

The Freethinker

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THE ENTHRONEMENT of Dr. John Carmel Heenan as Archbishop of Westminster is perhaps the most important event in the historic evolution of English (or more precisely, Anglo-Irish) Catholicism since the date (1851) when in his Encyclical Letter, *From the Flaminian Way*, Pope Pius IX (1846-78), announced the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Britain. That event provoked fierce riots in ultra-Protestant quarters, for the England of Queen Victoria, like its titular head, then regarded itself as authentically Protestant and thus as radically opposed to the anti-Christ of Rome. The imagination recoils when one tries to imagine the reactions of either Victoria herself, or the Anglican primate, had the then newly-enthroned Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, chosen to refer to his Protestant opposite number as his "very dear friend" across the Thames at Lambeth. For in good Victoria's golden days, Protestants and Catholics were wont to use very different and much harsher language about each other. Pope John's (and Dr. Heenan's) Secretariat for Christian Unity, still lay far in the unpredictable future.

The Roman "Revolution"
Upon his unexpected election to the papacy, Pope John is alleged to have announced his intention of becoming "a revolutionary pope". If so, one has to admit that he kept his word: for at least if one looks at the matter from the standpoint of the Vatican, when observed in historical perspectives, Pope John XXIII was certainly the author of a new line, of a new theological, as also secular policy. For in place of the rigid "unconditional surrender" (to borrow a political phrase) that was all that the Vatican had hitherto offered to "our separated brethren"—to the lesser breeds without the (ecclesiastical) law—Pope John resorted (again to employ political terminology) to "popular front" tactics: Christian unity (preceded presumably by immediate co-operation) between Rome and the non-Roman Churches to East and West, to Orthodox and to Protestant alike.

That this Vatican *volte face*, besides making hay of the spurious—but still apparently widely-held theory—that the Catholic chameleon never changes colour, actually constituted a kind of papal "revolution", as the Pope had predicted, was surely proved by the bitter opposition that his innovations (like those of his great predecessor Leo XIII, 1878-1903) immediately aroused, not only amongst the conservative cardinals of the Roman Curia, but also widely throughout the Church at large. Amongst these recalcitrant bishops who were sceptical of, or even actually opposed to, the new papal line, were, it seems pretty clear both from their past record and from their immediate reactions, the British hierarchy with the late Cardinal Godfrey at their head. That this was actually so was publicly charged in the *Evening Standard* last year by a liberal Catholic writer (Paul Johnson) who actually asserted that Pope John had sent over Cardinal Bea, SJ, the chair-

man of the newly created Secretariat for Christian Unity at Rome, to discipline the recalcitrant bishops and to bring British Catholicism into conformity with the current world-strategy of Johannine Rome. Mr. Johnson's critique met with some not very convincing denials from Cardinal Godfrey.

Now, however, that the latter has joined his seven archiepiscopal predecessors since 1851 at Westminster, Pope Paul seems to have silently (and no doubt infallibly) endorsed Mr. Johnson. For the Pope has appointed as Archbishop Godfrey's successor, one of Cardinal Bea's leading colleagues in the Secretariat for Christian Unity, Arch-

bishop Heenan formerly, like Godfrey, Archbishop of Liverpool and now translated to Westminster, the premier see in Britain. It seems clear enough that Heenan's appointment was in no way an accident, but that Cardinal Bea's colleague at Rome has now been sent over here to continue—permanently this time—Bea's last year's undertaking of disciplining the British hierarchy into conformity with the Vatican's new line.

Archbishop Heenan was sent from Liverpool to the higher dignity of Westminster as a supporter of the papal revolution inaugurated by Pope John and continued nowadays by Pope Paul; and certainly anyone who has any knowledge of the ecclesiastical record of the British Catholic hierarchy will not be likely to envy him his task. For hitherto the see of Westminster has not been noted for revolutionaries, particularly one can add, where Christian reunion is concerned. (NB. Ever since 1851 Westminster has been the leading Roman Catholic see in Great Britain. It should, however, be remembered that the Archbishop of Westminster is not a primate: he has no direct jurisdiction like say, the Archbishop of Armagh as primate over the Irish hierarchy.)

The Papal Revolution Begins

It must be conceded that Dr. Heenan lost no time in announcing the advent not only of a new archbishop, but of the "papal revolution" along with him. For his sermon at his consecration he used language that surely never had been heard in the Byzantine-Victorian edifice before. Old Cardinal Bourne (1903-35), whom I myself heard in that pulpit, would surely have thrown a fit had someone endowed say, with ESP, informed him that his eventual successor was to refer to his Protestant arch-enemy, the Archbishop of Canterbury (whom another famous Roman Catholic preacher of that day used to describe regularly as "the schismatic and heretical head of that sacrilegious communion established by Elizabeth") as "my very dear friend in Lambeth".

Nor, we imagine, did the majority at least of the thirty-six Roman Catholic bishops present at Heenan's enthronement, relish his assurance that one of his principal aims was "to build spiritual bridges" between Westminster and "our separated brethren" in the Protestant Churches. And if this was the typical British Catholic reaction, what about

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Archbishop Heenan and the Future of English Catholicism

By F. A. RIDLEY

the Protestant one? For the Church of England and the Free Church Council, plus the Eastern Orthodox Church, all went to Westminster. What, for example, would old Kensit of Protestant Alliance fame, think of this hobnobbing with anti-Christ, as he once described a much milder contemporary flirtation between some English High Churchmen and Rome. When John, by divine (and Pope Paul's) permission Archbishop of Westminster, stepped down from his new pulpit, the more perceptive of his hearers must have realised that "fings 'aint wot they used to be" at either Rome or Westminster. For the papal revolution had arrived with Heenan. (Were I writing in a political paper, I would add that politically Heenan was obviously playing for the support of the Left: viz. his open endorsement of bigger old age pensions, etc., which is part of official Labour, but not of Tory policy. One can add that if English Catholicism goes Labour, it will surely demand its *quid pro quo* in the political and social field.)

The Future of Catholicism in Britain

Hitherto, since a curious combination of Oxford theology and Irish potatoes (or rather the lack of them), reinvigorated what since the Reformation had been a moribund creed, British Catholicism had been pre-eminent for the bitterest hostility towards all other Churches in

Britain. As an Anglican theological student at the time, I can remember the uniform hostility displayed by the English Catholic press towards the then Malines Conversations held between Cardinal Mercier Archbishop of Malines, primate of Belgium, with a view to "reunion", with Lord Halifax and other Anglo-Catholic leaders in the Church of England. Had Mercier, who was apparently runner-up, been elected Pope in 1922, he would probably have anticipated Pope Roncalli by forty years. As it was, Pius XI (1922-39), upon his election promptly and peremptorily closed down the Malines talks to the unconcealed delight of the English Roman Catholic hierarchy and their henchmen. Now however, the new line has apparently been adopted in permanence. Its basic strategy, one can relevantly add, remains the same, for in *some* respects, Rome does not change. It is world-dominating and locally its aim is conversion of England. But tactically, so to speak, British Catholicism has acquired a new look; it is more subtle and much more flexible and adaptable. Archbishop Heenan, as the spokesman of this new line, may not be personally so big a man as were Wiseman and Manning, but in the light of current social and religious perspectives, he and his Church may well be ultimately more dangerous.

Albany Trust Lectures

By COLIN McCALL

THE ALBANY TRUST (32 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.1) whose three aims are education, research, and social and clinical help, has just published six of the most interesting lectures I have read for a long time, under the title, *Winter Talks 1962-63 Series* (3s. 6d.). The speakers were: C. H. Rolph ("Homosexual Law Reform"), Dr. W. Lindesay Neustatter ("Sexual Deviation from the Psychiatric Standpoint"), Kenneth Robinson, MP ("Parliament and the Wolfenden Report"), Gordon Westwood ("Sociological Aspects of Homosexuality"), Anne Allen, JP ("Sex and the Family") and Antony Grey ("Towards a Sexually Sane Society"); and the chairmen included Mr. Kenneth Walker, FRCS, Dr. Alex Comfort and the Bishop of Woolwich. Some of the questions that followed the lectures are incorporated.

Both Mr. Rolph and Mr. Robinson recall the notorious "Labouchere Amendment", the clause introduced into the Criminal Amendment Act of 1885, which had the effect of making every sexual act between males a criminal offence, an amendment that would not have been allowed today. At the time a Member queried if the clause was in order, and was told by the Speaker that "at this stage of the Bill anything can be introduced into it by leave of the House". It has been with us ever since, and has caused untold human suffering.

Dr. Neustatter and Mr. Westwood emphasise that the homosexual condition is not inborn; that "any apparent femininity is in the mannerisms, and sometimes in the mode of dressing which particular individuals may adopt", and that the homosexual cannot be diagnosed by physical examination. "This always seems to annoy people", Mr. Westwood says. "For some reason, there seems to be an urgent desire to believe that homosexuals are born, not made". "I will not say that such a thing is impossible", he goes on, "but if there is a biological basis to homosexuality, its effects cannot be demonstrated, they cannot be seen, and they cannot be described; so I would say they are not a fit subject for scientific investigation".

Treatment of the homosexual is difficult; in many cases "a very second-rate offer" (Neustatter); moreover, it is only part of the problem. His social setting is equally important. And it is this that we can change, given the will. Parliament, for instance, could and should abolish the Labouchere Amendment; it could accept the Wolfenden recommendations. But as Mr. Robinson remarks from experience, Parliament has "an ingrained fear of legislating ahead, or too far ahead, of public opinion".

"This is not to say," Mr. Robinson explains, "that Governments and Parliaments are not frequently compelled to take decisions which conflict with what is assumed to be mass opinion, but they are almost always political decisions. It is in the field of socially controversial legislation, where party politics hardly enter, where the issues involve moral and ethical considerations and touch on sex or religious belief, that Parliamentary inertia is most noticeable. Thus it is that on this limited front, embracing such matters as homosexuality, abortion, Sunday observance, and—until recently, at any rate—suicide and obscene libel, our laws are oddly illiberal compared with those of many other countries, especially in view of our generally enlightened code of law. It is here that the path of the reformer is uphill and strewn with obstacles".

In these *Winter Talks*, the Albany Trust has provided an authoritative guidebook to the reformer, but it has provided much more. In these seventy-odd pages will be found a wealth of compassion and understanding, as well as experience, that will help us, in Mrs. Allen's words, "to convince our boys that they are going to be men and our girls that they are going to be women, and that they should be delighted".

It is good to learn that the Trustees propose to make a series of lectures devoted to social topics an annual event. Meanwhile, I strongly recommend this first series.

[Copies of the Albany Trust *Winter Talks* may be obtained from THE FREETHINKER Bookshop, 4s., including postage.]

Sin, Sins and Sinners

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

IT IS QUITE OBVIOUS of course that the hen must have come before the egg, or where could the egg have come from? And that would settle the matter forthwith but for the aggravating fact that it is quite obvious the egg must have come before the hen, or where could the hen have come from? The same sort of deadlock occurs between sin and religion, theistic religion at any rate. The non-theistic religions are not only in another category, they are less categorical. Most theists, Christians especially, contend that sin, as they conceive it, is what they call original and it was therefore sin that gave rise to religion, since the function of religion is to circumvent sin. Their secularist opponents think differently. They hold that no such thing as sin was known until religion, in one of the neezy periods of its evolution was compelled to invent sin. And that now, religion is in the topsy-turvy position of having to do battle with the one thing above all others upon which its very existence depends.

For sin and religion, whatever their original relationship, have now become as interdependent as the hen and the egg. If religion ever succeeds in its avowed mission to conquer sin and sin disappears, religion will disappear with it, for religion will have destroyed its own *raison d'être*. If, as seems more likely, freethinking humanism should eventually conquer and displace religion, then sin as religion expounds it will likewise have to give way to an entirely different conception. This does not mean that sins in an every-day practical sense will all disappear with sin. There will still be plenty of sins left to go on with, social sins, artistic sins, even many so-called moral sins that have nothing to do with being venial or mortal and cannot be said to derive from the "original sin" of theism.

In any attempt to get at the meaning of this obscure religious abstraction known as original sin, we shall be obliged to ask firstly, what does it consist in and secondly how did it originate? On the whole, religionists seem broadly agreed that sin is essentially disobedience to the will of God. This may do very well for the religionists, but for their godless critics it involves the matter-of-course and quite unverifiable assumption that the theistic God not only exists but that his will can be and is directly communicated to human understanding. We are apparently expected to accept these pontifical claims without question, on the strength of the word of those self-constituted authorities who make them. If we refuse to do this, if we persist in our questioning, we are usually met with a lot of metaphysical disquisition which, we are unnecessarily assured, transcends the realm of reason. If we protest that it is precisely the satisfaction of sense and reason that we are seeking, we are informed with censorious reproachfulness, that the ways of God are not the ways of man and it is presumptuous to question them. That may be. But any inconvenient enquiry could be fobbed off with the same convenient excuse.

As to the origination of sin, there seems to be, particularly among Christians, a similar general agreement in attributing sin to the Fall as described in Genesis. Whether the Fall be taken as literal fact as many credulous Biblicists appear to take it, or whether it be regarded symbolically as all educated people are now impelled to regard it, it is always held up as the source of the sin which, beginning, we are told, with the first man, has never ceased to bedevil all posterity with its incalculably calamitous consequences. But as in Adam we all die, even so, a closer scrutiny of this doctrinal account of the Fall reveals one error which

may be the result of an oversight, but which is sufficiently significant to arouse the suspicion that it is detected but purposely bypassed for the sake of doctrinal expediency. There is no hen-and-egg deadlock here. Sin was not the result of the Fall. The Fall was the result of sin. For at least one sin preceded and incurred the Fall. Man didn't sin because he was turned out of Eden, he was turned out of Eden because he had sinned.

Man continued sinning of course after the Fall and thus gave rise to another hen-and-egg sort of paradox that although man is a sinner because he sins, he nevertheless sins because he is a sinner. Would he still be a sinner if he never committed any sins? But whichever we put first, the sin or the sinner, it is at least clear in this Biblical account of sin, that the origin of sin goes back to a period before the Fall. And when religion tries to evade this point, it is because religion knows that certain conclusions are inescapably entailed which involve the religious position in extremely intractable difficulties. But before considering these difficulties it may perhaps be amusing if not amazing, to point out further, that even "man's first disobedience" was not strictly the first sin. The first sin was committed by a woman, that old rib, as the polite do not call her. And no doubt ungallant cynics will delight in emphasising that this was no more than might have been expected. They will gleefully rub it in that it was woman who was the prime mover. It was woman who compassed and still compasses man's downfall. For while man may proudly boast of his priority, he is, through his knowledge of good and evil, bound to find out sooner or later, to the detriment of his self-assurance, that although man came first and woman after him, she has been after him ever since.

However, it is sense, not cynicism, which perceives that if man sinned before the Fall, then man could not have been perfect before the Fall, for a perfect man cannot sin. Neither can perfection generate imperfection. Yet we are asked to believe that a perfect God created this potentially sinful and therefore imperfect man. The usual way of trying to get round this is by saying that man was created perfect but became imperfect and a sinner through his deliberate misuse of the freewill with which God had so generously endowed him. God, we are told, bestowed this gift upon man because he wanted the response of a morally free being, so much more worth having than the response of a mere perfect automaton. No doubt. But the first thing that strikes us here is, that God wasn't all that generous. It is obvious that he was primarily and one may say selfishly satisfying his own wishes. And it was in the very exercise of this freewill that man first fell foul of God, who in his wrath, wreaked upon man and all his descendants, punishment which bears no proportion to the sin committed. Indeed it is difficult to see how man could have been to blame at all. All he had done with his freewill was to discover and explore the difference between good and evil. And until he knew the difference between good and evil it is impossible to see how he could choose between them.

It could be argued that if man was originally perfect, then in bestowing upon him the gift of freewill, God was deliberately implanting that potentiality for sinning which became man's undoing. It could be argued that if God was omniscient, knowing all the future, he must have foreseen and could have prevented the disastrous misuse

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This Believing World

Heartiest congratulations should be given to the Roman Catholic Church for the acumen it always displays in getting *free* publicity on TV, the radio, and the press of the world. The election of the late Pope John, his death, and the election of Pope Paul were fully reported everywhere of course, but what about such a world-shattering event as the promotion of Dr. J. C. Heenan to the see of Westminster in dear old Protestant England?

★

Interviews galore on TV and the radio, to say nothing of whole pages in our national press, with genial portraits of Dr. Heenan, almost kept comments on the long-awaited Denning Report out of the running. It would not have surprised us that, if the installation of Dr. Heenan had actually clashed with the publication of the report, preference might have been given to the great progress Roman Catholicism has made here with the huge popularity achieved by the new Archbishop of Westminster. Is he really going to "bridge" over the rush of Protestants to Rome?

★

It is quite a mistake to suppose that only "the common herd", the nobodies and the unintelligent, have swallowed the appalling rubbish which brought Mother Eddy such fame and fortune. Here we have Viscount and Lady Rochdale, both devoted followers of the revered Mrs. Eddy, faced with their daughter's fractured skull, the result of a riding accident. Whether proper treatment by skilled doctors in a fully equipped hospital would have saved her life, it is impossible to say; but fractured skulls are almost daily accidents, and the patient generally recovers.

★

Under Christian Science methods however—reading extracts from the hopeless nonsense of *Science and Health* is one method—the poor girl died. At the inquest, the coroner and jury agreed that the parents, as sincere believers in Christian Science, had to have their way. There could be no other verdict therefore than "accidental death". But what an eye-opener it must be for other Eddyites to find that, because the parents of the girl are aristocrats, full publicity has been given in the press to yet another tragic failure of belief in the rubbish of prayer and Mrs. Eddy.

★

Dr. Heenan is not the only Roman Catholic who gets full publicity all over the world. It appears that, without getting a bishopric, Padre Pio in Italy may even beat Dr. Heenan for glory and renown. He is one of the many "saints" in the Church who in 1918 got a special gift from God—the "stigmata", that is, wounds in the hands and side just like Jesus (we are told) suffered. And ever since Pio's church has been crowded to the full at Mass and for festivals. *The Daily Mail* (September 26th), gives us a smiling portrait of him, and nearly two columns are devoted to telling us about his marvellous "miracles", and the way he spends every day "in almost unbelievable austerity".

★

Padre Pio will no doubt be televised one day for England and the Roman Church will get more publicity. He may well be a "holy" man in the work he does for the poor, but he obviously is perpetuating not only his own "austerity", but his own unbounded credulity and superstition. In the end, it is his Church which gets the "kudos"—and the cash.

The Vatican and the Church of England are not the only wealthy Churches in the world. The Church of Wales has just received (*Daily Mail*, September 27th) a £696,000 windfall from the Stock Exchange, from profits on share deals and capital appreciation. In addition, interests and dividends brought in another £528,552. Not bad for the memory of its founder who, if he worked at all, did so as a poor carpenter, and who mostly had nowhere to lay his head. But how can a religion flourish without money and plenty of it? God himself will always repay generous donors with a seat near him—on a cloud.

★

We may agree with the American Negro preacher, the Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, that Santa Claus has "nothing to do with Christmas" (*The Guardian*, October 1st). But what, we might ask Mr. Powell, has Christ to do with December 25th?

SIN, SINS AND SINNERS

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to which man would put his freewill—if in such a fore-ordained case it could be called freewill. It could be argued that if the future was wholly undetermined and that therefore God was not omniscient and could not foresee the future, then all one can say is, that God took a most appalling and unwarrantable risk in imposing this freedom upon a creature limited, as man was, by the liabilities of the humanity which had already been willy-nilly thrust upon him. And it could be argued that one way or another, man has been, in the common phrase, more sinned against than sinning and that the original sinner was God, not man.

Many Genesis absurdities can be laughed at and left. But when these subtler fallacies are seriously served up as religious truths, they may be laughed at but they must be relentlessly exposed and disavowed. Not all the skill of religious dialectics has been able to resolve them though many religionists recoil from admitting as much. For atheistic humanists, thanks chiefly to Charles Darwin, sin has been deposed from the supernatural and imaginary to the natural and practicable. Sin, for the humanist, may be broadly defined as gratuitous injury to our fellow creatures, not excluding the so-called lower animals, in the way religion excludes them. Sin, however defined, proliferates into a bewildering variety of sins, but when these do not come within the humanist definition, then humanism will not condemn them, no matter how violently religion may do so. On the other hand, the superstitions, the physical and mental cruelties, the disguised thieving, the gross chicaneries, the hypocritical expedients which religion initiates and fosters, are all directly or indirectly hurtful to mankind. They cannot be too vigorously condemned and striven against by a more wholesome and honest freethought.

Old sins have long shadows. And there are abundant signs that the sins, many of them unspeakable crimes to a humanist, that religion has perpetrated in its long career, are at last beginning to catch up on it. Religion sees itself in the melting-pot. That is why the different brands are making desperate efforts to come together against their common enemy. They want to form a united front of sorts. And since even now they cannot shake off their inveterate habit of sophistry, they call it unity without uniformity.

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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.
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

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, October 15th, 7.30 p.m.: PAUL ROM (Paris), "The Understanding of Human Behaviour, Adler's Key to the Problem".
Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street), Sunday, October 13th, 3 p.m.: HARRY MCSHANE, "The Bewildered Christians".
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 13th, 6.30 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Honest to God".
Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, October 13th, MRS. SYLVIA PONSONBY (Family Planning Association), "The Development of Birth Control in Britain".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, October 13th, 11 a.m.: DR. J. A. C. BROWN, "Vulgarity".

NEW NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY SECRETARY

COLIN MCCALL, General Secretary of the National Secular Society since 1955, has resigned to take up another appointment and, at a special meeting of the Executive Committee of the Society on October 2nd, W. J. McIlroy was elected to take his place.

A native of Northern Ireland, Mr. McIlroy has made a big impression since coming to London and has built up the very successful Marble Arch Branch, which holds indoor meetings on Sunday evenings throughout the winter months. Thirty-five years of age, he has been a member of the Executive Committee since June, 1960, and has initiated and organised many successful efforts on behalf of the Society. His wife, Mrs. Margaret McIlroy, represents Scotland on the Executive and is well known to our readers. They have two young daughters.

Mr. McCall, who will continue to edit THE FREETHINKER, expressed his regrets at leaving the Secretaryship and his gratitude to NSS members for the wonderful support they had given him. He asked that they should give the same loyalty to Mr. McIlroy, "a most conscientious worker for Freethought".

Notes and News

"BRIDGE" metaphors are in vogue in Catholic circles, now that Christian reunion has become the talk—if not quite the order—of the day. Opening the second session of the Ecumenical Council, Pope Paul VI, followed up Archbishop Heenan's "bridge across the Thames to Lambeth Palace" with one across the Tiber "towards the contemporary world". And he offered the "hand of friendship" to those he called "the other Christians" (*Daily Herald*, 30/9/63). The Pope even asked for the forgiveness of these "other Christians" who "feel themselves to have been injured" by the Roman Catholic Church. It would have been going too far, no doubt, to have acknowledged real as opposed to "felt" injury. Still, it was a significant step, followed by the forgiveness of the "injuries" which the Catholic Church actually had "suffered" and the forgetting of "the grief endured during the long series of dissensions and separations".

★

"IT IS utterly intolerable that our Catholic girls, particularly of secondary-school age, should be subjected to such an assault on Christian morals". This outburst came from Father Francis Connelly of Newport Pagnell, Bucks, when he heard that at the town's new secondary modern school, girls were taking "run-through" showers, nude! It was not so bad for boys to use communal showers, Father Connelly said (*Daily Mirror*, 23/9/63), and there is no suggestion that boys and girls are sharing them at the same time. "It is simply that the idea is against the Commandments". A Buckinghamshire Education Committee spokesman might not "see how the showers will endanger morals", but then, he isn't a Roman Catholic priest.

★

THE FOLLOWING day a new Catholic school at Gorleston, Norfolk, with similar communal showers, was blessed by the Rt. Rev. Leo Parker, and the Headmaster, Mr. F. Devany told the *Daily Herald* (24/9/63) that he would "bow to the ideas of the deputy head, who is a nun". She prefers the girls to go into the showers with swimsuits on.

★

HOW DOES the British Medical Association recruit its assistant secretaries? In the light of Dr. Ernest Claxton's recent public statements, the method could be profitably changed next time. Dr. Claxton's latest outburst (*Sunday Telegraph*, 29/9/63) was directed at Dr. Richard Fox, a Quaker psychiatrist, who had told the Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene that "Society must either modify its prohibition on premarital intercourse or permit and prepare people for much earlier marriage". "It is surprising to hear a Quaker advocating fornication", Dr. Claxton said. "The policy Dr. Fox advocates is medically dangerous, morally degrading and nationally destructive".

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A PUBLIC opinion poll carried out for the Family Planning Association revealed that 41 per cent of the people questioned agreed that advice on contraception should be available to young people who are not married (*Daily Telegraph*, 30/9/63). 37 per cent disagreed, while 22 per cent didn't know. Half the young people themselves were in favour.

★

LAWYERS have advised the Board of Education in Long Beach, California, that the saying of grace in nursery schools is illegal under the US Supreme Court's ruling on school prayers (*Daily Telegraph*, 25/9/63). The grace, which was said before the mid-morning milk and biscuits, will continue to be recited in the kindergartens.

The "Experiences" of a Spiritualist

By H. CUTNER

EVERY NOW AND THEN I get a letter from someone who, perhaps for the first time, comes face to face with an "experience", either in a book or at a seance or from a psychic journal which seems completely baffling unless the Spiritualist hypothesis is accepted. I have even had reports from America that the famous conjuror, Joseph Dunniger, was giving "miraculous" exhibitions of telepathy on TV. Now the strange thing is that I have never had any requests to explain how the numerous magicians who come on TV perform their baffling tricks and illusions. If I were asked, my reply would be that I simply don't know, but I am content to believe that their performances are the result of clever conjuring.

The older generation of conjurors, like the late J. N. Maskelyne, were often so brilliant that we do not know even now some of the secrets of their illusions; but as in all things conjurors and conjuring march on. Yet there are people who know all this, and who if they cannot explain a trick done "under the strictest scientific conditions" by a Spiritualist immediately insist that it must have been done by a spirit. The idea that a clever Spiritualist would never use a conjuring trick is always the basis of their belief.

This little preamble is necessary because a lady reader has been good enough to send me a small volume entitled *Life and Experiences* of Edmund Dawson Rogers, which was published at his death in 1910 by the once famous psychic journal *Light*. Mr. Rogers was a founder of the Society for Psychical Research, was editor of *Light* for a while, and from all accounts was a very amiable man, who appears to have enjoyed a well-deserved popularity all his life. This little book gives an interesting account of his activities and his belief, not only in the marvels of Mesmerism, but also in all the "phenomena" of Spiritualism. How can we explain it except on the "fact" that Spiritualism is true?

In the first place, on his own showing, it must have been difficult even in his day to meet anyone with such a child-like belief in the marvellous. Mr. Rogers had only to be told that some *miraculous* event had happened somewhere, and he believed it. In the 40s and 50s of last century, Mesmerism was very popular, due to the "cures", and readers will find the case for it in the Rev. G. Sandby's book *Mesmerism and its Opponents* a fascinating introduction to a very controversial subject. A good many of the cases Mr. Sandby gives us would these days be considered wonderful proofs of the truth of Spiritualism.

From Mesmerism then, it was quite easy for Mr. Rogers to graduate to Spiritualism. His most endearing quality was that he never questioned anything. Whatever may be thought of Sir William Crookes and his immaculate Florrie Cook, he at least did have a few doubts about the "materialisations" otherwise he would not have tried to allay suspicion by taking photographs of Katie King "materialised". For Mr. Rogers there were never any doubts. It was all true just like the miracles, the devils and angels of his beloved Christian faith.

Mr. Rogers sat with everybody who would have him, and not only saw and heard spirits from beyond, but also of course the "aura" which, he tells us, is said "to belong to every human form, and to many other forms, organic and inorganic". He believed that the common garden nasturtium had a most "brilliant aura". So had particular

verses of the Bible which, for this reason, could always be picked out by an invalid lady he was always helping with Mesmerism.

Among the many Spiritualists Mr. Rogers sat with were Mr. Samuel Carter Hall, Mr. D. D. Home, Mr. and Mrs. Everitt, Mr. Traill Taylor, Dr. K. R. Cooke, Mr. J. S. Farmer, Mr. Stainton Moses, Mr. C. C. Massey, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, and lots of other stout-hearted believers. Most of these people are mentioned in Frank Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism* as well as the mediums who summoned up the spirits, and of course the marvels they accomplished. Two of the mediums who made big reputations for themselves with getting spirit writing on slates—tricks which people like Rogers had no more chance of solving than I have of exposing some of Maskelyne's still unsolved illusions. These slate-writing marvels seemed very convincing. They almost convinced an experienced amateur conjuror, S. J. Davey. However, Davey later proved as clever as the mediums, and blossomed out as "a slate-writing medium" with tremendous success. It was he who converted Alfred Russell Wallace, who ever afterwards would not believe that Davey's wondrous "manifestations" were all due to conjuring. Wallace remained thenceforth a Spiritualist.

The history of all mediums, as far as it was possible to investigate them, showed that what are called physical phenomena were fraudulent. But of course a good many mediums would go off into a trance, and so perhaps they were unaware of what they said or did. Most of what they said was sheer bunkum.

Mr. Rogers naturally was obliged to say that of the phenomena and the sittings he had with mediums, "There is no doubt that trickery is practised in some quarters" which is a delightful understatement. Personally, after reading his book I should say he was perhaps the most easily deceived person I have ever read about, though Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the greatest of English women poets, could possibly beat him there. Robert Browning was so contemptuous of the medium his wife believed in—D. D. Home—that he wrote his famous poem *Sludge the Medium*, a poem heartily disliked by all good Spiritualists.

I do not expect this article will have much effect on people who, as soon as they cannot explain a wonderful Spiritualistic marvel, conclude it must be the work of a spook—beg pardon, a "spirit". Trickery and fraud will, I suspect, be always with us, and such a simple-minded old gentleman as was Mr. E. D. Rogers, has always been meat and drink for mediums.

BIRMINGHAM DINNER

The Annual Dinner of the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society, which took place on Saturday, September 28th, in the Market Hotel, was a friendly and convivial occasion, attended by young and old members of the Branch. Among the latter were those youthful octogenarians, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Smith and Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Papps.

The Branch Chairman Mr. W. Miller, and Mrs. Miller, welcomed the guests, and Mr. Miller wittily introduced the Head Office speakers, Mr. D. H. Tribe (President), Mr. W. Griffiths (Hon. Treasurer) and Mr. Colin McCall (retiring Secretary).

After the Dinner, the guests were cleverly entertained in ESP fashion by Mr. Fred Henshaw and his daughter Sheila. Altogether a very happy occasion.

A Distinguished Centerarian

By MARGARET McILROY

DR. MARGARET MURRAY is a most remarkable woman. To celebrate one's hundredth birthday by the publication of a book—*My First Hundred Years* (William Kimber, London, 30s.)—is in itself a notable achievement; equally unusually Dr. Murray emerged from the retired life of a Victorian young lady, and commenced a distinguished career in archaeology at the age of thirty. Her original and unprejudiced mind enabled her to reach thought-provoking conclusions about pagan survivals in the Christian world.

Dr. Murray's reminiscences of her long life are fascinating. She was born in India, and spent much of her youth there. Her mother had gone out to India as a missionary, but soon married. At a time when most Christians simply regarded non-Christians as devil-worshippers, Mrs. Murray was unusually broad-minded, and insisted that converts need not act in such a way as to cut themselves off from their families; that "Christianity means a change of heart, not a drastic change in all the habits of daily life, even to the type of dress, which many American missionaries considered immodest".

She helped to found a number of organisations which did valuable welfare work in Calcutta, she visited Hindu ladies secluded in Zenanas, and she and her husband entertained Indians in their home. This was almost unheard of at the time, and scandalised many Europeans. Freethinkers often overlook the positive achievements of missionaries, and it is perhaps salutary for us to note the good done by this generous and talented woman, who once said to her daughter that "the only way to live was to spend and be spent in the service of God". Summing up on missionaries, Dr. Murray herself remarks that she has a great respect for them "if to zeal they add kindness and commonsense, but the latter quality is so often lacking".

As a young woman Dr. Murray was not content to sit idly at home. Almost the only career possible for a lady at the time was nursing, and this she did in a Calcutta hospital, to the dismay of all the family except mother. However, when the Murrays returned to England she was not accepted as a nurse, being too short. She was already thirty when she enrolled for a course in Egyptology at University College, mainly because her married sister would have liked to have done so. Her first article was published in the following year. A few years later she became a junior lecturer, and was ultimately Assistant Professor of Egyptology.

In one respect this book is a little disappointing. It would have been very interesting to hear something of the stages of thought by which Dr. Murray reached her conclusions on primitive religion and witchcraft, but of this there is nothing. There are, however, numerous fascinating anecdotes on a very wide variety of subjects. She tells of odd experiences on archaeological expeditions in various parts of the world. She talks of the suffragette movement, and gives a very clear impression of the extent to which the status of women has changed during her lifetime.

Dr. Murray appears to be a deist. She defines religion as "an awareness of an unseen over-ruling power", and believes that on death "the mind and soul of each individual passes on to some higher knowledge, some closer approach to that Almighty Power, in which we live and move and have our being". Unfortunately she does not

give any reason for this belief, but places some reliance on feminine intuition. However, as a student of religions she has a number of interesting points to make. She comments on the mistakes of archaeologists whose Christian prejudices make them unable to evaluate or comprehend ancient religions, and who do not appreciate the extent to which religions which are formally the same may change their content and outlook with time. "Want of chronological sense", she says, "added to a want of sympathy with the feeling of these ancient worshippers towards their gods, makes many of the modern books on ancient religion superficial and almost absurd".

Dr. Murray considers that "archaeology is one of the greatest and noblest of all studies, for the subject is the mental and spiritual advance of mankind". She has no doubt that man is advancing. She has lived through a century of great material advance, and she insists that mental and spiritual advance has been as great. She adds, "I have seen the beginnings of the change in all the chief religions of the world . . . The minds that could design space-ships and direct their course . . . will hardly be content to accept the childish legends which have passed muster for centuries as the basis of religious belief".

This interesting and readable book gives unusual sidelights on many aspects of recent history, and introduces a woman of remarkable personality and attainments. We wish Dr. Margaret Murray yet more years of activity.

CORRESPONDENCE

TELEPATHY

You ask for a copy of Professor Vasiliev's book for review. Now I must ask myself: am I justified in sending you Professor Vasiliev's book for review? We are not interested either in publicity or proselytising or just selling copies, and the book is not a popular exposition but a scientific report by a man of science of the work he has done, meticulously and over many years, with the assistance of scientific colleagues; and it is addressed to scientists. Nevertheless we have in some cases sent the book to non-scientific publications on request, where we felt justified in doing so. But, reading Mr. McCall's article, I feel doubtful whether that would apply in your case. Perhaps you would give the matter some thought.

You have addressed your (to my mind) most unpleasantly slanted and objectionably worded invective against a scientist, of whose work and integrity you admit you know nothing, except via a newspaper article which you disliked. That, surely, was a trifle hasty and unwise—not to mention fairness. For instance, you immediately jump to the uncomplimentary conclusion that the fact that the subject fell asleep at the agreed time meant that the time had been agreed with the subject, or such is your *invenendo*. I mention this to demonstrate your bias.

You write, "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, crackpots and pseudo-scientists seems not to occur to people". First of all, Vasiliev is, and has been for many years, Professor of the Department of Physiology at Leningrad University—and that, in the world of science and learning, means something. Dr. Rhine with whom you (unjustifiably, in my view) couple Vasiliev, has never held a Chair, or indeed any other post, in his University other than just that of Director of the Parapsychology Laboratory there. However, I am perfectly willing to grant you that professors can be as benighted and foolish as anyone else. It is, of course, widely and, I imagine, justifiably, assumed that the official political bias against such happenings in the USSR is precisely yours; and that consequently anything that was allowed to be published had run the gauntlet of something pretty gruelling. The work we have translated and published had, in fact, been suppressed for over 25 years. Judging by the tone of your article, I infer that you believe this to have been the correct policy. Why, then, do you

want a copy? To keep the pot boiling? Can you give me a single good reason why I should assist you in this fruitless endeavour?

Judging by your article, I should say that rationalism, to the extent to which you represent your co-religionists, has now reached precisely that degree of a prioristic dogmatism that has in the past brought scientists into head-on conflict with organised and dogmatic religion. Your prejudices as to what must happen and what cannot happen, and your nebulous yet tenaciously held notions as to what sort of "explanations" science must provide would seem to render you entirely immune to the impact of empirical observation. Since you are in the fortunate position of already *knowing*, what could be the point of presenting you with any experimental or observational data whatever?

Like the theologians of yore, you will be quite ready to resort to accusations of moral turpitude if all else fails, and will do everything possible to pour ridicule on mathematical theories that provide a calculus or frame work for happenings which, if true, or even *possible*, would offend your religious susceptibilities. Thus men of commonsense have known in the past that anyone so august and God-approved as themselves could not have descended from apes, that the earth is flat, that the sun moves and the earth stands still, that iron ships could never float and heavier-than-air machines could never fly. If the current physical theories (which I gather you do not quite understand judging by your disquisition at second or third hand on the inverse square law), cannot account for a given set of observations, the question then arises whether another theory *could*. Or has the theoretical, as well as the empirical, truth about the cosmos been revealed, once and for all, to the Editor of THE FREETHINKER and (one half of) the Rationalist Press Association?

You express considerable contempt for Western parapsychologists many of whom, like yourself, have gone out of their way to misrepresent, discredit and suppress the Vasiliev work before it appeared. We should, of course, never have dreamed of translating this if we did not think it not only enormously superior to, but indeed of quite another order of excellence as compared with the heavily protected and subsidised pseudo-science that has flourished in the West under the name "parapsychology". This activity is largely parasitic on the boldness, prestige, and solid worth of the qualitative, anecdotal and observational work of the early enthusiasts whose work and whose very names are, however, largely belittled, dismissed or ignored by for example, Dr. J. B. Rhine whose writings, in my opinion, are entirely devoid of either scientific or scholarly (as opposed to propagandist, emotional, quasi-religious and journalistic) merit. It is a good subject that has unfortunately got into the wrong hands—I am speaking, of course, as an experienced crank and crackpot that would be only too delighted if some rationalists would decide to become at least partly rational, and if freethinkers would—just occasionally—free themselves from their prejudices sufficiently to think.

ANITA KOHSEN,

Director, Institute for the Study of Mental Images, Gally Hill, Church Crookham, Hants.

REPLY

To Miss Kohsen's mind, my "Russian Telepathy" article was "unpleasantly slanted", "objectionably worded" and, of course, dogmatic. I knew it would be. To Miss Kohsen's mind any strong article against telepathy would appear thus, whereas one that defended it would be pleasant, balanced and fair. I wonder what was her reaction to my "American Telepathy" article on *This Week's* exposure of the fraud of the *Nautilus* telepathy "experiments". Slanted? Objectionable? Dogmatic? Did I "resort to accusations of moral turpitude"? I should be interested to hear.

To try to equate the opponents of ESP with flat-earthers and the like is an old trick which I have often noted. But it won't do. I urge the same kind of scepticism towards ESP experiments as former Rationalists urged towards Florrie Cook and Sir William Crookes. It is not my religious susceptibilities that are offended by telepathy, it is soundly-based scientific laws. Of course, scientific laws are not sacrosanct. If new evidence is forthcoming and it conflicts with the law, then the law must be changed. But the evidence must be demonstrable; the experiments must be repeatable (which ESP experiments are not). We cannot take the word of Professor Vasiliev, however distinguished a physiologist, any more than we can take the word of Professor Rhine, whom Miss Kohsen dismisses, but whom many ESP-ers revere.

Yet this is what we are asked to do. In dealing with accounts of ESP, we are dealing with human testimony (which is notoriously unreliable) and often with human gullibility. We are asked to accept a written account of a brain (or mind) being directly affected by another at distances of a thousand miles or more.

Whether or not I understand the law of inverse squares is

unimportant. The question is: is there a class of phenomena (ESP) which contradicts the law? Claims have been made that there is: by, for instance, Professor Rhine, Professor Soal and Professor Vasiliev. I have long argued that Professor Rhine was hopelessly unscientific (much to the disgust, on one occasion, of Dr. D. J. West) and I am glad to note now that Miss Kohsen agrees with me. I don't know her views on Professor Soal, who has been widely acclaimed. His work too I maintain, will not bear critical analysis. I have not read Professor Vasiliev's book, which Miss Kohsen, perhaps rightly, declines to send me for review, but I should approach it in exactly the same way as I did the others. If there is a possibility of illusion or collusion, then this must take precedence over a telepathic explanation. Illusion and collusion are common human experiences, verifiable facts; the telepathy is contrary to scientifically-established laws. The former, to my mind, are more feasible. COLIN MCCALL.

TWO VIEWS ON SEX

I read with considerable interest the article by Margaret McLroy, "A Celibate advises Parents" (20/9/63). The opinion of Father Pickering, that sex instruction "must comprise a minimum of factual knowledge", contrasts with that of Dr. Alex Comfort on "Pre-marital Sex and Morals in Marriage", published in the October 1963 *News and Notes* of the Ethical Union. Dr. Comfort concludes by saying: "If you want a short summary of my own morality, it has been so concisely put by Bertrand Russell—that life should be motivated by love, and directed by intelligence".

Father Pickering has demonstrated by his "description" of the sexual organs just how inaccurate and misleading he can be. I feel sure no pupil of his will thank him for such instruction. G. DICKINSON

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