this temptation is not recorded in the old Gâthas (stanzas of the Zend Avesta), but is a later invention; and it is related that Zoroaster banished the Evil Spirit with “Ahuna Vairya”, the “pater-noster” of Zoroastrianism.

Here, in fact, we have the model of the temptation story and the seed from which our devil germinated. Ahriman, the late Pahlevi term for Angro Mainyu, was the opposite of Ahura Mazda (Ormudz), the Wise Spirit. Each was held responsible for one aspect of things such as light: dark, spiritual: material, health: illness, etc. And although Angro Mainyu does express evil thoughts, the two were originally the opposite principles of real existence. By and by however, they, with their followers, grew into abstract principles. Ahura Mazda with his Amesha Spenta (the immortal saints), Ahriman with his *daews* or demons.² One of the latter, Aeshma, demon of wrath, we find again in the Book of Tobit as the demon Asmodeus. Though a late Jewish work, it also contains a considerable amount of the teaching of the Magi who under the Arsanid dynasty had established a hierarchical system in Persia, and considered themselves the direct successors to Zoroaster.

The god of the Old Testament is just a highly-powered demon, occasionally even called *El-Shaddaj* = the Violent El. In his best-known form of Jehovah he is Saturn, the

sombre, fickle, vindictive and moody tyrant. What he considers “sin” is punished on the spot. The “Seven Planets” move about as his messengers, i.e. *mal'âkhî* (also name of the so-called prophet), or “angels” and they carry good or bad tidings, as the case may be: “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil. I am the Lord which does all these things.” (Isaiah 14, 7.)

El-Shaddaj is a relative of the Assyrian Bull deities. The Greek *daimôn* is the translation of Hebrew *shed* and denotes a superior being who can be both good and bad but often likes to be mischievous (Genesis 6. 1-4). After the return from Babylon with the permission of Kurush, (the Persian king Cyrus), the god’s negative aspects become more and more personified: there is a special Angel of Death; one demon hovers on the threshold and has to be appeased by spells written on a small scroll contained in a capsule (*mezuzah*) which the Jews affix to their doorposts: there are bat-like demons even in holy places, therefore they must be approached with covered heads. And the king of demons is Achmodaeus (Tobit ch. 6, 15ff.), according to the Talmud (Gittim 68, 6). It is in particular alien gods who are one’s own demons.

For instance, the Slavonic herd god Volosu or Veles was declared the devil, the Persian deities of light—Ahûra—became the Indian demons—Asura, whilst their own light gods, the devas, became demons in Persia; the Indian bird god Garuda reappears in Siam as the bird demon, Krut.

Like the Old Hellenic netherworld, the Hebrew *she'ol*³ is a place where the dead continue to exist as listless shades. In the Iranian and Egyptian counterparts, however, the departed were judged by the two aspects of the supreme god. According to the later Persian tradition, they have to pass over a bridge as narrow as a blade, and those laden with sin crash down into a bottomless pit; the others, however, guided by Shraosha, pass safely and reach the Fields of Bliss. The Christian Devil and his Hell are in this sense the complementary half of God with his Paradise (derived from the Persian for the King’s gardens). Seen from this angle, and considering that nowadays it is no longer possible to blame God for the evil too, it becomes clear why the survival of the idea of the devil is indispensable for the maintenance of the god-idea.

(1) The Hebrew text has *hejlel* = the shining one (Morning Star), from the verb *hâlal* = to shine; *bên-shâhar* = son of the Dawn. The “fallen angel” has been superimposed by the Greek myth of the Fall of the (rebellious) Titans.

(2) Compare “the devil and his angels,” Mt. 25, 41.

(3) *She'ol* is derived from *shâ'âh*, lit. “to fall with a crash,” met “to make a noise” and also “to be desolate.”

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Humanity's Coming of Age

By G. I. BENNETT

FROM TIME TO TIME we hear the National Secular Society criticised for its liberal human outlook. Why interest itself in the work of blood sport abolitionists? Why support republicanism? Why concern itself with matters like nuclear disarmament? Why consider social questions such as the Malthusian, or political questions such as world federal government?

Some people would have us restrict our activities to expressions of anti-clericalism. Some would have us confine ourselves to the propagation of atheism as distinct from the less uncompromising agnosticism. I disagree, and I have always disagreed. Though I have no supernatural creed, I am one of those who think there are more important things today than beating the drums of anti-clericalism or atheism. Perhaps it is a pipe dream, but I should like in my lifetime to see the world made a safe, decent place in which men and women can live out their lives in peace. I should like to see brutality in all its forms eliminated as far as possible. I should like to see human beings everywhere throwing off their physical, mental, and spiritual chains—but not in the process forging for themselves new ones. I should like to see the human race becoming one, to see emerging a world without rancour and the bellicose assertion of national, political, and religious rights. I should like, in fine, to see our species becoming civilised.

For my part, I am not greatly worried about the hold that doctrinal religion still has on many people's minds. I once had to struggle against it myself, but I think its evils tend to be exaggerated. The excesses of religion are disappearing. Creeds are becoming more humane. The time may come when supernatural religion may cease, or almost cease, to be. But that does not matter. Why should we wear out our lives trying to bring people to our untheistic freedom of mind? If truth will out, let them in the main find their own way to emancipation from theology. The religious impulse in man has emotional well-springs. We cannot overnight argue our fellows out of what we consider are erroneous personal beliefs. I have given up trying. Tyranny is another matter. We must always fight that. But notice I say *personal beliefs*. So long as beliefs are personal, I would not interfere with a man's contentment of mind. I may consider him mistaken—but who am I to tell him what he should think?

But where human survival is concerned, we are on very different ground. War in all its forms is a hateful business. To see it abolished as an instrument of policy between nations would be one of my dearest dreams come true. And I give my blessing to any and every movement that genuinely works towards this end. But I do not see why we should scorn and spurn what aims at less than that. Any sincere peace efforts—even if abortive—are much better than militarism and the appurtenances of militarism, the flag-waving, the jingoistic parades and pageants, the slavish obeisance to political leaders or autocrats, the inane expressions of loyalty to Queen and Country, to President and Union.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has been savagely criticised and condemned from many quarters. Some, like the Archbishop of Canterbury, have said that to get rid of nuclear weapons is not tantamount to getting rid of war and nothing less is worthy of support. I consider this view extremely shortsighted. War is a loathsome thing. Yet, somehow or other, we have managed to

survive two world wars in this terrible century. We should not, however, survive an atomic war, and not many of us would choose to. Nuclear bombs starkly threaten the very existence of humanity. To be rid of them would not mean being rid of war, but it would at least mean being rid of the darkest shadow that has ever cast itself over the human race. I think our Society is therefore very right indeed in supporting the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. We have put ourselves on the side of survival—and is there anyone who will dispute the wisdom of that?

But I feel that the NSS is also very right in its general approach to civilisation. It wants men to be free. It wants them to think for themselves. It wants them to work for, in the hope that they may behold, the dawn of a fairer tomorrow. Some cruelty and pain there will always be in this world, but it must be reduced and kept to the minimum. Those whose enjoyment is found in pastimes that hound and torture living creatures are culturally still cavemen, or worse. However protracted may yet be the legislative struggle, we must take from them their lawful right to do this. And, at another level and in a different field, we must deprive of power those men whose insane political or ideological conceptions would sweep us all to radioactive perdition.

Ours is the only species endowed with moral sense, and the intelligence to re-fashion its thinking and conduct in accordance therewith. It matters little to well-balanced men whether we ever conquer the minute particle of space that is our planetary system, or even contrive to get outside it. It matters everything that we learn to live together as a single progressive community on this our earth. It is time we took firm hold of the reins. It is time we started to live like civilised beings. Until we do we shall live perilously and shamefully. Until we do we shall not have come of age.

Religion and Sex

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the fifth of a series of simple, yet factual statements on topical problems, prepared by the National Secular Society in response to requests. It is intended that each one should be issued as a leaflet.*

LET'S BE HONEST from the start. This leaflet isn't a rival to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and you won't find any four letter words in it.

Most of us today are inclined to treat sex as a great joke. This is, of course, a much healthier attitude than the Victorian notion that it is an awful and unmentionable subject. But it does have a serious side as well.

Most religious denominations have decided that they have the right to regulate, or try to regulate, the sex life of their members—even to say whether they are allowed to use birth control methods to determine the size of their families.

The Fathers of the Church disapproved of sex. They believed that the Second Coming of Jesus was just around the corner, and that sexual activity was a distraction from the main job of preparing oneself spiritually (whatever that meant) to meet the Lord.

Even the most optimistic Christian today, some 2000 years later, is not nearly so sure that the Second Coming will take place in his lifetime. And small wonder too!

But the Churches continue to lay down the law about sex. The largest Christian sect, the Roman Catholic, is run by men who have—officially at least—no sexual experience whatever; yet they dare to advise other people on their sexual problems.

You may say that if Christians are silly enough to listen to their priests and parsons, then it is entirely their own affair. This is largely true. But it does seem unfortunate that little children, who are too young to judge the truth or otherwise of the religion they are taught, should be given guilt complexes about masturbation, on no other ground apparently than that of a mischievous Old Testament myth. This is the absurd story of one of Judah's sons, Onan, whom Jehovah slew because he masturbated rather than marry his sister-in-law, despite His own Levitical law. If you say it doesn't mean masturbate and that the sin was really disobedience—well, that doesn't help the guilt-ridden children fed the old fable.

What is even more serious is the fact that the laws of this country relating to sex are still largely based on canon law, which itself springs from the superstitions and taboos of the Bible.

Nobody today—save a few ignorant fundamentalists—would dream of reading the Bible as a textbook of the physical sciences. Why then should it be thought a suitable source of authority for the social sciences or the laws of the land?

Yet constantly in our laws a confusion is made between private behaviour, which may or may not be regarded as a vice or by the Churches as "sin", and public crime. Such are the laws against male homosexuality which seem to come, originally, from Old Testament myths like that of the bad men of Sodom and Gomorrah. They certainly don't come from the Wolfenden Report, a remarkable and interesting report which well repays study.

Now, we may as individuals disapprove of such conduct on grounds that have nothing whatever to do with religion. Unfortunately, in a society that is ridden with Christian prejudice, it is very hard to get rational debate on sexual problems.

The fact is that these are medical and social matters which deserve our study and sympathy. The leaders of the Churches, like their hero Jesus, have for the most part no expertise in these matters, and therefore no claim to be regarded as authorities.

Even more important is the Christian attitude to marriage, and so to divorce. Everybody hopes that when two people decide to share each other's lives, the arrangement will prove of lasting satisfaction. But hopes are not always realised. People make mistakes.

Marriage is basically a contract. When the parties concerned agree to dissolve it, and to satisfy a court that they are making arrangements for their dependants, outsiders should not presume to meddle. The Churches say that marriage is basically a sacrament, made in the sight of God and binding for ever, except in special circumstances. In deciding the exceptions, they act as God's interpreter (God never speaks directly!). When a Royal Commission was set up in 1950 to rationalise the law on divorce, religious opposition confounded it. D.H.T.

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CORRESPONDENCE

AFFIRMATION

At the risk of sounding pedantic, may I point to one small historical inaccuracy in your brief statement on "Swearing" in THE FREETHINKER of June 1st. While unbelievers won the right to serve as jurors without taking an oath as a result of Bradlaugh's Affirmation Act of 1888, the right to affirm as witnesses had been already granted by the Evidence Amendment Act of 1869. Bradlaugh had been influential in its passage as well, though not at that time as a Member of Parliament. It was, indeed, Bradlaugh's plausible assumption that the Evidence Amendment Act of 1869—in conjunction with the Parliamentary Oaths Act of 1866—had given him the right to affirm in Parliament which was one significant factor leading to his long drawn out struggle (1880-1886) to be admitted to the House of Commons.

WALTER L. ARNSTEIN
Ill., U.S.A.)

(Associate Professor of History, Roosevelt University, Chicago.

FLATLETS FOR THE ELDERLY

Six years ago, the newly formed Ethical Union Housing Association made an appeal to the movement. As a result a house in Hampstead was purchased and converted for housing elderly persons. Confident of the backing of the movement, the Association has now bought a site at the corner of Worple Road and Raymond Road in Wimbledon and intends to construct on it 20 self-contained flatlets, each comprising a bed-sitting room, kitchen and toilet. Bathrooms will be shared (for economy and so that the responsibility of cleaning does not fall on the individual). A common room will be included and there will be a Warden's flat. Nearly all the flatlets will have a sunny outlook.

As the age composition of the population changes with a bias towards older people, the need for housing for elderly people is ever increasing. Rents, unless controlled, are constantly rising, and landlords are loth to accept the elderly as tenants because of the added responsibility as compared with accommodating younger persons. The Association's scheme is intended for the over-sixties of limited means and a large proportion of them will be members of the movement.

The architects for the scheme, Clifford Culpin & Partners, have won a number of architectural competitions and awards including a Ministry of Housing Medal for a scheme for old people. Mr. Culpin is a member of the movement. Purpose-built, these flatlets will be specially designed for the convenience of the not so young.

The scheme is estimated to cost in the region of £55,000. A large proportion of this amount will be obtained by loans from the Wimbledon Borough Council but a substantial amount will have to be found by the Association; in turn this makes necessary an appeal to the movement.

Help can be given in several ways: either by donation or a seven-year Deed, or the taking up of Loan Stock, available in multiples of £5; such stock to be transferable but not returnable. Any donation, no matter how small will be very welcome.

ROSE E. BUSH, Chairman, Ethical Union Housing Association,
13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8.

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