

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIII—No. 44

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

WHEN I WAS LAST IN HAMBURG, I was informed by a German acquaintance that the "royal art" of astrology has now, so to speak, shed its former royal trappings and has literally got down to business. For not only are the German papers in that traditional land of science and philosophy apparently as replete with astrological predictions as they are here, apparently also, the stars are taken very seriously even in some hard-headed German business circles which, or so one might have surmised, were quite alien to all that sort of thing.

For I was told (and by an unusually intelligent and well-informed German business executive) that in many commercial concerns in Hamburg, the commercial capital of the West German Republic, it is practically impossible to get a job unless one's handwriting is first of all submitted to a graphologist for his expert opinion. This, not in medieval and monastic Tibet, but in the ancient and Hanseatic city of Hamburg in 1963—in the greatest European sea port.

**The Stars also Shine over London**  
However, it would appear from an article recently published in *Tit Bits*, that the stars not only shine over the famous city of Hamburg, but also over the still more famous city (including especially "the City") of London as well. For in an article the title of which I have borrowed for mine, Peter Palmer reveals some rather surprising facts about the current vogue of astrology, not only in the popular press—where "What the Stars Foretell" has in recent years become a virtually ubiquitous feature—except in a few particularly highbrow papers. Big Business in England, Mr. Palmer states, is as celestially inclined as is its German counterpart and competitor. He tells us: "It is the astrologers who decide when a company should be floated: the time for a merger or a take-over bid; the best moment to trade shares. They have even ventured into management selection".

Nor, apparently are the stars unacquainted with some recent goings on upon our terrestrial planet, for we are further informed: "One British astrologer even claimed that the Profumo affair could have been prevented if the warning of the stars had been noted". For according to an article in Whitman's *New World Astrology*, a privately published monthly booklet which has a circulation of 20,000, Mr. Profumo's horoscope gave an automatic warning of "difficulties in affairs of the heart and a clear call to resist the factor of fascination". What a pity Mr. Profumo's colleagues did not read *New World Astrology*; it would have made Lord Denning's Report and midnight opening of HMSO quite unnecessary.

**Stars over the Stock Exchange**  
However, big business if less sensational, is much more important than governmental scandals. The London Stock Exchange like lesser (and poorer) mortals, also has its horoscope read. How, and with what results, Mr. Peter Palmer then proceeds to tell us. His informant was a lady astrologer, Miss Katina Theodossiou who, we are

informed, lives in Weymouth Street in London's West End and who made a spirited defence of astrology in the television feature, TWTWTW.

So that there shall be no doubt about her professional status, we are informed that "more than 40 internationally famous companies consult Miss Katina Theodossiou on matters of high policy which their rivals would give a ransom to know". We further learn that Miss Theodossiou

IEWS AND OPINIONS

## Big Business Goes Star-Gazing

By F. A. RIDLEY

is "a cultured intelligent woman who has made a scientific study of astrology and is at present writing a book on the subject".

**Astrology and Big Business**  
Nowadays, astrology is on the defensive. The "royal art", formerly un-

disputed, has now to face the twin charges of credulity and superstition. As Mr. Palmer admits earlier in his article: "Many people laugh off astrology as a more gimmicky form of crystal ball-gazing or palmistry. The majority of scientists will have nothing to do with it and at its best they call it a pseudo-science".

Miss Theodossiou will have nothing to do with such criticisms. She asserts categorically that "astrology is a science which bears no more relation to fortune telling than physics does to reading the teacups. She has always had an aptitude for mathematics and claims to bring that sort of exactitude to her charts". Moreover, "I can forecast stock exchange movements to within 36 hours. I advise some of the biggest companies in the world".

"The men who have won their way to the boardrooms of these companies are neither gullible nor credulous. They are tough business men who want value for money; even if they were superstitious, they would still want value for money.

"They want results: I give them a service based on formulas, data, patterns and cycles. Every client has come to me on the personal recommendation of someone else I have helped. There is nothing supernatural about astrology; a computer could provide the same results if it were fed with the material I collect. In fact it would give results far quicker".

So far, so good! But this staunch defender of astrology on rational grounds, adds a remark which, if taken literally, would logically appear to put all the newspaper astrologers without exception, completely out of the star-gazing business. For she adds: "People born under certain stars have much the same characteristics. But one has to be more precise. In casting a horoscope it is important not only to know the date of birth but the exact time". A damning admission, if not for the "royal art", at least for its current journalistic practitioners from the *News of the World* upwards—or downwards.

For it is surely obvious that none of the "What the Stars Foretell" columns that adorn (or disfigure) the bulk of our popular press, can conceivably have known the precise moment of birth of each of the human race which they include each day under their omnibus predictions. In point of fact, a learned (now defunct) astologer whom I used to know in the reading room of the British Museum, had nothing but contempt for these never-ending journalistic effusions which were, he held, as impossible from the standpoint of scientific [*sic*] astrology, in which he believed.



as from any other rational point of view.

If this admission of Miss Theodossiou is to be logically applied, a special labour exchange solely for the use of out-of-work newspaper astrologers would surely be required. Unfortunately there appears to be little current prospect of this. Whatever its cause, it can hardly be disputed that as Mr. Palmer states early on in this article: "Now astrology has recently made an astonishing comeback. In the language of the science—or art—its own star is in the ascendancy".

One might even add that in terms of current statistics, astrology is the predominant superstition (one can hardly call it a religion) in this country. For example, one of the most noticeable differences between the English press and say, the Catholic Irish, is that the latter features no "What the Stars Foretell" columns. Whatever its precise attitude to astrology, Rome has never been in the habit of encouraging rival superstitions.

### Bad News for Harold Wilson

At the end of her interview with Mr. Peter Palmer, Miss Theodossiou, no doubt basing herself on the general principals of astrology, embarked on the dangerous path of prophecy. Venturing into the "dismal science" of economics, she predicted the decline of monopolies and the revival of free competition (a prediction that should please the ghost of Richard Cobden!). Moreover, she has good news for the workers at large, forecasting that "there will never be another slump like the one in the thirties". Exit the "hungry thirties". But she has bad news for Mr. Harold Wilson and the Labour Party; for "despite recent setbacks, I say the Tories will win the next Election". No wonder the Stock Exchange is interested in astrology! The only terrestrial comment that we can make on this last item of celestial prediction is that if it comes true, Sir Alec Douglas-Home will have every reason to thank his lucky stars!

## A Free Man

By PETER CROMMELIN

IT IS NOW seven years since I finally broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, which for more than fifty years had dominated my life and mind. During these seven years I have never once regretted my departure from the Church. I have renounced all claims to any kind of personal immortality, but I hope to enjoy the remainder of my mortal life as a free man within the common law. I no longer harbour any supernatural aims or ambitions. I no longer aspire to heaven; I no longer have any fear of purgatory or hell. I no longer regard myself as either sinner or saint. I think of myself as a very ordinary human being, who up to the present has not been convicted of any criminal offence.

It may have been the Roman Catholic doctrine of celibacy and marriage which led to my final renunciation of the Roman Catholic faith. It could have been this. It is quite certain that the Roman Catholic doctrine of celibacy stops a great many marriageable people from getting married, while its doctrine of marriage stops the dissolution of many marriages which would be much better dissolved.

If I had remained a priest, I could never have become a married man. Having broken away from the Church, the very first thing I did as a free man was to get married. This marriage (in a register office) has, I believe, made two people much happier together than they would have been apart.

Our married life has not been easy all the time. There have been moments when the outlook seemed very threatening. Two people who try to live together on practically nothing, are clearly subjecting themselves to some severe stresses and strains. It simply is not possible to live on love alone, although any marriage without love would be a poor thing indeed. Although I no longer believe in miracles, it seems almost miraculous that through some entirely unexpected human assistance, my wife and I have been able to build for ourselves a secure home and a promising little business in the place where we have chosen to be. And the place where we have chosen to be is undoubtedly one of the beauty spots of England. And so we have much to be thankful for.

When I was a "Catholic" I sometimes played with the idea, and weighed the possibilities of becoming a "Protestant". It seemed to me even then that the differences

between the two have been enormously exaggerated on both sides of the historic controversy. Since my marriage however I have felt no inclination to belong to any religious sect. I have come to believe with militant atheists that religious dogma constitutes a very real obstacle to human progress. Since there is no rational justification for the uncritical acceptance of any "revealed religion", the only logical course open to a freethinker is to reject the lot. If atheism is definable as the state of having no religion, then certainly I have become an atheist.

Religion is not merely a waste of human time and energy. It is a positive evil. It is a deceiver. It deceives many good people who would be much better and happier without this induced form of self-deception. Religious dogma poisons all the good which might be done by a purely rational study of history, science, art, and philosophy. I have come to share with militant atheists the certainty that what the world needs is not a more religious morality nor a more moral religion but a more rational morality, based upon the real requirements of human nature in the present stage of its evolution. It has never been demonstrated that religious belief is a real requirement of human nature. All that the religions of mankind actually demonstrate is that people can be persuaded to believe almost anything, by the power of force, fear, and hope. But to describe this human infirmity as a real requirement of our nature is misleading, and is perhaps intended to mislead.

Knowledge is better than faith. We have now reached a stage of human evolution, when it is quite possible to know about a great many matters, without making any claim to the possession of any supernatural infallibility. We know, for example, that the most urgent of all human problems is to control the growth of population by some less drastic means than nuclear warfare. The thing can be done. Apart from sheer ignorance, almost the only real obstacle to rational birth control comes from religious dogmatic prejudice against scientific methods of contraception. For this reason alone, I am glad to have abandoned responsibility for preaching or teaching a doctrine of unrestricted procreation.

These are important matters which vitally affect the future of mankind. A general acceptance of Roman

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# Mysticism and Revelation

By G. L. SIMONS

TODAY MANY people realise that reason militates against religious belief, that if one is prepared to be logical there are no good reasons why one should accept the main propositions of, for example, Christianity. This realisation, however, does not always lead to the rejection of religion. When reason and science indicate that religious belief is irrational and unworthy of mature human beings, there is only one course open to the fervent believer who needs to justify his beliefs, he must maintain that logic is limited, that science is in its infancy, and that there are ways of knowing which transcend mere reason and which give man a greater insight into the ultimate nature of reality. Mysticism and revelation are thought by certain people to be means whereby such insight can be gained.

Mysticism and revelation, when viewed credibly, are similar in that they both give the person an intense feeling that he is aware of some truth about the world which cannot be discovered by reason or observation. Mystics maintain that the world of sense is unreal, transitory or temporal and that there is a more real world *behind* the world of sense. This more real world has an externity, an all-pervasiveness which impresses the mystic with its perfection and its beauty. However, the mystic appears wholly unable, except in the most general terms, to describe his experiences in words which have public significance. But the person who experiences a revelation usually attempts to describe it in terms of the senses. The revelation may be, for example, a vision or voices heard.

The mystic and the person who has the revelation are convinced of the veracity of their experiences. They think not merely that the experiences give knowledge about the human mind, but also about reality outside the individual. Thus mysticism and revelation are opposed to science. On the one hand it is claimed that knowledge can be gained *intuitively* in the absence of empirical observation; on the other hand the value of intuition is recognised, but it is not regarded as sufficient *in isolation*. Its deliverances must be tested in an orthodox empirical fashion.

Mystics claim to be "at one with reality", "in tune with the infinite", etc. The language which they use is remote, esoteric and difficult. They seem unable to use words in their normal sense, with their normal connotation. A. J. Ayer remarked in *Language, Truth and Logic* that "... the mystic ... is unable to produce any intelligible propositions at all." The experiences of the mystic are highly personal and intense. But we have no reason to believe that they are capable of serving as a guide to the understanding of reality outside the individual. For their sole credential is the passion with which they are entertained. And a proposition is not made probable merely because it is believed intensely.

The mystic *may* have discovered a cognitive faculty, but it is completely unreasonable to assume that this is the case merely because the idea is pleasing and bolsters up comforting prejudices. The mystic seems unable to say anything about the world which can be tested in a public manner. He is unable to predict events, to throw light onto social problems, to contribute in any way to a suffering mankind. The mystic retreats into his own mentality, experiences in an intense fashion and claims to have knowledge of the ultimate nature of things. He may have, but his mere affirmation is not a sufficient guarantee that this is so.

The man who experiences a revelation is less inarticulate. He is able to communicate his experiences in language which is easily understood. He "sees" an apparition, or "hears" the word of God. He can describe the vision and detail the auditory sensations. But he can only achieve clarity at the expense of security. For he has a problem, shared also by the mystic. It is known that hallucinations occur. The problem for the religious believer is to give reasons why revelation should not be regarded as hallucinatory.

Under normal circumstances to investigate hallucinations is a straightforward task. An hallucination is recognised according to its inconsistency with other sensory impressions, both of the person and other witnesses. When a drunk claims to see a tiger in the room which cannot be perceived by sympathetic friends he is not believed. He is mistaken in ascribing objective reality to a sensation generated by an abnormal state of mind. No religious person would be prepared to believe the statements of an alcoholic or an epileptic if these statements sounded incredible and the religious person was unable to verify them independently. To apply the same reasoning to religious revelation leads to conclusions which the believer, for purely emotional reasons, would be unwilling to accept.

For it is characteristic of revelation that the experiences are highly personal. They are not capable of being checked in a public manner. For this reason it is unjustified to give statements which describe experienced revelations the status enjoyed by scientific propositions which describe a controlled experiment which anyone can repeat if he wishes. But unless the statements derived from revelation can be given a certain status they cannot serve as a basis for what may be regarded as objective knowledge. That they cannot achieve this status is indicated by the fact that such statements cannot be used to predict events, or verify hypotheses. For all sciences outside psychiatry they are empty.

Some people may think it unfair to apply scientific criteria to an aspect of human experience which does not purport to be scientific. However unless we apply the principles of scientific verification to statements which claim to describe the world in which we live *we are infinitely gullible*, since we will believe anything if our emotions are appealed to in the appropriate way. If we do not apply scientific criteria to different forms of mental experiences we no longer have a reason for distinguishing between, on the one hand, the experiences of the alcoholic, the drug-addict, the dreamer and the mentally sick person, and on the other hand, the experiences of the healthy, sober person. And in this context people are said to be healthy and sober precisely because their experiences can be corroborated in a systematic, public fashion.

Thus there seems to be no reason why we should regard revelation as any different from hallucination. To remark, for example, that because revelation is more common than hallucination it should be regarded in a different light is invalid for two important reasons. In the first place it assumes what it tries to prove. Unless the assumption was made that revelation was different from hallucination there would be no reason for saying that it was more common. In the second place, if one form of experience is more common than another, and is widespread through-

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## This Believing World

It is interesting to say the least that the Bishop of Southwark should say that he "has no patience with people" who declare that Spiritualism is "humbug and fraud". It "demands careful and thoughtful inquiry". And how has his Church treated most "inquiries"? Simply by refusing "to consider the evidence". Well, we should like to see that "evidence", for generally what we get is the kind of "evidence" exposed even by *Psychic News* on its front page (October 9th) in the case of one of its most popular and talked-of mediums—Gordon Higginson.

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**Dr. Stockwood also had something to say on "salvation"** According to the *South London Press* (October 11th) he insisted that "Christ died on Calvary to save people, not buildings". The reference to "buildings" here is the problem of redundant churches which upsets some Christians very much. They cannot bear to see a "holy" place dedicated to "our Lord" either being pulled down or turned into a Bingo palace or a cinema. Considering that it is doubtful if the Bishop believes in the "Sin of Adam", in the Garden of Eden, and therefore in "the Fall of Man" — a thoroughly Christian doctrine — we wonder what Christ saved us from on the Cross of Calvary? We do not expect an answer.

★

**On the other hand "The People" (October 13th)** exposed "a rogue in sanctuary". Mr. Peter Clive, known as Brother Johan who runs "A Sanctuary of the Silent Healing Power" to help uneducated sick people in Africa to get well. Thirty shillings is the minimum charge for his medicine which costs in the main a fraction of this sum. And no doubt calling his place of business "a sanctuary" helps the good work. For Brother Johan advertises in religious journals and insists that all his "patients" have "faith". Obviously if they hadn't, Johan would soon go out of business.

★

**The "Daily Mirror" (October 9th)** gave us a picture of a typical "prophet" from New York, glasses and huge black beard and headdress and long frock complete. All these things make up Bishop Homer Tomlinson, who claims that he has 250,000 followers all over the world, and wants to present a token banner to the Queen. The Bishop calls himself the "Mighty Prophet", and probably believes he is. But what is he prophesying about, and have any of his "prophecies" ever proved true?

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**Now, why should long hair and a long beard** make a man "holy" or "mighty"? Yogis, for example, are notorious in this, and appear to need neither a hair restorer nor a shave. But Buddhist monks are often bald and clean shaven. Are they not "holy" too? These pious queries disturb us whenever we see a "holy" man.

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**It would have proved more interesting** if ITV on Sunday, October 20th, had asked Dr. Heenan to comment on its programme, "The Mark of Fear". More than half of it was devoted to reproductions by medieval artists of Hell and its "Terrors", the idea being of course that all Christians should be kept in a state of sheer, horrible fright at what would inevitably happen to them if they did not accept Christianity as taught by priests and parsons. Every conceivable horror was piled up, devils and demons in the most frightening forms torturing human bodies, inflicting agonising pain in the vilest ways. And all in the name of gentle Jesus and the Christian Church!

**Nobody had predicted Hell in its most dreadful aspects** with such joy as earnest Christians, and for descriptions with words only there are the pamphlets by Father Furniss describing at great length the eternal frizzling in the flames of Hell, of children who had not been baptised. So it is not unfair to wonder what the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, so amiable and friendly on the TV screen — and no doubt in life also — thinks of the belief in Hell his Church *still* holds in all its anachronistic grip?

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**We don't know if Dr. Ramsey our Archbishop of Canterbury** actually believes in Hell as fervently as the Roman Church, but we are sure that many of the African and Asian converts do and we see that he wants them to come over to England and "convert the post-Christian heathenism in our country". This is a brilliant idea, but we wish some of them, if they do come, will do their best to convert Freethinkers instead of running away as English parsons and priests mostly do. They should also try their hand on the *apathy* which distinguishes Christendom in our green and pleasant land.. But will they? Not on your life!

## MYSTICISM AND REVELATION

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out history and the world, there is only one logical approach in seeking for an explanation—to look for a common cause. There is no reason at all to assume that *such a cause* must be transcendent or other-worldly merely because the *experience* relates to things outside human knowledge.

Furthermore there are important chemical and psychiatric reasons which indicate the likelihood that mystical and revelation-type experiences only occur in minds which are either unwell or chemically conditioned in some way. Everyone knows the effect of excessive alcohol and drugs. In *The Doors of Perception* Aldous Huxley describes in detail the (virtually mystical) experiences he underwent in taking measured doses of mescaline. It is interesting that the Mexican peyote cactus which contains mescaline was called "holy" because it produced religious experiences when eaten in excess. Also epilepsy which can be physically induced in the appropriate subject was once called the "holy disease" because of the visions which it produced. Also it is important to note that there are few mystics with a full stomach. That fasting, and even frantic dancing in certain circumstances, can produce visionary experiences is a commonplace of psychiatry.

A symptom of mental disease is the experiencing of religious visions and trances. William James and Professor Thouless, for example, have indicated the pathological nature of such experiences. And it is perhaps significant that eminent brain specialists in different countries have recently observed that if surgery in the pre-frontal region is too extensive, formerly religious people become non-religious. (See Sargant's *Battle for the Mind*.)

It seems likely that the mystic, through extreme fasting, often starves his brain of important chemicals. Sensory impressions become distorted and he misconstrues his place in the world. And today, if like St. Francis we claim to converse with the animals, or like St. Joan claim to hear voices, we at best would be regarded as eccentric, at worst deranged. Viewed disinterestedly mysticism and revelation do not belong to the realm of the theologian, but to that of the psychiatrist and the scientific historian.



**THE FREETHINKER**103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1  
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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.  
Manchester Branch NSS (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, November 3rd, 6.45 p.m.: A Meeting.  
Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Arnold House Hotel, Montpelier Terrace, Brighton), Sunday, November 3rd, 5.30 p.m.: PROF. H. LEVY, "Marxism and Ethical Values".  
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 5th, 7.30 p.m.: DR. JOHN LEWIS, "Historical Inevitability: What is the Marxist View?"  
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 3rd, 6.30 p.m.: D. H. TRIBE, "Freedom to Reject Christian Ideas".  
Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, November 3rd, 7.30 p.m.: S. SMITH, "A Century of Free Thought".  
Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, November 3rd, 7.30 p.m.: STANLEY MAYNE, (National Council for Civil Liberties), "State Security and Individual Freedom".  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1.), Sunday, November 3rd, 11 a.m.: REGINALD W. SORENSEN, M.P., "Malaysian Tensions — Racial, Religious and Political".

**Notes and News**

IF THERE was to be a united Christian Church, its head would have to be the Pope, said Dr. John Moorman, Bishop of Ripon and leader of the Anglican observers at the Vatican Council, in an interview released by the Roman Catholic Divine Word News Service in Rome (*The Guardian*, 22/10/63). The Anglican Communion had lived 400 years in separation from Rome but would, as a whole, Dr. Moorman believed, be prepared to accept the fact of the Papacy, although they would find great difficulty in recognising the basis on which the primacy rest. "Far too much has been made of the words of Our Lord to St. Peter", he added.

THE PUBLICATION of Dr. John Rock's *The Time has Come*, which will soon be reviewed by Margaret McIlroy, has drawn attention to the very real concern of intelligent Roman Catholics over the problem of birth control. Sooner or later the Church's attitude will have to be relaxed, and we note that Dr. C. van Emde Boas of Holland, President of the European Near East and African region of the

International Planned Parenthood Federation, referred (*The Guardian*, 22/10/63) to the efforts of Cardinal Suenens of Belgium to bring before the Ecumenical Council in Rome, a scheme which involved "a very cautious reconsideration of the Roman Catholic point of view on birth control".

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THE POPULATION of India has been increasing at the rate of eight millions a year, and would soon reach ten millions annual increase. Stating this at an international meeting at the House of Commons on October 21st, Lady Rama Rau said that money was needed for more research on questions of fertility and reproduction and for evolving new, simple contraceptives that could be widely used by people who were poor and illiterate. Asked about the attitude of the United Nations, Lady Rama Rau said that last time the assembly had discussed the question "they had failed to get the necessary two-thirds majority in favour of any serious consideration". It isn't hard to guess where the opposition came from.

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A LARGE photograph in the *Auckland Star* (17/10/63) showed the front of the New Zealand Rationalist Association offices, with the secretary, James O. Hanlon, lowering a crude replica of the USSR flag from the flagpole. The flag, a red curtain with a hammer and sickle painted on in black, was believed to be the work of students from a hostel opposite Rationalist House. "I don't know why they think we are a communist organisation", said Mr. Hanlon. "The Association is non-political".

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IN RECENT WEEKS, the *Daily Express* reported (16/10/63), five cases of "spontaneous cure" of cancer have been brought to light by a Kent radiologist, Dr. Douglas Nelson, who is trying to piece together data which might explain why an "incurable" disease sometimes cures itself. None of the persons had any medical treatment or "spiritual healing". In a sixth case, a 37-year-old London barrister was regarded as hopeless fifteen years ago, but underwent X-ray treatment and has made what a University College Hospital consultant surgeon, Mr. George Qvist describes as a "striking" recovery.

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THOSE BORN under Taurus (April 21st to May 22nd) were advised by the *Sunday Mirror* astrologer, Constance Sharpe, on October 6th, to "Keep unpopular or radical opinions to yourself". But this, we take it, applied only to the following week. You're free to talk now.

**RETIREMENT OF J. HUTTON HYND**

J. HUTTON HYND, Secretary of the South Place Ethical Society for the past nine years, retired at the end of October at the age of sixty-five. A Scot by birth and education, Mr. Hynd is a respected figure in the Humanist movement on both sides of the Atlantic, having been Leader of the St. Louis Ethical Society for sixteen years prior to taking up his London appointment.

At the Conway Hall, London, headquarters of SPES, Mr. Hynd engendered an atmosphere of friendliness which contributed enormously to the pleasure of the meetings and social functions, and the list of distinguished speakers at the Hall on Sunday mornings and Tuesday evenings is a testimony to his organising ability and persuasiveness.

We wish Mr. Hynd and his wife a long and happy retirement, and hope that they will still be seen periodically at meetings of the Society which he has served so well.



# The Death of Jesus

By COLIN MCCALL

THOUGH PERSONALLY a mythicist, I do not regard the historicity or non-historicity of Jesus as a crucial question for Freethinkers. That it is an interesting one, I readily grant. Hence my enjoyment of *The Death of Jesus* (Gollancz 1963, 25s.), by Joel Carmichael, an American scholar and linguist, who has held Hebrew scholarships at Oxford and been Fulbright Fellow in Islamic studies at the Sorbonne.

Mr. Carmichael argues (brilliantly, as Mr. Dwight Macdonald has said) from a historical Jesus. He is perfectly aware, of course, that the Gospels are a jumble of puzzles and contradictions, about an individual, yet never telling us anything personal. Jesus, he says, "seems to be moving in a vacuum; we cannot see what his day-to-day life was like, nor understand his relations with his companions". What must one do, then, to try to unravel the story? Mr. Carmichael decides to start at the end and proceed in reverse; to work backward from the death, which he regards as "the one most unquestionable, most solid, and most significant event" of Jesus's "otherwise obscure life". One may dispute this; argue that the crucifixion is no less obscure than the rest of Jesus's life. But it is perhaps worth indulging in a suspension of disbelief to see whether, with Mr. Carmichael, "we can arrive at an alternative to the traditional view of Jesus' career, and grasp what it meant to the people of his time".

Christianity has magnified Jesus almost, but not quite, out of recognition, and the process started in the Gospels themselves. Indeed, says Mr. Carmichael, if the Gospels had been "systematically and intelligently screened we should know nothing at all about Jesus the man".

When one recalls the sweeping powers assumed by the Church when Christianity became a state institution under Constantine the Great, and the severity of the censorship authorised under him and applied with vigor ever since the fifth century, the survival of the few scraps of information we have is astonishing. We owe them to an indifference to history compounded by inefficiency and subordinated to a reverence for traditional texts. This left a great many holes in a web of piety that was ideally intended to exclude all mundane facts in the interests of Jesus' glorification.

Clues to the "real" Jesus should be sought, then, in whatever conflicts with this magnification, this "transformation of perspective" that the Gospels began and that Christianity continued. Anything conflicting with it is "likely to be true", particularly if it adds plausibility to an otherwise senseless story.

In the absurd story of the betrayal, for instance, the Gospel of John's divergence from the Synoptics is of "special significance". Judas is reported as having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees which, after the incident of the servant of the high priest's ear, captured and bound Jesus. Now the Greek word *speira*, translated "band", means a "cohort" and refers, says Mr. Carmichael, "to the Roman force garrisoned in the Antonia Tower of the Temple". A little later "its commander is called *chiliarchos*, translated in Latin and English by the word *tribunus* (tribune) or captain, and making it unmistakable that if the 'band' of people was disorderly it was at any rate 'accompanied' by Roman troops. In short, it was a Roman cohort that arrested Jesus . . .".

Obviously Judas would have no power to summon such a cohort, which is not mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels. As John generally goes furthest of the four in exculpating the Romans and blaming the Jews, Mr. Carmichael

suggests that the Roman references are "a detail, ultimately founded on fact, that somehow remained firmly interwoven with an early strand of the tradition, which for the most part was busily engaged in cutting out all hostile references to the Romans—wherever possible".

The contradictions and impossibilities of the trial of Jesus have often been noted. The real point is that Jesus was not, in fact, condemned on a religious charge by the Sanhedrin. Had he been, he would have suffered Jewish punishment—stoning, the stake, strangling or decapitation. Instead the punishment was the characteristic Roman method of crucifixion. Pilate, the Roman governor, on the other hand, "washed his hands" in Jewish fashion and paraphrased the Old Testament in handing over Jesus to the mob, which completed the Old Testament reference with: "His blood be on us, and on our children".

It is ironical to reflect [says Mr. Carmichael] that this sentence, which has wrought so much havoc through the ages, is due to nothing more than an editorial insertion.

But, as it became increasingly difficult for the Christians to gain converts among the Jews, these were sought among the pagans. Increasingly, then, the Jews were presented as the enemies of Jesus.

Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God and it cannot be seriously doubted that he meant an imminent "terrestrial, material transformation of the world, instituted by divine power and terminating the present sinful order of human affairs". The imminence might be elastic, the precise moment unpredictable, but the day was clearly close at hand. When the event did not justify the words that Jesus uttered (or the earliest tradition that they represent), the early generation of Christians extended them to cover a Second Coming, and when that in turn was postponed the Church was forced to alter the entire conception; to substitute a spiritualised interpretation for the original material one. "It may even be said that it was just this failure of the Kingdom to materialise that generated the Christian Church, which filled up, so to speak, the vacuum of Jesus' disappointment." When St. Jerome expanded "this generation" to cover the entire human race, we may "admire his imagination and fortitude", says Mr. Carmichael, but we cannot agree.

"Jesus came for Israel alone." But Judaism was also "the intellectual world of a people harshly oppressed by an alien and odious power". And while the Romans were unlikely to be disturbed by a purely religious movement within the Jewish community, they would understandably be concerned if a military force occupied the Temple, "a vast edifice" which had proved a formidable obstacle to Pompey in 63 BC and had been restored on a "still more magnificent scale by Herod the Great; more than 200 yards wide and 450 yards long". Jesus, indeed, came not to bring peace but a sword. He was in "the long line of Jewish insurgents against the power of the idolatrous Roman state". He not only threatened the Roman power, though. His seizure of the Temple was directed as much at the priesthood in charge of it. He thus "fell foul of the Jewish aristocracy and the priesthood".

Mr. Carmichael resists the temptation to fill in the shadowy picture with "persuasive, imaginatively elaborated details". There is, as he says, no material for the biography of "a living, breathing Jesus". What he attempts is to discern the most plausible points according to his criterion of authenticity given earlier—anything that conflicts with the "transformation of perspective" in the



Gospels is likely to be true—and then trace that transformation to Paul's "final obliteration of the historic Jesus" and embalming of him "like a fly in amber". Whether or not one goes all the way with Mr. Carmichael, it should be said that he has written a most interesting and stimulating book, supported by a depth of learning that is obvious but never displayed.

## A FREE MAN

(Concluded from page 346)

Catholic theology of sex, is bound to lead to a large number of unwanted children, whose lives will be a misery to themselves and to their parents, as well as a social problem.

Humanitarian schemes for relieving poverty and famine, do not really go to the heart of the matter. The real necessity is to stop the uncontrolled growth of population which is the cause of poverty, famine and war. In this matter I feel that the Catholic Church does not help in the slightest degree but is in fact an obstacle to progress. So long as people are persuaded to believe that to indulge in the pleasure of sexual intercourse whilst taking positive steps to avoid giving birth to a child, is to commit mortal sin, for so long is a very positive obstacle being placed to the scientific control of population.

Humanists must contradict the religious assertion that the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children. It simply is not so. The primary purpose of marriage is the mutual and greater happiness of the two persons who decide to become a married couple. Marriage is a purely secular institution, and every effort must be made to liberate it from ecclesiastical control. That marriage has anything beyond its human value must be strenuously denied.

When I have the time, I should like to construct a dictionary of objections to Christian doctrine, beginning with alms-giving and ending with zeal. In the meantime, one objection is sufficient and that is that there exists nothing outside the human imagination corresponding to the Christian imagination of Deity. I have no personal objection to the hypothesis that there may be an Absolute Creator of the Universe. It is however totally inconceivable that this hypothetical Absolute Being should have given to any man the kind of power or the kind of authority that is claimed by the so-called Church of God.

Here we come face to face with a recognisable psychological phenomenon, the lust for power. Those who would save themselves from becoming victims of this lust and this power must actively rebel against it. In Christian lands, human beings are subjected to the power and influence of the Church from the moment they are born. Frequently they are taught that it is sinful to criticise either the clergy or the Bible; sinful to express any disrespect for public worship or religious ritual. Despite early religious indoctrination, few adult Christians remain completely obedient to ecclesiastical discipline. Yet few have the courage to leave the Church altogether or to condemn the Church as it ought to be condemned by all who desire to see mankind liberated for ever from this false claimant to divine authority. It is not altogether true to say that people get the government they deserve. It is entirely true that in this day and age of ours, people must either learn to think more freely for themselves or sink to a sub-human level of conformity and obedience. Theocracy and democracy are logically incompatible. But whereas theocracy belongs to a dead past, democracy still waits to be made a full and living reality by free men, who must be able and willing to tolerate a much larger burden of personal responsibility for the way things are run.

## CATHOLICISM AND CHILDREN

MRS. VERONICA MARY O'DONNELL, 29-year-old mother of seven children, was put on probation for three years when she appeared before Bristol magistrates and admitted ill-treating her two-year-old son, who was found to have bruises "virtually on all parts of his body" (*Daily Express* 19/10/63). Dr. P. W. J. Parkes, deputy medical officer at Bristol prison said that Mrs. O'Donnell, who came from Ireland 12 years ago, was now in her tenth pregnancy. She was married at 16 and had seven children living. "She was tensed up because of her pregnancy and was a bad manager," and Dr. Parkes had suggested that she should see a doctor with a view to being sterilised. "She did not take kindly to the idea. But now she seems to be coming round," Dr. Parks said. After the hearing Mr. O'Donnell said: "As Roman Catholics the question of sterilisation puts us in a very difficult position, and we have certainly not consented to it." Mrs. O'Donnell said: "Basil and I would, of course, get together on this decision. There is no friction between us about it."

The same issue of the *Daily Express* (19/10/63) reported the "religious" problem of the fourteen-month-old son of an English girl and a Chinese-Cuban father, a "difficult" baby from the adoption point of view, who had nevertheless found a good home with Mr. and Mrs. B, a wealthy London couple of Jewish origin who do not practise Judaism. The baby's mother is a Roman Catholic and she had him so baptised. When she gave him for adoption, however, she signed a declaration that he could be brought up in any Christian faith and Mr. and Mrs. B proposed to bring him up as an Anglican like their own two sons. Later the mother confessed to her parents that she had had an illegitimate child, and they and the parish priest "persuaded her it was her duty to see that the baby was brought up in a Catholic household. So she refused to sign the final adoption papers, insisting that the baby should be handed back for re-adoption by a Catholic family". Mr. and Mrs. B failed to get a confirmation of adoption, even though they promised to have the baby attend a Roman Catholic church, but they had the baby made a ward of court. The wardship is being contested and the hearing was adjourned until October 30th.

## OBITUARY

### GUY ALDRED

I remember as a young boy hearing Guy Aldred address a meeting of the Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society. I remember even more forcibly seeing the startling illustrations to his anti-militarist writings. Although I met him on only a few occasions I couldn't help liking that anachronistic figure in the knickerbockers. He showed absolutely no respect for the dead, and seemed to delight in printing private and confidential correspondence.

One had to learn that nothing was sacred to Guy Aldred; that he believed in bringing everything into the light of day, no matter what the consequences. He had, in fact, no taste; but he had what is much more important, an overriding honesty of purpose. It is not surprising that his great hero should have been Richard Carlile. Aldred espoused the same kind of unpopular causes, he had also been to prison for his convictions.

He delighted in telling of his boy-preacher days in London, and in declaring that he was the only real atheist in the land, because he unqualifiedly denied God. He fought seven parliamentary elections as an anarchistic socialist and lost his deposit each time. The last time, at Woodside, Glasgow, a year ago, he polled only 134, yet his death on October 16th at the age of 76 will be felt by many people scattered throughout the world who revered him, as also — I dare say — by political opponents who couldn't help but admire him.

Of Guy Aldred, as of his execrably printed paper, *The Word*, it could honestly be said he was unique.

C.McC.



## CORRESPONDENCE

## "THE REPRESENTATIVE"

As a (non-Catholic) theatregoer I was handed a copy of the National Secular Society leaflet in which you criticise the way in which Catholic concern about *The Representative* has been expressed. I have myself distributed leaflets for good causes in my time, which leads me to think that you may prefer to hear from someone who does not agree with you than from nobody at all.

The tragedy with which the play deals is virtually without historical precedent. However, let us at least try to suppose that a play could be written accusing, say, Bertrand Russell, of conniving at the deaths of large numbers of innocent people by being a conscientious objector in World War I. Let us further suppose that some Rationalist association considered that though the case against him was clearly put, the case for Russell did not do him justice.

If such an association then approached a management that was about to stage the play, and submitted a reasoned protest alleging misrepresentation, should we agree with any Catholic who should raise a cry of censorship and rationalist intrigue? I think not. In short, if you had been willing to apply to the action of Sister Louis-Gabriel the standards you might wish others to apply to yourselves in a parallel situation, your leaflet would not have been written, as it was, as an irrational incitement to prejudice.

In the case about which you are concerned, is there any evidence that "censorship" was proposed, still less accepted? Is it not very possible that the consultation had something to do with the production of the brochure on sale at the theatre, in which there is fair expression of the conflicting points of view? Isn't that something that your Society should welcome?

Your leaflet makes its appeal at a level which may not be much appreciated by many people who choose to go to such a play as *The Representative*.

ROY WALKER.

[Mr. Walker asks: "Is it not very possible that the consultation had something to do with the production of the brochure on sale in the theatre . . . ?" The General Secretary of the Council of Christians and Jews said (Sunday Times, 1/9/63) that Sister Louis-Gabriel had "agreed . . . if invited . . . to advise the producer on such purely external matters as proper forms of title and address". It is possible that this was her reason for going to see the producer before rehearsals began, but, if so, he must have vouchsafed the information that the English version would "present the Pope more fairly than had the German" (The Universe, 30/8/63). To anyone but the most naive, however, it is clear that as the National Secular Society handbill stated, there was a Roman Catholic attempt at censorship of the play. Incidentally, the NSS Secretary reports a good response to the handbill and a number of new members in consequence.

Oh, yes, and we refer Mr. Walker to the letter printed below.—Ed.]

I enclose a cutting from the Geneva daily newspaper "La Suisse" for October 19th, giving a report of the Catholic inspired demonstrators who are trying to stop the play *Le Vicaire* ("vicaire" in French means "curate" not vicar as in English) by Rolf Hochhuth.

This is the same play as that running in London entitled *The Representative*.

You will see that the Catholic demonstrators in Basle blew whistles, threw rotten eggs and stink bombs. It is most likely that the priests organised this demonstration but of course kept themselves in the background and no doubt will deny any complicity.

A GENEVA READER.

## OPIUM DEPARTMENT

Many of us must have been distressed to see pep-articles on religion appearing in the *Daily Herald*. How it would have alarmed the old brigade, the men who spoke frankly about religion as the opium of the people!

Now a judicious use of certain drugs can stimulate man's invention in the field of creative activity which gives purpose to life. Of course people who have not troubled to keep in touch with modern developments are shocked; but it would be far more progressive for a paper like the *Daily Herald* to promote the free issue of such drugs than to support the hearty rector's.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

## THE CHURCH AND THE POOR

Cardinal Beniamino Arriba Castro, of Tarragona, said at the world assembly of Catholic prelates: "The Church should not leave the care of the poor to Marxism. Helping the poor is an inherent part of Catholic doctrine". —*Daily Express* (9/10/63) Especially if ye have them always with you!

## THOMAS PAINE SOCIETY

In last week's report of the above Society, supplied by the Secretary Mr. R. W. Morrell, the name of the Chairman, Mr. Christopher Brunel was unfortunately omitted.

## OBITUARY

His friends in the National Secular Society were shocked to hear of the sudden death of Henry McCabe on October 17th. A native of Ireland, Mr. McCabe had been a Freethinker for many years. He was a member of the Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society and was recently elected to the branch committee. Two evenings before his death Mr. McCabe participated, with other Marble Arch members in a leaflet distribution outside the Aldwych Theatre, London where *The Representative* is being performed.

Henry McCabe was a kindly and generous man who held his views with sincerity and conviction. At the weekly meeting of Marble Arch Branch members observed a period of silence in his memory and a floral tribute was sent to the funeral.

W. J. McI.

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