

The Freethinker

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THOU SHALT NOT KILL; but needst not strive/Officially keep alive." Following A. H. Clough, I think one might frame a Decalogue for newspaper editors containing: "Thou shalt not lie; but needst not try, unduly hard to tell the truth." It would be interesting, for instance, to know the number of unfounded stories that the popular press has built up sensationally for days or weeks, and then left quietly to die. The figure must be astronomic.

Of course, in some cases the "truth" is never discoverable. And it isn't easy to climb down after giving something the "full treatment". The fact remains that a great deal of dubious and even false reporting goes unquestioned and uncontroverted. The *Daily Sketch* has not yet withdrawn its Lourdes "cancer cure" assertions of July 13th, 1962, and June 14th and 15th, 1963, which were contested in these columns on September 7th, 1962, and August 9th, 1963, respectively, and one of which—that of Mme. Rose Martin—was shown definitely to be medically questionable. Indeed, from past experience one may expect the *Sketch* to repeat the claims during the next twelve months. On a less serious note, the same paper (along with a number of others, this time) headlined on July 17th, 1963, that a flying saucer had landed on a 72-year-old farmer's potato patch in Dorset.

Russian Scientists "Convinced"
Telepathy and similar "mysteries of the mind" are always assured of a good press. No matter how "nutty" or trivial the "phenomena", some national or local paper will report with due solemnity. Preferably though, these days, the story should have "scientific" backing. And if materialistic Russians can be cited in support, of what consequence are a few freethinking dissentients?

Have not most of us at some time tried mental telepathy, as Victor Louis said in his Moscow report in the *Evening News* (August 28th, 1963)? How comforting it is then to be told that, "Now Russian scientists are convinced that thought transference is possible". Not just some Russian scientists, note—though this must surely be the most that Mr. Louis can know—but Russian scientists in general, presumably. "Distance, obstacles and the curve of the earth, they say, do not interfere with thought waves", the report continued. And: "The Russians reached their conclusions after hundreds of tests. People sealed in radiation-proof rooms still 'received' thought suggestions over distances up to 1,700 miles".

Authority
"The Russians", to whom Mr. Louis referred rather vaguely, "called in" Professor Leonid Vasilyev ("for 40 years the Soviet's leading authority on the subject"), who believes that hypnotism and a personal knowledge of the person receiving the message are important factors", he said, "At present . . . would be essential before a space man, for example, could communicate with a ground station by telepathy". In the Professor's own words: "The sender needs to have a mental image of the person

he's transmitting to. Experiments in which the sender did not know the receiver did not work".

Presumably, then, the tiresome ordinary radio communications with an astronaut will have to be persevered with, as he can hardly be expected to carry a mental image with him of the many technicians to whom he will be transmitting. Reliance can hardly be placed on one "receiver" telepathically tuned-in, lest anything should happen to dull

his extra-sensory perceptiveness. And alas, Professor Vasilyev sees this as an obstacle to international experiments such as have been planned between a Cambridge parapsychological society and Soviet scientists this year.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Russian Telepathy

By COLIN McCALL

Distance No Obstacle

Unless hypnotism can help. "In all my experiments, says this Russian Dr. Rhine, "the greatest number of successes has been in tests where hypnosis was used".

In one test [according to the Professor], the sender, a hypnotist, was sent to Sevastopol, 1,500 miles away on the Black Sea. The subject remained in Leningrad. At an agreed time the hypnotist began hypnotising telepathically. At once the subject in Leningrad became hypnotised. Half an hour later the subject was awakened in the same way.

How obliging of the subject to become hypnotised at the "agreed time"! Anyway, the "success" of this experiment led to others, and later "a subject in Leningrad was not only hypnotised but repeated sentences passed to her telepathically by the sender".

Spontaneous

Sometimes, Professor Vasilyev tells us (via Mr. Louis, of course), telepathy happens "spontaneously". And then we get this typical tale:

During the last war a school teacher in the Urals named Sophia Agenosova mentally received a message from her husband saying he was off to the front. She at once caught a train to where his battalion was stationed. There she found that her husband had *intended* to send her a cable. He had changed his mind at the last moment because he thought it would not reach her in time.

If that doesn't convince you of the truth of telepathy then you must be as sceptical as I. In which case you might welcome the emergence of Mr. Louis's sense of humour at the end of the article, when he posed a problem about telephoning telepathically. Suppose "you are 'calling' a girl friend when the wife gets 'on the line'".

The question is, though, how seriously will this Russian report be taken? Not only do many people seem to want to believe in telepathy (as a sort of religious hang-over); by a curious paradox there may well be less inclination to doubt it when "Russian scientists" attest to it. Political suspicion of the USSR is not likely to be extended to this mental-cum-spiritual realm. That a communist revolution can't guarantee to cure cranks, crack-pots and pseudo-scientists seems not to occur to people.

Scepticism

In short, a story of thought-transference is no more likely to be valid because it is set in the USSR, than in the USA or here. There is just as much chance of illusion and collusion in Leningrad as in London. Of course one can't

examine Professor Vasilyev's stories, and if one could it would probably not be possible to disprove them, any more than it is to disprove the many similar stories one hears of wives receiving telepathic messages from husbands off to—or at—the front, etc. But one can be sceptical. Not, I should add, out of sheer "cussedness", but from experience and from exposures of the invalidity of alleged extra-sensory perception.

Rationalists Past and Present

And, at a time when a number of present day Rationalists (like Sir Julian Huxley and Professor Antony Flew) are lending their support to ESP, it is worth while recalling the remarks of a past one, Sir George Greenwood. To those who, he said, "tell us that there is really nothing extraordinary in Telepathy, who speak of 'brain waves', and refer us to the analogy of wireless telegraphy, I would commend the words of a well-known scientist, who is himself a convinced believer in the reality of the phenomena of Telepathy: 'Let us for a moment examine this analogy of telepathy to wireless telegraphy. Even if we assume the so-called "brain waves" to be infinitely minute waves in the ether that fills all space, they would still obey what is called "the law of inverse squares"—that is to say, spreading on every side in ever-expanding waves, they

would decay in proportion to the square of the distance from their source. Thus, at a thousand yards away from the source the effect produced on any receiver would be a million times less than the effect upon the same receiver a yard away from the originating source. Hence to transmit waves over great distances through free space requires tremendous energy in the originating source of these waves . . ."

Sir George was quoting none other than Professor (later Sir William) Barrett, whose conclusion (which is not affected by his now outdated belief in the "ether") was that these "supernormal phenomena . . . do not belong to the material plane, and therefore the laws of the physical universe are inapplicable to them. It is hopeless to attempt thus to explain telepathy and other phenomena which transcend knowledge derived from our sense perceptions".

I agree with Barrett. If there is such a thing as telepathy, it is "supernormal", otherwise it would obey the law of inverse squares. And I agree with Sir George Greenwood in his rejection of it. Surprisingly, though, it has become unfashionable to say so. Point to irrationalities, expose flaws as one may, it is "dogmatic" to deny telepathy.

The Mandeans

By "AKIBA"

THE MIDDLE EAST is the cradle of three great world religions: great, in the impact they have made on world history. However, there is nothing automatic and inevitable in the unfolding of history. Many "accidental" features may have contributed to the "success" of one religion over a rival. Thus Mithraism and Manicheanism were "world religions" yet they failed to survive.

In a previous article on the Yezidis, I drew attention to the importance of the sub-religions which are interspersed structurally and historically between the major world religions. There can be no doubt that these faiths and cults—surviving as they do the overwhelming pressures of dominating state-religions—have preserved much that is valuable for the historian and the student of religion.

The Mandeans are an interesting case in this context. Not only in that they represent a surviving branch of the Semitic stock, but also on account of their language, religion and sacred literature. There is, besides, the records of their religious teachings, literature which includes fragmentary remains and revisions of ancient Gnostic speculations. Adherents of the faith are found in Iraq and Iran (see E. S. Drower's *The Mandeans of Iraq and Iran*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1937). They live in the neighbourhood of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, since immersion in flowing water is an essential, and certainly the most characteristic, feature of their religious practice. And John the Baptist has a special place in their sacred writings.

The most valuable and the most ancient portions of Mandaean literature are collected in the voluminous *Sidra Rabba* ("Great Book") or *Genza* ("Thesaurus") which is divided into a right and left part. It consists of theological, mythological, ethical and historical treatises interspersed with revelations, prayers and hymns. Next in importance is the *Sidra d'Yahya* ("The Book of John") or *Drase d'Malka* ("Recitations of the Kings"), more rarely designated *Drase d'Yahya* ("Recitations of John"). This is a collection of tractates, in incomplete or corrupt textual form, relating to the experiences and teachings of

John the Baptist. This book also contains narratives (e.g. one about "the fisher of souls"), and instructions in conversational form. Here the legend of the baptiser of Jordan is expounded in popular form.

A careful study of the Mandaean texts throws light not only on the Mandaean rites, the origin and history of the religion itself but, far more important, it holds the key to an advance of knowledge regarding the character of the Oriental Gnosticism and Gnostic Christianity which played such an important part in the formative centuries of Christianity.

The Mandaean religion has a certain similarity to the Yezidi religion, in that it is syncretic, being composed of Christian, Jewish and Manichean elements. The Mandeans believe that far above, beyond the heaven of the planets, there is a world full of light and splendour where dwell the Life (as the supreme deity) and other divine beings. From this realm the soul of man derives—the soul of Adam and the souls of his descendants in the Mandaean community. Beneath this realm is the world of darkness with its black waters. Part of it has been "thickened" brought in to a solid state; this is the earth inhabited by mankind.

The believer waits with earnest longing for his salvation from the evil spirits who torment him, and he prays for his deliverance from this earthly existence. At the hour of death a divine being descends from the world of light and, as the "liberator", takes the soul from the body, bearing it upward through the celestial spheres to the world of light and of the Great Life.

The Middle East has yet to give up many of her secrets and the Mandeans, the Yezidis and many of the smaller Oriental Christian sects may well have in their possession the scrolls or papyri which will throw the whole of the Christian world into turmoil. The historicity of many of the incidents reported in the Gospels may yet be challenged by the accident of the opening of a Mandaean earthen pot, or the unrolling of a Coptic Christian parchment.

Boadicea—The British Joan of Arc

By F. A. RIDLEY

MOST LONDONERS, and no doubt many visitors to what used to be the metropolis of a world-wide empire, will remember the statue erected on the Thames Embankment of the ancient British Queen, Boadicea (as the Victorians usually called her), or Boudicca, to adopt the spelling now most commonly endorsed by contemporary Celtic philology. Under one or other of these appellations, every schoolboy, as Macaulay was fond of phrasing it, has heard of the famous Queen of the Iceni, who headed the great rebellion, 60-61 AD of the Ancient Britons against the might of Roman Imperialism. Upon the London statue raised in honour of this redoubtable personage, is suitably inscribed a jingle composed by the poet, William Cowper, assuring the martyred Queen that "regions Caesar never knew, thy posterity shall sway"—a surely rather ironic tribute paid by a modern spokesman of English Imperialism to one of the most illustrious victims of its ancient Roman predecessor!

A recent book written jointly by Donald R. Dudley and Graham Webster (both of Birmingham University), *The Rebellion of Boudicca* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963) gives us a comprehensible and heavily documented survey of the life and antecedents both of Queen Boadicea and of the great insurrection of the British tribes under her evidently inspiring leadership. Evidently also, this insurrection of the natives against the yoke of Roman Imperialism imposed on them a few years earlier (44-60 AD) was a formidable affair.

Our major Roman authority for this period, the great contemporary publicist, Tacitus (as is usual in such cases, no British account of the rebellion has survived) who enjoyed exceptional facilities for knowing from the Roman point of view what really transpired, described the situation as touch and go. He asserted definitely that the Romans were all but driven out of the island, and that the Britons inflicted severe defeats upon the Roman power before the Roman governor, Suetonius Paulinus finally succeeded in crushing the insurgents in one decisive battle.

In some respects, the rising led by Boadicea, bore a general resemblance to the great servile insurrection of Spartacus (also probably of royal blood) one hundred and thirty years earlier. But though the Britons obviously fought bravely, Boadicea seems to have been conspicuously deficient in the military genius which enabled Spartacus to weld a rabble of untrained slaves into an army and at its head to conduct some of the most astonishing campaigns in the annals of war. In the British case as narrated by Tacitus, all the military expertness was clearly on the Roman side.

The final battle (which an eminent Victorian located on the present site of King's Cross Station, an assumption debunked by our two authors) appears to have been a typical imperialistic victory in which a small, trained and technically-equipped professional army system destroyed an undisciplined horde of brave, but untrained barbarians incidentally, our authors describe this anonymous "Waterloo" as occurring "somewhere in the Midlands"). As again, every schoolboy knows, the defeated Queen took her own life in order to escape the cross and the lash which were the normal punishment reserved by Roman Imperialism for defeated rebels and slaves.

By the time the insurrection came to a head in 60-61 AD, the Romans had been masters of southern Britain since the island was first invaded and permanently occupied by the Emperor Claudius, 44 AD (there had been

two earlier flying raids by Julius Caesar, a century earlier—55-54 BC). By the time of Boadicea's insurrection, the Romans were already well dug in the southern half of the island and had established flourishing colonies at Verulamium (St. Albans), Camulodunum (Colchester) and at Londinium, where the embryo of the later City of London had already (according to Tacitus) become the leading commercial centre of Roman Britain.

All these towns were razed to the ground by the insurgent Britons (charred remains are familiar objects to modern archaeology) with enormous loss of life, 70,000 is the precise figure given by Tacitus for Boadicea's victims, again, as in earlier cases, probably a round, rather than an exact figure.

The initial success of the rising was due to the absence of the governor, Suetonius Paulinus, one of the most celebrated Roman commanders of this era, on an expedition against North Wales which culminated in the forcible Roman occupation of Mona (Anglesey), the headquarters of the apparently well-organised cult of the Druids in Britain.

From the fact that the obviously well-organised British revolt eventuated at the precise moment that the Roman governor had his hands full in Wales, it is a tempting hypothesis that though Queen Boadicea represented the titular—and according to the Romans, terrifying—figure-head of the insurrection, its real instigators were the Druids, who timed its effective diversion in order to prevent the Roman attack on their own headquarters, Anglesey. Such a supposition has a striking parallel in a later English insurrection, since it appears quite certain that the medieval Peasants' Rebellion (1381), though nominally led by Wat Tyler, was actually largely religious in origin, being organised by the Lollards, the religious as well as social heretics of the day.

Be that as it may, Boadicea's rebellion all but succeeded. The Roman colonies were razed to the ground, their inhabitants were massacred, and a Roman relief force was ambushed and cut to pieces. Only the hurried return of Paulinus and a battle in which the Roman commander appears to have displayed remarkable tactical skill against numerically heavy odds, saved Britain for the Roman Empire. The British Queen and her daughters took poison and Roman reprisals (as in the earlier case of Spartacus) were on a corresponding scale as Tacitus informs us. Thereafter there do not appear to have been any further British risings.

Fortunately, in the case of Boadicea (unlike that of Spartacus), we have a contemporary authority, Tacitus, the son-in-law of Agricola (later, governor of Britain), who was on the Roman staff during the rebellion. Accordingly Tacitus speaks with the authority almost of an eyewitness (naturally a hostile one). What however, we actually know about Boadicea, does not really amount to very much. Even her personal antecedents are unknown, except that she was the widow of Prasutagus, King under Roman suzerainty, of the Iceni, a British tribe domiciled in what is now East Anglia. We are further told a hair-raising story with very little precise detail about it; that after her husband's death, the Queen was beaten up by Roman soldiers, her daughters raped and her property confiscated by Roman usurers. *Ergo*, the great rebellion arose from the fury of an outraged Queen and mother. This "great man" or rather woman, interpretation of his-
(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

We are not sure whether "South Bank Religion" is so called because we are in the diocese of the Bishop of Southwark, or because he is in ours. But the Christian religion in it is having some surprising changes. Take for example, Dr. Mervyn Stockwood's own opinion of some of his fellow parsons (*Daily Express*, September 9th)—"The products of our theological colleges are often so narrow and restricted that not even a tin opener will reach what ought to be their thinking apparatus". This strong opinion could have come direct from THE FREETHINKER—and with justice.

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But at the same time, what about Dr. Stockwood himself? He may be a little less "narrow and restricted" in his Christian thinking, but how much less? Does he not hold fast to his Oriental religion packed with the supernatural and the most unblushing absurdities? In other words, what exactly does the Bishop believe? The old old religion as proclaimed by the Apostles 1900 years ago? Nobody knows.

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Ponder on the grave words on precisely the same subject from the Rev. Peter Geake, vicar of Burgh Heath, Surrey: "The Englishman brings his natural shyness to church with him. He likes to sit at the back, and he is an anonymous worshipper. He is frightened of getting too closely drawn in". All this actually means is that "the Englishman" is beginning to see the absurdity of "worship" not because he is really shy, but because he knows what silly nonsense it all is. The genuine believer is not at all shy. He is irrepressibly vociferous, and unctuously believes that the Gospel must be yelled about everywhere, and opposition howled down by discordant hymn-singing. Mr. Geake obviously should go to a Christian Evidence Society meeting.

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In the meantime, there is one Christian minister who, after being well indoctrinated into the Baptist faith, has decided to quit the Church and become a croupier in a casino. The details are given in the *Daily Express* (September 6th), and it appears that the Rev. Michel Gilchrist "came to terms with himself", found out he was making a mistake by "continuing in the Church" which would have been "sheer hypocrisy", and is now "fascinated" by being a croupier. We cannot help wondering what Jesus would have done in his place? Or what Jesus now thinks of ex-parson Gilchrist? Surely it would have been more Christian to have become a steeplejack, a miner, or a jockey rather than a croupier?

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Then there is the Rev. Victor Taylor who is the Methodist minister for Hartcliffe Estate in Bristol, and who no doubt would find it difficult to visit all the Christians in it. So he has sent out a questionnaire asking for answers to 25 religious questions. A few of these are given in the *Daily Mail* (September 7th) but not one deals with fundamentals. For example, one is, "Do you teach your children to pray?" another is, "Should divorced people be allowed to re-marry in church?" and there are similar infantile questions which take for granted not only the Bible but the truth of Christianity.

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What Mr. Taylor really wants to know, he says, is why some people attend church, and others do not, and "what part religion plays in everyday life". We can tell him. Religion plays hardly any part in everyday life.

Marx on Religion

MAN, WHO HAS found in the fantastic reality of heaven, where he sought a supernatural being, only his own reflection, will no longer be tempted to find only the semblance of himself—a non-human being—where he seeks and must seek his true reality.

The basis of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion; religion does not make man. Religion is indeed man's self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again. But man is not an abstract being, squatting outside the world. Man is the human world, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion which is an inverted world consciousness, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its general basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realisation of the human being inasmuch as the human being possesses no true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly a struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion.

Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, the embryonic criticism of this vale of tears of which religion is the halo.

—Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, from T. B. Bottomore's translation of *Karl Marx—Early Writings* (C. A. Watts & Co. Ltd., 1963).

NOTTINGHAM MEMORIES

T. M. MOSLEY, veteran Freethought speaker, was secretary of the Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society for thirty years, and anyone who has spent an evening with him knows what a fund of memories he possesses. The idea of preserving some of them in print was good, but the resulting 32-page pamphlet, "*Cosmo*" *Memories and Personalities* (1s. from 63 Valley Road, Carlton, Nottingham) does not come up to expectation. The spark that enlivened Tom's talk is missing from the writing, and he has been rather let down by his unnamed printer. Apart from spelling mistakes, the pages are too crowded and the paragraphs too long. A pity, because there is much of interest literally packed between the covers of this pamphlet.

BOADICEA—THE BRITISH JOAN OF ARC

(Concluded from page 299)

tory we suspect had deep-rooted economic and religious motives in Roman exploitation and Druidic fanaticism. Be that as it may, popular history like popular fiction likes a heroine, and as a British "Joan of Arc", the old Celtic Queen has been (as our authors reveal in fascinating detail) embellished in song and story. John Fletcher wrote a play about her and both Cooper and Tennyson wrote poems in honour of the heroic Queen of the Iceni. It would in fact hardly be any exaggeration to rank Boadicea with her more fortunate royal successors, Queen Elizabeth I and Victoria, and Florence Nightingale as the four best-known (if not greatest) women in our island story. But after so much attractive fiction some facts are doubly welcome. They will be found in abundance in this fine book which every student of the history of this island should certainly make a point of reading.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NSS DINNER

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Chairman: W. MILLER

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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 NSS (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. A. MILLAR.
(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
Manchester Branch NSS (Platt Fields), Sunday afternoon (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.
Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.
North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY
Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, September 22nd, 6.45 p.m.: MISS J. M. LEVI: "Fifteen Years of National Health, and the Future".
Birmingham Humanist Group (Arden Hotel, New Street), Wednesday, September 25th, 7.30 p.m.: PROF. P. H. NOWELL-SMITH, "Sex and Semantics".
North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, September 20th, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.
Nottingham Branch NSS (Coal Utilisation Council Showrooms, St. Peter's Gate), Thursday, September 19th, 7.30 p.m.: DR. BRIAN LEONARD, "The Battle for the Mind".
West London Mission (Kingsway Hall, Kingsway, London, W.C.2), Sunday, September 22nd, 7.45 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "Secularism".

Notes and News

ALL PRAISE to Katharine Whitehorn and *The Observer* for speaking out so openly (1/9/63) on Roman Catholicism and birth control. Not only did Miss Whitehorn challenge the right of Catholics to prevent the spread of birth control knowledge and the publicising of the Family Planning Association (mentioning the British Transport poster ban which the National Secular Society fought), she showed how newspapers censored themselves for fear of offending Catholic readers. Her article, for instance, was omitted from the Irish edition of *The Observer*, and papers which have no special Irish edition simply censor all editions. It is encouraging to note that Miss Whitehorn's article prompted a large correspondence, five to one in her favour.

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"WE HAVE for years been trying to form a lobby to resist Catholic pressures, as Miss Whitehorn advocates", wrote Margaret McLroy, Public Relations Officer of the National Secular Society, in an unpublished letter to *The Observer*. "The supine attitude of the Protestant Churches constantly surprises us", said Mrs. McLroy, "and we feel it should not be left entirely to Secularists to speak up when social advance, and indeed measures of common humanity, are blocked by Roman Catholic pressure". The President of

the NSS, Mr. D. H. Tribe, had previously written to the *Sunday Times* hoping that liberal Catholics would "join with other progressive elements in the community to combat those ecclesiastical backwoodsmen who would hold our national and international life to ransom" by preventing or hindering birth control projects.

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TWO VERY different letters from Roman Catholic women to the *Spectator* (6/6/63) illustrated the cruel absurdity of their Church's ban on all but what it glibly calls the "natural" method of birth control. A "Future Catholic Parent" was candid, and admitted that if she and her husband-to-be were to enjoy a happy married life they would have to defy her Church's teaching. It was either the use of contraceptives or spending the first years of their married life in separate bedrooms. The second letter, from Erika Fallaux, solemnly set out to defend the "rhythm" method. "Very rarely", Mrs. Fallaux argued, "can intercourse in any case be spontaneous. Moments of tenderness and desire on the part of one may be met by tiredness, ill-health, or simply disinclination on the part of the other. It may be the wrong time of day. The children may have a prior claim . . .". So you see, you might just as well wait for the "safe period".

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NO PILL for Mrs. Fallaux! It is "an interference, on the biological level, with the cycle", a "repetition of the tragedy of Man's Fall . . .". Yet a woman's irregular menstrual cycle might be "regulated" and "the length of her safe period increased by the use of hormones". This, we take it, is a "natural" interference on the biological level! What a pitiful sight it is to see the lengths to which Catholics are driven in defence of their celibate-inspired birth control views. But it is sadder to see Catholic women worn down and Catholic marriages marred by unwanted children. The time has surely come to ask if an unmarried clergy really wants to see others enjoy marriage.

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THE CORRESPONDENCE column of *New Society* (5/9/63) contained a really startling letter beginning: "I am one of those who has made an unsuccessful attempt at suicide and will, at some time, have to go to the trouble of making another". The writer, who for obvious reasons, remained anonymous, contested the assumption that the world is such an agreeable place that no one who was *not* mentally ill could possibly wish to leave it", and asked, "Why should one be coerced into living if one does not wish to?" "We are coerced enough in this life as it", the writer continued. "To die is almost only the absolutely free choice we have . . .". And "to resuscitate if possible those who attempt suicide" was "an intolerable interference". Startling, yes, but sane.

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CATHOLIC MALTA is suffering from "the contagious disease of social leftist changes", said *The Faith* (September, 1963). "A few Maltese renegades, who have lost their faith are diabolically inspired to wreck havoc on the Church", knowing that "they cannot change Catholic Malta into a Socialist Malta without challenging the Church and the Maltese people in general". Whose fault was it, the paper asked, if the Church openly condemned the Maltese Labour Party? Why did the Socialists attack the Church's "social teaching"? The "dynamism" of Mr. Mintoff (who was never mentioned by name) "will only serve to bring trouble in this habitually quiet little island". But, like a good Catholic paper, *The Faith*, found "Malta's reaction . . . already in progress". The island will be united, "in the name of God, in the name of Jesus.

“The Nun of Monza”

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

AT THE TURN of the seventeenth century and at the age of sixteen Marianna de Leyva was persuaded to enter the Convent of the Humble Benedictine Nuns of Monza. The devout might say that she was a “forced nun” and that the ensuing scandals were only to be expected and in no way to be regarded as a smear on her fellow nuns; but, even before one goes any further, one must examine more closely the business of her admission to the cloisters.

Her father was a Spanish nobleman whose grandfather had devastated Lombardy and had become the first Spanish Governor of Milan; and one of his grandsons married an Italian lady who had a considerable fortune in her own right. Part of this inheritance the mother left to her daughter who was to become the notorious nun. Marianna’s father, therefore, was not simply thinking of his girl’s spiritual welfare when he thrust her into a habit: he had an arrangement with the abbess. He told the world he was giving his daughter’s fortune of 40,000 gold scudi to the convent as a spiritual dowry. Actually, he pocketed 28,000 gold scudi for himself, and gave the abbess the balance; and the nuns with vocations to be nuns were quite content to accept this crooked share-out. The fact, then, that Lady Marianna, who became Sister Virginia Maria, may have been a “forced nun” still reflects no credit on the order.

Young Sister Virginia gazed out of a convent window and sighed over the beauty of an intemperate and wild young man, Gian Paolo Osio, who lived in a neighbouring mansion. This gallant was a friend of a priest, a scoundrel who was only too anxious to introduce the thought of carnal love into the convent. He was ready to baptise a loadstone and give it to Gian as a charm to magnetise Sister Virginia’s passions, and to compose poetical letters to promote the cause of Gian’s lust. Yes, Father Arrigone was certainly not a “forced saint”. He was, for good measure, a man who gave banquets to students in his church where they all drank heavily, told stories and sang songs.

At the outset, Sister Virginia made attempts to save herself from the sins which the priest promised her were no sins and which so many of the nuns regarded as amusing diversions in the monotony of convent life. It was one thing for the local apothecary to be quite unmoved when nuns appeared in his shop to order abortive potions and for the local lock-smith to feel it quite in order for Gian to have fifty duplicate keys made to fit the convent doors, but Sister Virginia began by having scruples. She tried eating Gian’s excrement as a way to put an end to her forbidden attachment. She cooked it with liver and onions, we are told, and ate it in “the small parlatory”. Then she attempted to return the young man’s presents. But when she sent him back a crucifix, he threatened to put it on the roof of his house with an inscription saying that it had been given to him by a nun who had not wanted it. In the eyes of nuns, such a denunciation was unthinkable—a religious who refused to cherish a crucifix; and it was far better for Sister Virginia to be seduced quietly with the gift of a silver cross. In fine, the young girl was corrupted by “good” companions.

At first she did no more than meet Gian on the threshold of the convent and exchange pious thoughts while her companions kept watch. But soon she was receiving him in the bedroom which she shared with two other nuns, and soon she was starching his collars; and go-

betweens had go-betweens, and inevitably the scandal grew. Yet to The Church and to The Nobility, the affair was a complication which seemed too hot to handle. The authorities simply did not want to act when it meant implicating a member of the powerful Leyva family and the rich Osios whose bravoës were only too willing to beat up anyone who was deemed impertinent. So a child was born in the convent, a babe which rather conveniently died; and Gian had to drink milk from Sister Virginia’s breast.

Indeed one might think the convent story became a glorious farce, were it not for the split-minded ruthlessness which the ladies could show on occasions. There was, for example, the case of Sister Candida who started to have her own romance with Father Arrigone. Sister Virginia had the nerve to be outraged. But Sister Candida came off lightly compared to lay-sister Caterina who, in a moment of pique, boasted that she would “tell tales” and was quite deliberately murdered. The chronicler writes that not one of the nuns concerned in the murder seems to have had the slightest shudder of horror or revulsion; and there was not a word of pity for the victim, and not one of them seems to have had an instant’s faltering or any qualms of conscience. “It might have been the slaughtering of an animal rather than one of their own kind”.

Only some twenty years earlier, the Abbé Bodin had taken a census of the Devil’s forces, and he had calculated them (subject to slight errors in computation) at seven and a half million demons. Well, one might think the whole boiling lot had got into the convent; for the story piles up with further murders and infamies until both Church and State were compelled to intervene. It is horrifyingly instructive to read the full account in Mario Mazzucchelli’s *The Nun of Monza* (Hamish Hamilton, 25s.); and one is not surprised that for years the documents of the case were kept hidden. But in 1957, in some clerical thaw, Dr. Mazzucchelli was given permission to examine the archives, probably on the assumption that the legends were becoming more unedifying than the truth could be. The doctor found dossiers stuffed with raving letters, bans, edicts, wills, deeds, etc.; and from it all he pieced together the true story of depositions and confessions.

When Sister Virginia finally came to trial, she was still a woman proud of her lineage; and she seems to have forgotten her early doubts about what is fitting behaviour for a nun, for it is recorded that she glanced around her with eyes in whose sinister flash “the soul shrinks back, faltering and afraid”. However, she was tortured and condemned to be walled up in a cell at the Convent of Santa Valeria with just a tiny aperture in the wall through which food could be passed. The convent at Monza was ordered to pay the convent in Milan the cost of the walled-in nun’s upkeep. But even at this ghastly point, the professional nuns were not prepared to “do the right thing”, and the convent at Monza failed to send money to the convent in Milan. After fourteen years, the convent at Milan took the countermeasure of releasing Sister Virginia from her prison without light or sanitation.

At first she spoke about the miraculous penitence she had made and the visions she had received in exchange. She was cunning enough to speak modestly about the great favours God had shown her during her tribulations, and

she whispered marvels as if they were sins; and soon she won round the Cardinal into accepting her punishment almost as martyrdom. Yes, were it not for the murders, one could positively admire this singular woman who died at the age of 75 in 1650 and who brought to light so many goings-on in the clerical Establishment.

Lecture Notes

THIS IS the time when societies awake from their summer slumbers. Glasgow Secular Society (Hon. Secretary, Mrs. E. M. Hay, 43 Dudley Drive, Glasgow, W.2) held its first indoor meeting on Sunday, September 8th, when Colin McCall spoke on the Bishop of Woolwich and modern theology. and on Thursday, September 19th, in the Coal Utilisation Council Showrooms, St. Peter's Gate, the Nottingham Branch of the National Secular Society (Hon. Secretary, Mr. J. W. Challand, 162 Lowdham Lane, Woodborough, Notts.) will hear Dr. Brian Leonard speak on "The Battle of the Mind". The Birmingham Branch, of course, holds fortnightly indoor meetings all the year round, and this Sunday the speaker will be Miss J. M. Levi of the Socialist Medical Association. Two London branches of the NSS, Marble Arch and North London—like the Edinburgh Branch—continue open-air propaganda through the winter months, but Marble Arch weekly indoor meetings will commence at the Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W1, on Sunday, October 6th. Copies of the Marble Arch Branch syllabus may be obtained from Mr. W. J. McIlroy, 140a Hornsey Lane, London, N.6.

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THE ANNUAL Reunion of South Place Ethical Society will be held in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1, on Sunday, September 29th at 3 p.m., when the Guest of Honour will be the well known psychologist, Dr. J. A. C. Brown, author of the Pelican, *Freud and the Post-Freudians*, and other works. Music and refreshments will also be provided, and the retiring Secretary of the SPES, Mr. J. Hutton Hynd, will preside.

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A WEEK later (Sunday, October 6th) a new society, the Thomas Paine Society, will make its bow in the same hall (at 3 p.m.). The Society defines its objective as "to secure for Thomas Paine the recognition that he so richly deserves", involving for example, the commemoration of Paine in places associated with him, the encouragement of research and the answering of attacks. It is also hoped to issue a journal (once a year to start with), newsletters and leaflets, and to hold occasional meetings. Details of the Thomas Paine Society may be obtained from Mr. R. W. Morrell, 443 Meadow Lane, Nottingham, who reports a heartening response to his first proposal announcement.

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THIS SUNDAY, however, a most unusual secular meeting will be held—in a church. In response to a challenge from the audience at one of his lunchtime Tower Hill meetings, the Rev. Dr. Donald Soper agreed to let a Secularist speak after the evening service at the Methodist Church, Kingsway Hall, London, W.C.1. So, on September 22nd, at 7.45 p.m., the President of the National Secular Society, Mr. D. H. Tribe will address the members of Dr. Soper's congregation who care to stay and any other people who care to come. Mr. Tribe's talk will be followed by discussion.

WANTED: Works by Charles Bradlaugh.—B. J. Clifton, 152 Manor Avenue, London, S.E.4.

A Celibate Advises Parents

By MARGARET McILROY

IN A PRAISEWORTHY attempt to move with the times, the Catholic Truth Society has produced a little pamphlet, *Sex-Instruction in the Home*, by the Reverend Aidan Pickering, to guide parents in giving sex-instruction to their children—which it very firmly assures them it is their duty to give. The pamphlet is for private circulation only, presumably because the CTS would not approve of any young person reading the whole of it. There are tear-out sections provided—separate ones for boys and girls, of course—which the parent may give the child to read if he finds himself quite unequal to the task of speaking about such a subject!

However, the anxious Catholic parent need not be afraid that too much is being asked of him, for, according to the Scottish bishops, sex-instruction "must comprise a minimum of factual knowledge". Father Pickering, though himself a biology master, exclaims in horror, talking of non-Catholic sex-education, "You would be appalled to see the anatomy charts of the sexual organs and the growth of the unborn child published for use in schools with boys and girls of twelve and thirteen". One may wonder whether most Catholic parents are quite as narrow-minded as Father Pickering himself.

He does say that children's questions should be answered truthfully, and quotes Pope Pius XII, "Whatever their questions may be, do not answer them with evasions or untrue statements which their minds rarely accept". But Father Pickering has a strange idea of truth, for he would prefer to keep until early adolescence a knowledge of the father's part, so he says of small children, "If they ask you how a baby begins, they are quite satisfied if you tell them that you can feel it begin. Answers of this kind—the truth yet not the full truth—can be given to similar questions". In what sense this totally, and intentionally, misleading answer can be called the truth it is not easy to see. Catholics have always had a reputation for equivocation, and this seems to be a clear example of it.

"It may be as well to point out," says Father Pickering, "how these talks differ from the usual non-Catholic method of sex-instruction. We say nothing of internal anatomy; we use no scientific terms; we take no examples from plants or animals . . . Instead we take our examples from the feast and prayers of the Church". The avoidance of "scientific terms" leads to the unfortunate statement, "The part the father uses to give the seed is the part from which his water comes; and the part the mother uses to receive the seed is inside the opening from which her water comes".

The basic weakness of the Catholic attitude is clearly shown in the reason given for having sex-instruction. "Its sole purpose should be to assist the formation of the virtue of purity". Purity seems to mean the avoidance of any sort of sexual pleasure outside marriage. It means that the adolescent must resolutely turn every thought connected with sex out of his waking mind. This must obviously be difficult, and the pages for the adolescent to read are strewn with reminders that this or that is a venial sin, or a grave sin highly displeasing to God, or even a mortal sin.

Never is it suggested that sex-instruction should help to prepare young people to adjust themselves successfully to married life, nor are they given any understanding of the problems of the opposite sex—unless one counts a warning to young girls that God will hold them responsible if by immodest behaviour they tempt others. As is

so frequent in Catholic social attitudes, all the writer's concern is for abstractions like purity. The real problems of individuals and families are only incidental.

Priests generally ignore those difficulties in sexual adjustment that are liable to arise within marriage, and enviously conclude when they have a pair of virgin Catholics at the altar that the couple's problems are over (at least until a growing family turns their thoughts longingly to birth control). The fact is that a large proportion of women reared to be modest as Father Pickering instructs, and taught to regard the male sex organs as "the part from which his water comes", never find marital relationships anything but disgusting, with consequent disappointment to themselves and their husbands, often leading to severe strain on their marriages. Thus the Pickering line on sex-education actually robs many of its victims of the sexual pleasure and satisfaction within marriage which the Church states that God kindly arranged for people to have in order to encourage them to have children. In addition the emphasis on modesty frequently causes difficulties in childbirth for Catholic women.

Catholic writers with more perceptiveness than Father Pickering have pointed out that an exaggerated emphasis on purity may put boys off women so effectively and permanently that they become homosexuals. Even within the limitations imposed by dogma, Catholic parents could offer their children something far more helpful than this for sex-instruction, based on an awareness that it should serve more purposes than forming "the virtue of purity".

Much as Catholics try to deny it, it is an inescapable fact that celibates are almost uniformly bad as advisers on any problem concerned with sex and marriage, and the Rev. Aidan Pickering's pamphlet is just one more example of this. If the Catholic Truth Society were to ask an intelligent layman to prepare their next publication on this subject, the result might be more helpful to Catholic families—besides appearing less ludicrous to unbelievers.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor welcomes letters from readers, but asks that they be kept as brief and pertinent as possible.

FREETHINKING

I am not quite sure that I properly understand what the first part of David Bird's letter on freethinking is driving at. It strikes me as just a matter of opinion and had perhaps better be left at that.

Also, at the risk of seeming tiresome, I must say that his definition of a good education as "one that promotes truth and reason without sacrificing one for the sake of the other" is to me not very comprehensible. How does one sacrifice truth to reason, or even more, reason to truth? Surely the very exercise of reason is in order to promote truth, unless Mr. Bird is referring to so-called religious truth, which we are told is perceived by the eye of faith beyond the scan of reason. To a rationalist this sort of truth is dubious in the highest degree.

REGINALD UNDERWOOD.

FROM PLATO TO MAO TSE-TUNG

Mr. F. A. Ridley's article, "From Plato to Mao Tse-Tung" (THE FREETHINKER, September 6th) contained some interesting material but so frustrating to read "... from 1917 when the Russian Revolution installed a socialistic system ...".

No doubt this is careless phraseology for as an old Marxist Mr. Ridley is well aware that after the overthrow of the ancient feudal regime in 1917 socialism or "a socialistic system" whatever that may mean, was entirely out of the question in such a predominately agricultural country and low level of industrial development.

The Russian people were not socialists. When Mr. Ridley wrote in the *Socialist Leader* he sometimes used the correct Marxist term for the social system in Russia, i.e. State Capita-

lism. However, I presume Mr. Ridley's definition was dictated by the policy of THE FREETHINKER.

The irresponsible confusion in the many unscientific definitions of the meaning of the words "socialism" and "communism" in all papers and periodicals is no doubt intended but is enough to drive an intelligent student of Marx completely barmy.

R. STUART MONTAGUE.

[While not wishing to trespass on Mr. Ridley's ground, we must refute Mr. Montague's presumption that the definition was dictated by the policy of THE FREETHINKER. It is, however, our policy to leave arguments about the true meaning of "socialism" to socialist papers.—Ed.]

OBITUARY

We regret to report the death in London, at the age of 80, of Grace Stockton, a life-long radical and Freethinker. Miss Stockton was a member of the Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society, and was until recently a regular attendee at meetings.

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