

# The Freethinker

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A NUMBER OF our readers had the pleasure of meeting Abraham T. Kovoor, President of the Rationalist Association of Ceylon, and Mrs. Kovoor, when they attended the weekend conference of the World Union of Freethinkers held in the Beatrice Webb House, near Dorking, Surrey, a year ago. Born in India, Mr. Kovoor went to Ceylon in 1928, and was a science teacher at St. Thomas's College, Mt. Lavinia, and Thurston College, Colombo, until his retirement recently. His son is head of a research department at the Sorbonne, Paris. At the Dorking conference, Mr. Kovoor spoke feelingly about the superstitions prevalent in Ceylon (the only country in the world with a university devoted to astrology) and the problem of eradicating them. A recent case shows that Mr. Kovoor can act as well as speak effectively.

## Spirit Letters

On Friday, June 1st, the Ceylon *Daily Mirror* reported that in the hamlet of Retiyala, Govinna, 33 miles from Colombo, there was "an 'evil spirit' which writes letters to a young girl and is believed to be responsible for various other mysterious occurrences in her house". When the *Mirror* reporter visited the house, "the blade of a coconut scraper was thrown at him" and a letter dropped on his back; he "saw a tin of powder 'flying' from one room to another and a bottle of sugar being dashed on the floor", while a number of flash bulbs were stolen out of his bag.

## Increased Activity

The presence of the "spirit" was first felt in the house of the sixty-two-year-old farmer, Dalgahage Poli Appuhamy, in January, and its activities increased with the months. It threw stones, upset chairs, dashed pots to bits on the floor and drew pictures on the walls. The farmer's wife said she had seen cooked rice moving from pot to plate and then to an invisible mouth, while when hoppers (pancakes) were prepared in the morning, "no sooner the hopper is taken out of the pan it goes across the air, never to return". Some of the hoppers were, however, found hidden among some old mats.

The spirit's activities were not always destructive. When there was a scarcity of dry fish in the area, the house was supplied with excellent *karavala kuriya*, a good quality dry fish. Alas, though, nobody dared to eat it. Likewise, when Mai Nona, the farmer's 16-year-old daughter, the spirit's special favourite, was ill, she was afraid to use the patent remedies which it provided for her. On the whole, though, things were pretty hectic. Attempts by *kattadiyas* (professional exorcists) to drive the spirit away had been in vain, and the inmates lived "in constant fear". They were even pulled out of bed at night. In fact, as the *Daily Mirror* said, it was bedlam in this house where a "ghost" was "in love with a girl".

## Mr. Kovoor Lays the Ghost

Bedlam or not, no spirit was responsible, declared Mr. Kovoor, in the same paper on Monday, June 4th. The

case was, he said, similar to some twenty-seven others he had treated successfully in and around Colombo during the past few years, and he announced that he would visit the "haunted" house with a reporter in a few days' time, keeping the date a secret so that he could carry out his investigation quietly and carefully. Mischief attributed to poltergeists is usually the work of schizophrenics, he said. In all the cases he had been called in to investigate, this had proved to be so, and he had been able to stop further mischief by detecting who the schizophrenic was.

Mr. Kovoor visited the house on June 6th, and told the *Daily Mirror* that he had been successful in tracing

the member of the family responsible for the troubles. That particular member, said the *Mirror* (June 7th) had given Mr. Kovoor a solemn promise not to repeat them in future. Mr. Kovoor agreed to keep the name of the person secret for some time.

There had been a rush of inquisitive people from all parts of the country, and there was a crowd of over 300 near the house when Mr. Kovoor arrived, accompanied by his wife and pressmen. But the crowd was co-operative, and withdrew outside the garden at Mr. Kovoor's request. Then all the members of the family were introduced to him, and he interviewed them one by one, while Mrs. Kovoor took notes and the pressmen took photographs.

The inquiry revealed "the family history, domestic troubles, family enemies and all the other details necessary for the purpose". Mr. Kovoor insisted that he wanted evidence only: "those things seen with their own eyes". It was then discovered that some of the mysterious phenomena reported—such as hoppers flying through the air—had not been seen at all. "With regard to the letters written by the spirit, Mr. Kovoor established clear proof that they were the work of the inmate suspected". The writing of the various members of the family was examined and that of one of them tallied with the "spirit-writing".

## Promise

At the end of the investigation, Mr. Kovoor asked the person in question not to repeat the "activities" in future, and received the solemn promise in return. Finally, Mr. Kovoor invited all the people outside to come near the house, and he made a short speech, in which he guaranteed that there would be no more trouble from the spirit. He had dealt with the matter in a common sense, scientific way, and he only regretted that such a poor family had spent over 1,500 rupees on *thovil* ceremonies and on *kattadiyas*. The eldest son in the family, Dolis Singho, then thanked Mr. Kovoor and The Times of Ceylon Ltd. group of newspapers (which includes the Ceylon *Daily Mirror*) for the great help given. Two months have now passed since Mr. Kovoor visited the house, and from that day, he tells us, there has been no trouble. The "spirit" has disappeared.

Here, then, we have a case where, with the co-operation

## —VIEWS and OPINIONS—

### The Rationalist and the Poltergeist



of a newspaper, a Rationalist has been able decisively to shatter a spiritualist superstition. A superstition by no means confined to "backward" countries or uneducated peoples, as a glance at any issue of *Psychic News* will show. This poltergeist happened to be in Ceylon, but might equally well have been in Southwark or Seattle. Glasgow boasted one a while back—but with this difference. No newspapers seemed anxious to take the side of rationalism, to spoil a "good" ghost story. The sad

truth is that many of our popular newspapers tend to perpetuate superstition, with their stories of ghosts, miracles and mysteries. They pretend to "give the people what they want", and assume that the people never want to know the truth, at any rate about spiritualism. Is it too much to hope that British papers might follow the example set by the Ceylon *Daily Mirror*? They might then belatedly discover that a demonstration of the truth can be as exciting as the fostering of superstition.

## Our Lady and Sir Oswald Mosley

By F. A. RIDLEY

ON SUNDAY, JULY 22ND, I happened to be going through Clerkenwell, a district of East Central London, the home of many formerly famous people, from Lenin, who once lived there in political exile, to Henry Carey, author of one of the most famous love songs in the English language: *Sally in our Alley*. It was in Clerkenwell also, that Carey finally committed *felo de se* by hanging himself, leaving behind him the princely fortune of one half-penny.

I was heading towards Trafalgar Square, where the statue of Lord Nelson, that has listened to so much political oratory of all shades, was due that particular afternoon to listen to a speech by the present leader of the British Union, that failed fuhrer of British Fascism, Sir Oswald Mosley.

However, whilst man proposes, God disposes; for while I set out to hear the political reaction, what I actually encountered was that spiritual counterpart of Fascism, the Roman Catholic Church. One could perhaps describe it as the original Fascist firm? For my recollections of purely ecclesiastical chronology had temporarily slipped up; I had in fact, forgotten that July 22nd was the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, in whose quasi-divine honour, the Italian Church of St. Peter in Clerkenwell Road, annually celebrated her feast day with a full-blown procession winding ritualistically through the narrow streets of Clerkenwell.

I saw the procession which wound, illuminated by Latin pageantry through the dingy streets of this rather sordid area of London. The procession itself was a lengthy and well-attended one, for the still largely Italian Saffron Hill district contains many adherents of the Holy Roman and Apostolic Church. In point of fact, the district is the scene of sharp cultural antitheses, for those British strongholds of international Communism, the Marx Memorial House and the *Daily Worker*, are situated almost within the proverbial stone's throw of the Italian Church of St. Peter: Rome and Moscow are almost face to face.

The procession was a gaudy, theatrical affair, much more characteristic I should say of Italian (or more generally Latin) Catholicism than of the more sober English variety, no doubt still influenced by its local, still predominantly Protestant environment. Successively angels, priests, martyrs, virgins—any number of them—in honour of the Virgin: and even our Lord carrying his cross (and assisted, as in the Gospel story, by Simon of Cyrene) passed through the streets.

The histrionic contrasts were considerable, though from the point of view of pure dramatic effect the procession was too gaudy to be described as really effective, as has often been demonstrated in the architectural sphere: the showy, baroque, Jesuit-style churches erected under the auspices of modern (post-Reformation) Catholicism lack the authentic massive grandeur that generally characterised the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages, like, say, Durham, or Cologne. However, if we turn from the theatrical to

the sociological sphere, it is certainly a vivid, and not very gratifying example of the growth of Roman Catholicism in a traditionally Protestant land like England, that processions of this kind can range with impunity through our streets: a century ago a public Popish demonstration of this character would have probably provoked a repetition of the anti-Catholic Gordon riots.

It represented a somewhat ironic paradox, that while the former devotees of Italian Fascism were parading through the streets in one part of London—for St. Peter's Italian Church duly recorded Mussolini's dictatorial pronouncements throughout the long Fascist tenure of power—a mile or so west in Trafalgar Square, Mussolini's former admirer and sartorial imitator (black shirt and all), Oswald Mosley, was also leading another procession—a political one—through the streets of London, though the Fascist political rally designed to conclude it was terminated by the police after a very brief and stormy period.

However, this juxtaposition of secular and of clerical Fascism, if not actually of much real political importance, is yet deeply significant. For the points of actual resemblance, not to mention the mutual influence so often exercised by Catholicism and Fascism upon each other are writ large throughout the reactionary era of the 1930s in particular. In 1937, I compiled a book entitled *The Papacy and Fascism*, now long out of print, in the course of which I traced the many political and social parallels that existed, and still exist today, between these two powerful movements of reaction and of counter-revolution.

I there indicated that Fascism is a secular pupil of Catholicism whilst Catholicism was the ecclesiastical prototype of Fascism: it is surely by no means accidental that every single successful Fascist movement has arisen in a predominantly clerical and Catholic environment. Germany (for it was in ultra-Catholic Munich that the Nazi Party and Reich originated), Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, to cite only European examples. In no known case has a viable Fascist regime arisen in a Protestant (or still less, a free-thinking) social and intellectual atmosphere. Historically, one could make out a very strong case that the Jesuits were, if not the actual founders, at least the prototypes and preceptors of Fascism.

An Italian critic of the Papacy once concluded a penetrating criticism of the Vatican with the acute remark that this venerable institution "never forgets her claims through length of time". (I recently cited this aphorism on the title page of my book, *Pope John and the Cold War*.) During the past century (due perhaps more to the Irish immigration rather than the over-publicised propaganda of the Oxford Movement), Catholicism in Britain has risen from the status of an insignificant minority, to that of a powerful and growing movement. "Appetite comes with eating", at Rome perhaps more than anywhere else.

(Concluded on page 276)



# The Press, Ethics and Religion

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

THE PRESS throughout the civilised world is run by people of reasonable but rarely brilliant intelligence, and not always of conspicuous integrity. Now, of course, unless a paper shows profits it cannot ordinarily survive, so that its moral integrity is conditioned largely by the public demand for it both as a news medium and a publicity sheet. The result is that in the religious field, favour is shown to the dominant Christian element who, for business or social but obviously not for intellectual reasons, support the Churches, while the press practises discrimination against irreligion and unbelief, often in a grossly unfair way. Inside the newspaper offices this attitude creates anomalous situations, as most of the intelligent journalists I know are infidels, but are forced to adopt the stupid office policy of tenderness towards the Christian mythology. Anybody at all acquainted with journalism knows how extremely varied the quality of press ethics can be. The notorious Hearst, for example, often made up his own news when actual events were slow on the draw, and was blatantly dishonest in other ways, but papers like the *Manchester Guardian*, the *New York Times* and the *Dépêche de Toulouse*, when I knew it, are singularly honest and, therefore, comfortable to read. In between a Hearst and them, the variations of honesty must be almost infinite. But all told, most editors would prefer, for the front page, a sex crime or the illicit loves of Hollywood film stars to a UN debate. Such mental immaturity naturally prefers the juvenile imbecility of religion; the traditional babbling is already written and dispenses with thought, and editors are not paid to think, at least not deeper than the astrology column.

I would like to show, from the example of the only morning daily of my home town, Brisbane, how subtle the hypocrisy and unfairness can be inside a respectable looking paper, and how grossly biased it can be towards unorthodox opinion. One reason is that the *Brisbane Courier-Mail* is 40% owned by a Catholic group in Melbourne. I shall give a few specific examples of its tactics of suppression. Some years ago, when under its present editor, it espoused the cause of a woman quack who claimed to be able to cure the paralysis following poliomyelitis at any stage. She was a most blatant and shameless liar, with no training in medicine, nursing or physiotherapy. Thanks to press support she died worth £85,000: she was an unblushing fraud and the most successful confidence trickster in Australian history. The *Courier-Mail* gave her unstinted, enthusiastic support. I showed the editor documents which proved she was a liar and a faker of statistics. But he went on supporting her.

This was the most disgraceful thing I ever saw in journalism, as hundreds of crippled children and their parents were cruelly deceived. Another time I sent this man a reasonable article for which I expected to be paid. But he cut it back and printed it as a letter to the Editor without my permission or apology. Again on a public health matter, a silly scare, he quoted an ignorant doctor and made a fool of himself and his paper. When the truth came out, he republished a trimmed version of the fool doctor's opinion slanted in such a way as to bear a meaning directly opposite to that originally intended. And that sort of thing goes on continually. But no article or letter of any length telling the truth about religious, especially Catholic, swindles is printed, while Catholic propaganda of all kinds is given plenty of space.

The Christian mythology is demonstrably untrue and vast sums of money are wasted on it, but no hint of the truth can be got to the people through the usual channels of communication. Poorly educated priests and parsons, ignorant of modern philosophy, of history, of biblical scholarship, are given columns for their Sunday dose of drivel, but no effective refutation is allowed. And the worst aspect of this policy is that so much of this Christian tripe is defamatory of people like myself, a philosopher and scholar, traduced and insulted by floods of abuse from Sunday pulpits with no protection from the press or the police. This constant stream of abuse, by priests and parsons, of people who cannot agree with their rubbish, is one of the major scandals of social life in Brisbane today. And the press is partly responsible for allowing these dope-peddlers so much rope. This indicates the low state of cultural life in this intellectual slum.

I was, however, amused by one incident. An Anglican limelighter bishop wrote a letter to the paper about the birth date of the alleged Jesus. It was feeble stuff, so I wrote to him and offered to lend him Alfarcic's book on Christian origins. His letter in reply was a really monstrous piece of deliberate dishonest evasion; it was so terrible an exposure of the man's lack of frankness and truth I kept it. Some day THE FREETHINKER can publish it.

In Queensland the Churches pay no municipal rates on "places of worship" or on the homes of the clergy, on property worth millions. As I know how this concession was obtained, I regard it as a barefaced swindle. So, as rates were going up, I wrote to the paper protesting against the injustice of the clergy living parasitically on the rest of the community for municipal services. My letter was not printed but returned to me, and letters on the same topic by three of my friends were also suppressed. And these press hypocrites pretend to be devoted to the public interest. I think a daily paper in the British Commonwealth which prefers private Church interests to those of the people is a disgrace. In the vestibule of the *Courier-Mail* is an inscription in bronze lettering of Jefferson's words, "Our Liberty depends on the freedom of the Press and that cannot be limited without being lost". But these pressmen will not publish my protests and my liberty is lost. As a ratepayer I am forced by law to contribute to the provision of municipal services to churches and presbyteria which are, I think, odious and unnecessary. May I quote Jefferson on this? "To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical".

There is a kind of McCarthyism still extant here, and journalists fear the power of the Churches, especially that of the Catholic brand, cruel, relentless, authoritarian and quite unscrupulous. So from Melbourne has come the order to do all that Holy Church requires, and the journalist who disobeys might well lose his job. So the journalist has no need to find arguments to meet fully justified accusations of dishonesty and thieving of public money by the Church, he just simply suppresses them.

In the hands of honest men, the press can be a noble instrument of liberty and justice, but in the hands of cowards, and hypocrites, it becomes an ignoble tool of tyranny and oppression. And I think I have been able to show that religion breeds hypocrisy, greed and falsehood.



## This Believing World

**The expulsion of the Bishop of Accra from Ghana** by the government of Dr. Nkrumah, shows how even Messiahs hate to be criticised. Dr. Nkrumah is hailed in Ghana as its Redeemer, its Messiah, and the Bishop called this "god-less", for of course only Jesus is the true Messiah. The *Daily Express* (August 14th) is certain that Redeemer Nkrumah has led to "the spiritual enslavement and degradation of the Africans in Ghana"—but then, the *Express* upholds another Redeemer.

★

As mentioned in Notes and News last week, Dr. Weatherhead wants the greater half of the Bible—still called God's Precious Word—to be censored, or mutilated. He has at last discovered that the stories of Bible activities, rapings, and butchering of helpless prisoners, and similar bestial records which fill so much of early Biblical "history" no longer satisfy the spiritual longings of modern people, and ought to be blue-pencilled.

★

This is all very well. Dr. Weatherhead must have known that we Freethinkers have pointed out for at least three centuries exactly what he is now pleading for—and how where they treated? The Blasphemy laws with which we are cursed were made stronger, and were invoked as far as possible. That great Christian, the late Sir William Harcourt, insisted that G. W. Foote had to serve a disgraceful sentence of 12 months in prison for merely criticising Bible absurdities; and we haven't heard that Dr. Weatherhead even now would help in trying to abolish such ridiculous anachronisms as our Blasphemy laws.

★

Naturally nearly all Bible champions are angrily protesting against "blue-pencilling" the Holy Book. One writer in the *Daily Mail* (August 13th) says, "Surely it is better to keep the Old Testament intact, and recognise it for what it is, a colourful chronicle of a very remarkable people". Colourful, indeed. But the letter we liked best was from D. H. Rawlings, Hoddesdon, Herts., printed in the *Evening News* (August 14th). Mr. Rawlings was "saddened" by Dr. Weatherhead's remarks. "The Old Testament's", he said, "the unvarnished account of God's dealings with His people, the Jews. Any censorship will reduce it to the level of a fairy tale".

★

Writing in the Ipswich "Evening Star" (August 3rd) the Rev. Dr. P. Welsby did his best to tell us how "Christianity reached these shores". He candidly admits that it "is not all an easy question to answer" for "it is far from clear how or when the Christian Church first gained a foothold in Britain", and "various legends and stories were circulated to explain its arrival". In other words the story which we get in school histories of England are at best legends.

★

But of course Dr. Welsby then proceeds to tell us what "we do know"—stories which are completely legendary. To say "it is most probable that the Faith was brought by some Roman soldiers" is no more "probable" than to say that "it was brought by some traders from Gaul in the year 200 AD". Nobody knows anything about it for there are no means of finding out. What we do know for certain is that the monkish "chronicles" which have survived in manuscripts, like the "Venerable" Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, are unsupported by any contemporary

evidence. By the way, Dr. Welsby tells us that "large numbers of Britons" retreated before the hordes of Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, taking "their Christian faith with them". The Britons certainly retreated but we do not know if they were Christians.

## Catholic Illegitimacy

"MANY IRISH GIRLS who come to this country and then become unmarried expectant mothers refuse to get help from the Catholic Church", said the *South London Press* (17/8/62), on the basis of a report of the Southwark Catholic Rescue Society, which last year helped 565 unmarried mothers.

Father L. T. Munns, secretary of the Society, is "well aware that girls from Ireland seek non-Catholic help in their hour of need . . .". "Fearful that they will meet something of the same inflexible attitude here that they know exists so widely at home, it is only with great difficulty frequently that they can be persuaded to make themselves known to Catholic social workers", he says, and he regards their babies as being "invariably lost to the Catholic faith", though we are not so sure about this, as the adoption law provides that a mother who gives her child for adoption may specify the religion in which it shall be brought up.

The report shows that the majority of girls helped by the Society were Irish, and nearly half the unmarried mothers were under 21. After birth only 186 girls kept their babies, the rest being adopted or sent to foster-parents. The number of children being cared for by the society last year was 746.

"As a result of the rise in the birth rate of illegitimate children, and the dependence of so many unmarried mothers on welfare organisations rather than on families, the number of babies under one year requiring care has risen", says Father Munns.

And the *South London Press* adds that, out of 9,000 children in the care of the London County Council, "nearly 3,000 are Catholics".

## OUR LADY AND SIR OSWALD MOSLEY

(Concluded from page 274)

As the conversion of England passes from the visionary to the practical stage, Rome presses ever more resolutely towards her goal, whether by open attack or, as appears to be the present strategy, by permeating the other Christian Churches. How far this policy is likely to be successful eventually, will necessarily depend largely on political and social factors beyond the immediate sphere of religion. Religious and social progress are indivisible: the present and future fight against Rome is inseparable from the contemporary and future fight to preserve and to extend civil and political liberty, for the victory of the Mosleys and their ilk would simultaneously imply the conversion of England, now officially denominated (we hope rather prematurely), as "Our Lady's Dowry".

## TOP TWENTY

"The Union Miniere have made me a bronze plaque with the following inscription: 'Here 20 Holy Ghost missionaries gave their lives for love of Africa, 1/1/63.'"

"This will be fixed to the altar.

"On the other side of the plaque are the words, Mungu atukuzwe (May God be praised)." —*The Universe* (17/8/62).

Prepared in advance?



# THE FREETHINKER

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

London 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, J. A. MILLAR (Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoons. (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

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

### INDOORS

Ilford Humanist Group (Friends Meeting House, Cleveland Road), Monday, September 3rd, 7.45 p.m.: DON BAKER, "A Humanist Attitude to Life".

## Notes and News

THIS WEEK, our Views and Opinions and Dr. J. V. Duhig comment on overseas newspapers—the former favourably on the *Ceylon Daily Mirror*: the latter rather less favourably on the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*. Next week, a home newspaper, the *Daily Sketch* will come up for criticism.

THE JANUARY 1962 issue of *Secular Subjects* (only just to hand), published by the Rationalist Society of St. Louis, contained the facsimile of a letter from the ultra right wing John Birch Society Incorporated, to a Protestant, Edward E. Mikenas of 48 Fort Johnson Avenue, New York, who had expressed anti-Catholic views. The letter is dated September 25th, 1961 and includes the following: "Since about forty per cent of our members throughout the country, fifty per cent of our field staff, and sixty per cent of our office staff are Catholic, and since some of our very strongest and most courageous support in our total fight against the Communists comes from high-ranking, patriotic, and very wonderful members of the Catholic hierarchy, we cannot agree with your letter or your contentions in the slightest degree". It is signed by the founder, Robert Welch, and confirms Adrian Pigott's remarks about a large Catholic membership of the John Birch Society in our Views and Opinions on January 5th.

GOYA'S COMPLETE etchings and lithographs have just been issued in one volume by Thames & Hudson (63s.). They include, of course, the terrible "Disasters of War" series,

the greatest expression in art of detestation of war, and Cyril Connolly's review in *The Sunday Times* (19/8/62) was illustrated by "Contrary to the general interest", one of the violently anti-clerical etchings from the series. Mr. Connolly also mentioned the etching of the sleeping philosopher assailed by bats, owls and other horrors. Captioned, "The sleep of reason produces monsters", this has been most appropriately adopted by the French Union Rationaliste as a permanent cover illustration for its *Courrier*.

WE WERE delighted recently to meet the Secretary of L'Union Rationaliste, Jacqueline Marchand, with whom we had previously only corresponded. Mlle. Marchand was spending a short holiday in London, and called at THE FREETHINKER office. She was formerly Secretary to the eminent French freethinking scholar, the late Professor Prosper Alfaric, whose *From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church* was translated by Dr. J. V. Duhig and published by the Pioneer Press (6d.)

"PROTECT OUR CHILDREN from the sight of naked animals", say the ridiculous Clifford Prout and his curiously named Society for Indecency to Naked Animals, which is reported to have designed "bikinis for stallions, petticoats for cows, knickers for bulldogs and boxer-style shorts for other animals" (*Daily Herald*, 15/8/62). But Mr. Prout is not the only prude about. Apparently some visitors to the Bradford (Yorks) Corporation art gallery complained about three paintings of nudes on exhibition. "I had imagined", said the gallery's director, Peter Bird, "that the offence given by the exhibition of the female nude was a thing of the past. But I was wrong" (*The Guardian*, 21/8/62). The paintings were removed on the instruction of the chairman. Later common sense prevailed and they were replaced.

ANOTHER EXPEDITION has set out to see if the Loch Ness monster can be detected with hydrophones, long-range cameras and high-powered binoculars. An "all-too-solemn expedition", "Cassandra" called it (*Daily Mirror*, 13/8/62). He also commented on the expected report of its findings, likely to run to several thousand words. "I can report them in two", he said. "No dice". We agree.

NEXT DAY "Cassandra" turned to the latest MRA advertisement, in which he read that, "The League of Nations failed because it was not God-arched". What does it mean? he asked. "God fallen-arched? How do you God-arch a League of Nations? With a pallet knife, a bacon-slicer, a scent-spray, a prayer-wheel or a hypodermic syringe?"

FROM AMSTERDAM, the International Council of Christian Churches issued a statement attacking the "blasphemies" of the Russians (*Daily Express*, 17/8/62). Outer space, the Council declared, "belongs to Almighty God and not to Mr. Khrushchev".

WE HAVE BEEN ASKED by the Rationalist Association of New South Wales (Box 26, King Street Post Office, Sydney, Australia) to announce that it now holds its Sunday night meetings at 7.30 p.m. at 38 Clarence Street, Sydney (at the rear of Wynyard Railway Station) and that the lectures are advertised every Saturday in the *Sydney Morning Mail*. Mr. J. F. MacDonald, President of the Association, extends a cordial welcome to all readers of THE FREETHINKER who are either resident in Sydney or passing through.



# Heine's "Disputation"

BY OTTO WOLFGANG

MUCH AS I HATED school indoctrination and drill, I still have a soft spot for one of my teachers. Oddly enough, he was our religious instructor but, odder still, it was he who quite deliberately planted in our impressionable brains the seeds of critical doubt. His predecessors had been narrow-minded fundamentalists, who we despised but we found Dr. B, the local chief rabbi, very different. He was a modern, highly educated man who, when dispensing his curriculum, more or less apologised that he had to do his duty for which he was paid. He preferred talking to us about linguistics and semantics in Hebrew and Arabic, Latin and Greek. Then, all of a sudden, he would point to a pupil and ask him whether he had performed some orthodox rite. The victim, stumbling to his feet, would start stuttering, not knowing what to answer. Then Dr. B would gently apply his medicine: "Why not answer 'No, Sir, I don't believe'? Isn't it better to be frank and straight instead of shamming?"

Another time, when he dutifully had to treat the David myth as if it were real history, he digressed to Heinrich Heine, Germany's greatest lyrical poet. "You have never read his 'Disputation', I bet—you simpletons!" he said with a feigned sneer. He put on this act just before the bell went, so nothing more could be added, but our appetites were wetted, exactly as he had intended.

"The Disputation" is the last piece in the collection *Romancero*. It is such a devastating debunking of religious beliefs, that this long poem is frequently expurgated from Heine editions. It may, therefore, be useful to give a summary of its contents, and furthermore I shall try to render the highlights in my own translation. But let us shortly introduce Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) who, as a Jew and rebel, was persecuted and died in exile. It was no vain boast when he called himself "A Soldier in the Liberation War of Humanity".

"Heine made the German lyric European as none of his predecessors has done" wrote Professor J. G. Robertson (*A History of German Literature*, 1959), who complained, however, that "many a matchless song is ruined by the sting in its tail; his scoffing at Christianity is crude and tasteless . . . But it must be confessed that Heine had at his command an Aristophanic power of satire and cynicism possessed by few other German writers". And G. Waterhouse (*A Short History of German Literature*) said that, "Few have reproduced the simplicity of the 'Volkslied' as faithfully, or as naturally as Heine".

Yet he too complains that the "sudden intrusion of the sardonic" mars many a fine song and this petulant stabbing "excludes him from the true Romantic school".

As a Jew he began life with a certain handicap, nor did his formal conversion bring him spiritual or material satisfaction. The rebellious elements of his nature thus easily roused and found expression in mockery and political agitation.

Karl Marx—among a host of great contemporaries—was one of Heine's friends, and Engels wrote of him: "Already in 1833 one man at least had recognised what neither the German government nor the Liberals had seen—and this man's name was Heinrich Heine".

Nietzsche confessed that Heine's poems showed him to have reached the high-water mark of a lyrical poet. "He possessed that divine naughtiness without which I cannot imagine perfection."

"The Disputation" is a spiritual journey held in the Aula of Toledo at the command of Pedro the Cruel

(1350-69), son of Alfonso of Castile. Under a golden canopy, the king and his young French queen, Blanche de Bourbon—now called Donna Blanca—accompanied by their courtiers, attend a dispute between twelve Catholics and twelve rabbis, which is to establish whether the stern Jahveh or Christianity's triune God was the true one. The champion of the Christians is Friar José, a Franciscan "guardian", i.e. superior of a monastery, whilst the Jewish leader and mouthpiece is Rabbi Juda of Navarre. These were the knights who, in lieu of gallant paladins, wore capuchons and skull-caps in the place of helmets and wielded scholastic points as lances. It is stipulated that if the Jews could prove Christianity nonsensical, their opponents had to undergo circumcision whilst, if beaten, the Jews themselves would have to accept baptism.

As soon as the starting signal sounds, the Franciscan monk bursts into furious passion; to play safe, he first exorcises the rabbi in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—to chase away all possible devils who could foil his efforts. Then he recounts how the Lord was born of a Virgin who never lost her unsullied innocence; how they laid the Lord Almighty in a lowly stable manger where a little cow and a little ox kept him company (Heine calls them "little horned cattle"—which in German is equivalent to "dunce"; in this sense, the friar also quotes St. Thomas Aquinas, "whom they call the mighty Ox of Learning"). Then, after a cascade of invective and coarse insults of Jewry, covering a whole page, the monk goes on to affirm:

"Our God, he's very Love.  
Like a lamb he was impaled  
When, atoning for all mankind,  
Jesus to the cross was nailed.

"Therefore we're meek and gentle,  
Our Saviour emulating:  
Always are we friendly, loving—  
Never quarrelling or hating."

For lack of stronger arguments, the monk tries to tempt his opponent with a lurid description of bliss in Paradise, when as pure angels, with harps and lilies in hand, the faithful will roam the heavens. No more bald pates—golden locks will cover their heads—and charming maidens will keep them company. There will be kissing and drinking all day long. On this note, the Christian ends and the monks, convinced that such arguments cannot be beaten, busily prepare for the baptismal operation. However, the Jews, as always "dreading water", shake themselves with scornful grinning, and Rabbi Juda of Navarre takes the floor:

"With three persons in your Godhead  
You are modest, I confess.  
Other pagans couldn't manage  
With six thousand gods or less.

"Someone whom you call Lord Jesus  
Is not known to me, nor neither  
Have I had the honour meeting  
Mrs. Virgin, said to be his mother.

"If twelve centuries ago  
He in Jewish country met  
With unpleasantness of sorts—  
This, if proved, I would regret;

"Yet to blame us outright is an  
Accusation without base:  
As the chief *corpus delicti*  
Vanished. How d'you prove your case?"



"Doubtful also is the story  
That Jehovah was his dad . . .  
. . . He's no philanthropic babbler,  
Gentle fool or chirping quail.

"Our God of "love" knows nothing,  
Never does he bill or coo,  
For he is a God of Vengeance  
And of Wrath and Anger too."

Soon the Rabbi too digresses. How Jahveh likes to play with a monstrous fish, called Leviathan, and on the Day of Resurrection will invite all his elect to a banquet for which He himself will have prepared that fish in white garlic sauce, partly stewed in wine and dressed with raisins and little slices of horse-radish! And he tries to make the friars' mouths water with his description of the delicacy which awaits him for the sacrifice of his foreskin. Immediately the Jews set to grinding and brandishing their *mohel*-knives. However, the Catholics stick to their religion, and with all arguments exhausted, the affair degenerates more and more into a slanging match.

"Hardly had the Rabbi finished  
Than the monk was on the spot  
With abuses foul and stinking  
As a brimful chamberpot."

The audience becomes utterly bored, and the king, seeing everybody yawning, asks his lovely queen which side she would consider victorious. Donna Blanca, thoughtfully pressing her slender fingers against her temples, gives this verdict:

"Which is right, I can't decide,  
But, if you will excuse, I think—  
Of the rabbis and the monks—  
That they altogether . . . stink."

All religious disputations are bound to remain inconclusive, so this might seem perhaps a coarse and startling judgment—but not altogether unjust.

#### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

##### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 22ND, 1962: Present: Mr. F. A. Ridley (President) in the Chair, Mrs. Ebury, Messrs. Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornbrook, McIlroy, Miller, Mills, Shannon, Tribe, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Reply from the Admiralty (see Views and Opinions last week) was considered and a letter to HM the Queen was agreed. The BBC was considering possibility of atheism as a "What's the Idea?" subject. Birmingham Branch had lost £28 5s. 0d. in a robbery, and a grant was agreed. Humanist Council minutes were before the meeting. The House of Commons dinner had been postponed and the Committee expressed its regret. The Secretary reported on the meeting of the World Union of Freethinkers committee in Vienna. Correspondence with the National Council for Unmarried Mother and her Child and with the Archbishop of Canterbury, was read by Mr. Tribe, and further steps were considered. It was decided to reprint Chapman Cohen's *Are Christians Inferior to Freethinkers?* as a leaflet. The position of literature-sellers outside Hyde Park was being watched in the light of recent police action. Possibility of forming a South London Branch was announced. Marble Arch Branch intended to tape record speeches for use of other branches. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, September 12th, 1962.

#### THIS WONDERFUL (FLAT) WORLD

The International Flat Earth Society is a thriving scientific body and it would be a pity for it to be derided by those who have not really studied the subject—and are in consequence only too ready to follow the leads given in so many books and journals. —Yours faithfully, H. W. Huttler-Glank, B.M./Quark, London, W.C.1.—Letter in *The Guardian* (16/8/62).

## CORRESPONDENCE

### FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Like Anthony James, I much dislike the dangers inherent in any legislation restricting freedom of speech. In future years, it can be utilised for purposes very different from the original intention or prove difficult to implement in practice.

Neither the Common nor the Statute Law of England confers upon anybody an absolute right to freedom of speech.

The existence of laws against libel, obscenity, blasphemy or sedition, serve to remind that freedom of speech only exists to the point permitted by the legislation. It is this point which reminds that the neo-Fascists have probably offended against existing law by seeking to stir up hatred and animosity against groups of subjects. If the matter goes to certain lengths, there are eighteenth century precedents for indictment on a charge of treason, felony. Incitement to riot is a crime at Common Law. The cases of *R. v. Cunningham Graham and Burns* and *R. v. Burns* (1886), are worth looking up as they link up the matter with both incitement and sedition. *Wise v. Dunning* might also be consulted in this connection, as it provides precedent for summoning a person likely to cause disturbance under the *Justice of the Peace Act*, 1360, and binding him over. On *prima facie* evidence, there could have been a case for so dealing with Sir Oswald Mosley before he went to Ridley Road a few weeks ago. The *Public Order Act*, 1936, covers both the use of threatening or menacing language at a public meeting as well as trying to run semi-military organisations. It is also important to recall that the stirring-up of racial hatred is a public mischief. *R. v. Lees and Whitehead* serves to remind that, in 1936, two men were sent to prison for asserting that the Jews practise ritual murder.

My main query is why the mass of existing law has not been used earlier. The views of the neo-Fascists are not only detestable but are advocated in a manner calculated to disturb the public peace. It is curious to observe that the practical danger has tended to become bogged down in academic arguments about statutory procedure or freedom of speech. There should be enough resource available in the law as it exists to deal with the violent or disorderly methods of these cardboard fuhrers and their gangs. But the existing law must be applied with the requisite firmness.

We are hearing much, just now, unfortunately with truth, about ruffianly hooliganism among a certain type of younger thug. It is as well to recall that, in the pattern of the nineteen-thirties now being repeated, it was exactly this type which came to be recruited into the Fascist gangs. Having failed to cure them by spoon-feeding them with Freud, we are now in danger of seeing them find an outlet in the revival of Fascist activity. The danger is not to freedom of speech but to the very atmosphere and soil in which such freedom can flourish. There is a real danger that those who have stood by and witnessed ex-Nazis return to power in Western Germany might be diffident about dealing with Fascist trends here. The demand should be made that, before any statutory action, the existing law should be applied and that the utmost measures should be adopted against any form of hooliganism, political or otherwise. A vital step might then have been taken against the revival of Fascist techniques in our midst without interfering with freedom of speech in itself.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT.

### RELIGION AND THE CHILD

There is a drawback to the withdrawing of children from assembly and religious instruction at school, which as far as I am aware has not been dealt with in these pages.

In being withdrawn, the unbeliever's child must often spend these periods in the company of a number of Roman Catholics, whose influence is far from being of the best, and who may do more harm than a few hymns or Bible stories which few of the children believe anyhow.

I should be glad to know if the editor or any of the readers of *THE FREETHINKER* could offer any advice in a case such as this.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY,  
Secretary, Leicester Secular Society.

### THE PITY OF IT!

What a pity you do not accept the Omnipotent, Omniscient Creator's line of thought as revealed in His supernaturally inspired word, the Holy Bible (2 Pet. 1, 21). Deviation from this author and source of wisdom is the cause of all folly, error and evil, comparable to the sinking sand. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . (2 Tim., 3, 16-17) and there is sufficient plain, clear teaching for every phase of life, which if disregarded produces malcontent and chaos, but which if followed engenders stability and satisfaction (Rom. 2, 8-10).

As Mark Twain said, "It wasn't what he didn't understand in the Bible that bothered him, but what he did understand."

Mrs. L. GALT (Ontario, Canada).

[What a pity Mrs. Galt can't understand Mark Twain.—ED.]



### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The view is often expressed in *THE FREETHINKER*, especially in Dr. Duhig's article "Morality and the Catholic Clergy" (27/7/52), that the presence of evils in the world militates against the existence of a god. Now some of my Christian friends assure me that they believe in an all-loving, all-wise, God, *because* of evils, which would be otherwise inexplicable. They say that we only see part of the picture now but will understand everything at the end of all things.

Once accept a picture like this and there is no longer any "Problem of Evil". There is really no problem for us atheists either. There just happen to be some frightful things in the world, but they neither add to nor detract from, theistic arguments. Our grounds for rejecting or accepting theism must lie elsewhere. My own grounds for rejection have to do with meaning and logic.

WALTER DYTE.

[Mr. Dyte is mistaken in accepting the evasive reply of his Christian friends to the problem of evil. "Frightful things in the world" not only detract from the theistic argument, they shatter it. Their existence is incompatible with that of an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God. If one of Mr. Dyte's Christian friends cares to present the theistic case, however, we shall be pleased to consider it for publication—and reply.—ED.]

### NSS AND ALDERMASTON

The latest National Secular Society Executive Committee's Annual Report has a note on the Aldermaston march in which the Society took part. I altogether agree with our support for nuclear disarmament—but not with the slogan on the banner: "National Secular Society: Atheism—Secularism—Freethought". Christian marchers who criticised this are chided with "sectarian ardour". How strange, because I should have criticised it myself.

The fact is, I hold that nuclear bomb protests should not be made the occasion for freethought or other propaganda. Here is something where all who are taking part in the protest are united in this if in nothing else. There should be no note of discord or division. Personally, I think it would be sufficient for the various organisations participating to carry a banner stating simply who they are—in our case, The National Secular Society. But if slogan there must be, surely the words "The National Secular Society stands for Survival" are enough?

G. I. BENNETT.

### FIRST CAUSE

The First Cause must not be spoken of as though it were merely first in a series or chain of secondary causes. There is certainly no reason why such chains should have beginning or end. One can attempt to demonstrate the logic of a First Cause without making any attempt to demonstrate that the material universe had a beginning. Even if the world had no beginning, it appears to be ruled by laws and limitations which are not of its own making, and to be subject to a mode of existence which appears to be creation out of nothing. Whether the world is old or eternal it appears to the human observer to be continually coming out of nothing. And it is from these perfectly observable facts that the theist deduces, perhaps quite fallaciously, that physical reality has been made and is being made by something quite beyond the range of physical science, i.e. a First Cause possessing some at least of those attributes which religious people attribute to God, such as infinity, eternity, almighty power. Concerning the moral character of the First Cause it is better to say nothing. A Humanist moral code is quite good enough for human beings.

The difference between the First Cause and all secondary causes can be expressed by a simple logical distinction. The First Cause is the only one which is not the effect of any other cause. While it is open to doubt or discuss the durability of secondary causes, if the First Cause is accepted at all, it must be accepted as absolutely indestructible.

PETER CROMMELIN.

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### WITHOUT COMMENT

The Reverend Basil Tuffield, 39-year-old priest-in-charge of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Carshalton Beeches, has told women attending communion service that he would prefer them not to use lipstick, and powder—if it must be worn—so applied that it does not fall off into the wine.—*Evening Standard* (16/8/62).

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