

# The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIV—No. 46

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

A DECISION by Parliament in July 1964, to accede to the request of the Church of England to make clear the definite legality of the use of the Mass vestments at Anglican altars was something which passed almost unnoticed in the press. Vestarian issues seemed to belong to the sixteenth rather than to the twentieth century. The sight of members of Parliament solemnly debating the exact clothing to be worn by a clergyman at the administration of the sacraments was more of a curiosity than a matter for public comment. Few of the members realised that the vestments had a doctrinal significance, whilst fewer still possessed the liturgical knowledge necessary for proper discussion.

If anything, the incident seemed to denote no more than the anachronism of an ecclesiastical establishment which could compel such matters to be debated by Lords and Commons. Even fewer people realised that they were witnessing the enactment of a piece of canon law and that it was a first step in the imposition of a new code of ecclesiastical legislation in modern England. It is at this stage that the Freethinker should take notice. He must ask himself how far he is willing to see the established church as an *imperium in imperio*, administering its own legal system through its own courts and thus restoring to itself the position which it occupied before the Reformation. As a citizen, he has every right to very definite opinions upon such a matter and every right to protest against such an evolution.

**The History of Church Law**  
Canon law itself arose out of the earlier conciliar decisions of the Christian Church. It gradually evolved into a definite legal system with its own courts. During the Middle Ages, the Norman view that church and state were at one gave to the canon law an established position. It dealt with all church matters, with various forms of conduct cases such as sexual misdemeanours, with the law of marriage and nullity, with probate matters and with the clergy generally. As is widely known, the whole question of the status of church courts led to a violent feud between Henry II and Thomas à Becket, whilst the murder of the archbishop carried matters further by gaining a popular sympathy for the ecclesiastical hierarchy. During the later medieval period, the canon law of the western church prevailed in England. At the Reformation, there is some obscurity as to what happened although outstanding legal historians, such as Maitland, Holdsworth and Potter are in no doubt whatever that it had the result of bringing church law beneath royal law, and the church courts into subjection to the crown. A series of canons were given royal sanction in 1604 but it did not receive parliamentary approval and is not binding upon the laity. The so-called Laudian canons of 1641 failed to receive legal status and are merely not binding. During the eighteenth century, Convocation was in desuetude and the canon law passed into oblivion, whilst in 1833 the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council

was made the final court of appeal in all matters ecclesiastical. In 1857, divorce and matrimonial questions as well as probate were removed from the scope of the church courts and, not long afterwards, the home of the ecclesiastical lawyers, Doctors Commons, came to an end. Cases of ceremonial dispute, such as *Hibbert v Purchas* or *Martin v Mackonichie*, matters of heresy such as the cases of Colenso and Voysey, or matters of clerical conduct were decided in this way. It must be recalled that the lay judges were extremely displeasing to the Anglo-Catholic party who regarded such legal processes as pure erastianism (control of church by state) and wished the church to have its own courts.

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Church Law and its Revival

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

#### Church Courts

Various incidents during 1962 called attention to the unsatisfactory nature of the church courts. Their power over the laity was illustrated when a group of artists who had become unwittingly involved over a dispute concerning Digswell Church were heavily mulcted in costs by the Chancellor of the diocese of St. Albans. The trial of Dr. Bryn Thomas illustrated to the full the highly unsatisfactory state of the administration of justice which could take place in the diocesan courts. Public protest followed and the Church was forced to give ear to highly critical comments from outside sources. A scheme for the revision of the church courts was rushed through and became law in August of this year. Put briefly, processes are now streamlined, the judges must be practising members of the Church of England and appeal to the lay body, the Privy Council, is abolished. In short, the citizen is inhibited in such matters from taking his grievance to the ancient source, the Crown in Council and remains at the tender mercy of purely ecclesiastical judges.

#### Proposals to be Watched

For some years, a parallel process has been going on of refurbishing a series of canons for the Church of England. At one time, there was talk of a parallel canonical discipline for the laity, but this seems to have been dropped during recent years. A large-scale proposal for the revised canons is to be put through piecemeal, a policy against which Viscount Brentford protested in the House of Lords during the vestarian controversy. The first, a measure dealing with vestments, has already passed Parliament. Others will have the appearance of being purely domestic church matters. But some will press upon the life of the ordinary citizen. The canons concerning marriage and divorce must be watched. It is proposed to outlaw the remarriage of a divorcee who has a previous partner still living. But it is also proposed to set up episcopal courts of nullity where marriages can be declared null and void *ab initio* after the medieval and papal models. It is interesting that it was once proposed to pass this section through Convocation but to abstain from submitting it to Parliament, a decided hint that it would never pass the Lords and Commons but could be



exercised within the Church without parliamentary sanction. Still more curious is the implication that such a policy might well lead to a revival of something like Doctors Commons within the Church and a whole series of church lawyers not amenable to the ordinary secular rules of the legal profession. In short, when the process is complete, the Church, so far as law be concerned, will be an *imperium in imperio*, acting and functioning as a coherent system within which the royal law of the land does not apply.

### The Church as a Department of State

The first question which should strike the citizen who is not a member of the Church of England, is that this body claims a national jurisdiction over his activities, as in matters of marriage and divorce. As an established church, it is the official embodiment of the state upon its religious side. The monarch is the supreme governor of the Church of England and, as Sir William Vernon Harcourt annoyed the bishops by saying as long ago as 1898, the Book of Common Prayer is the schedule of an act of Parliament. In short, the Reformation and its subsequent evolution produced a situation in England whereby the Church of England, whatever claims may be made in some quarters that it is the Church Catholic in England, is as much a department of the state as is the Home Office or the National Health Service! In the last resort, it is by virtue of this fact that the bishops retain their seats in the House of Lords. The present trend is to break down this state connection and to give the Church a legal status on its own. One point must be clarified. Dissenting bodies may clearly set forth their own terms of membership. A person joining one of these bodies, such as the Baptists, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Roman Catholics or the Mormons, probably enters into a form of contract and accepts voluntarily the terms of admission. But this course is merely not open to an established church which claims a relationship to every citizen and a part in the general law-making of the country. If the Church of England wants to pursue its present course in canon law, it should be forced to do so at the price of disestablishment and disendowment after the Irish and Welsh models. It would become a sectarian body independent of the state and free to settle its own affairs in its own way. The state courts would then only retain a right of entry to its affairs in such matters as property trusts and the like. Indeed, if the Freethinker wishes to retain his liberties as a citizen untainted by any form of ecclesiastical inroad, he should already be agitating widely to this end. A type of humanism which seeks not to be nasty to the Christians is, as Dr. Victor Purcell has pointed out in the *Humanist* for November, 1964, not only useless in such a regard but may well be the victim of a very dangerous fifth column.

It might also be pointed out that the revival of canon law is a very important step in the movement for reunion with the Church of Rome. It brings the issue of legalism and the Church of England into far closer relationship to medieval methods and papal administration. Some canon defining "lawful authority" in the Church of England could one day be framed in such a way as to make the whole body subordinate to the Papacy. A department of state cannot easily be in a position to make approaches to Rome, but a church which has become a self-enclosed body is in a far more favourable position. Humanists, Secularists, and others who distrust any such movement would be very wise to keep an eye upon the field of canon law and to ask concerning the final end in view.

All too often, far-reaching measures conferring high privilege upon ecclesiastical buildings or church order

have gone through Parliament upon a nod of the House simply because members have been wholly unaware of the true implications involved. Some such process allowed all ecclesiastical buildings, including church halls and parsonages as well as convent property, to escape from the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act. The whole humanist movement should be made aware of what is going on in the fields involving legislation. Does it really want to see far-reaching matrimonial questions decided by diocesan courts debating an ecclesiastical conception of nullity based upon the legal speculations of medieval canonists? Does it wish to see church courts assuming the place which they assumed in the England of the later Middle Ages? Does it desire a new race of ecclesiastical lawyers administering a system other than that of the Common and Statute Law of England? If it does not so desire, it must realise that the anti-clerical battle is no more won finally in the realm of law than it is won finally in such spheres as secular education. One section of the Freethought movement has refused to be beguiled by pleas for non-militancy or for inactivity. It is doing yeoman service in its demand for the secularisation of the schools. Perhaps it could do far worse than a carrying on of the battle from this point to one of even wider claim, that of a demand for the secular state and for the total disestablishment of the Church. Canon law would then fall into its proper perspectives, and the revised canons be as little a threat to the liberties of free Englishmen as are the canons of the Episcopal Church of Scotland to radical thought and activity north of the border.

## At The Council

THE initial phase of the Vatican Council's discussion of birth control is over probably—as George Armstrong of *The Guardian* (3/11/64) suggested—with a sense of relief from both conservative and progressive bishops. In fact though Cardinal Ottaviani might consider it intolerable to go back on "the principles it has held sacred for centuries" and Cardinal Browne regard the question as "settled in the teachings of Popes Leo XII, Pius XI, and Pius XII," it is clear—as this paper has argued for a long time—that the Roman Catholic Church is having to come to terms with birth control. And—as we also forecast some years ago—the pill is going to provide the Church with a way out of its dilemma. The theological formula has still to be worked out, but there is no doubt that it will. For, as Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht pointed out, many people were leaving the Church because of its birth control ban.

On November 5th, the Dutch Cardinal replied to the bishops who had complained that there was no condemnation of communism in the Council's declaration of modern problems. "It would be more to the point," he said, "if we encouraged dialogue between Catholics and those Communists of goodwill". And he compared such meetings with that of Nicodemus and Christ. The Church, said Cardinal Alfrink, "should always be ready for dialogue with all those who speak the truth".

Another timely reminder for the bishops came from a layman, James Norris of the American Catholic Relief Service. The purse strings of the world are mostly in Christian hands, Mr. Norris said, and it behoved the richer nations to help the poor, while there was "still time to make sense of Christianity" (*The Guardian*, 6/11/64). The nearly blind Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Frings, was one who responded to Mr. Norris's call. Bishops should organise national agencies to help the poor everywhere, he said, regardless of race or religion.



# A Yorkshire Pilgrimage

By F. A. RIDLEY

WHILST recently paying a visit to "God's own county", (Yorkshire of course), and to the salubrious city of Huddersfield, then upon the point of producing its first Prime Minister—that sturdy offspring of "the broad acres", Harold Wilson—I took the opportunity to make a long-desired literary pilgrimage to the birthplace of the Bronte sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne. For by one of those freaks of genius which escape (and let us hope will always continue to escape) the province of exact statistics, the parsonage of Haworth on the heights of the wild Pennine moors produced a unique galaxy of genius. For where else have each of three sisters made a notable contribution to one of the world's greatest literary traditions? Yet here on this wild northern hill-top—remote or so it would seem from all cultural traditions and indeed from almost all normal social intercourse—a sickly and poverty-stricken family, none of whom lived to reach the age of forty, managed to produce between them novels which still rank amongst the more permanent contributions to our literature; two of which indeed, probably rank amongst the masterpieces of world literature, not to mention a by-no-means-inconsiderable body of verse. When Bernard Shaw remarked that, in its production of genius nature was quite indiscriminate, caring nothing for accidents of geographical locality or of social circumstances, he may very well have had the three Brontes in mind.

Though fifty thousand visitors go on pilgrimage every year to the shrine of the Brontes, ironically enough the famous sisters do not appear to have had a drop of genuine Yorkshire blood (if such a thing exists!) in their veins. For their father was Irish and their mother, Maria Branwell, was born in Penzance of Cornish stock. Nor was even their by now world famous name authentic, for the Reverend Patrick Bronte, incumbent of Haworth from 1820 to his death in 1861, was born in a typical Irish log cabin under the genuinely Irish name of Brunty. The now world-famous name was actually a pseudonym taken from the title of Duke of Bronte bestowed upon England's (and presumably Patrick's) naval hero, Lord Nelson, who was created Duke of Bronte by the then Bourbon King of Naples. It indeed seems strange that what is nowadays one of the most famous and honoured names in English literature, should have been borrowed from a title bestowed upon Nelson for his reactionary work in suppressing the adherents of the French Revolution in Naples and for restoring the Bourbons and the Catholic Church, including incidentally the famous "liquefaction" of the blood of St. Januarius which promptly resumed its traditional flow after the arrival of Nelson's fleet and the enforced departure of the French.

However, whilst the Rev. Brunty (alias Bronte) as a staunch Protestant would by no means have approved of St. Januarius, and as an equally staunch Tory—who, we learn always kept a pistol on the premises during the Luddite riots which punctuated the early days of the industrial revolution in Yorkshire—he would no doubt have thoroughly approved of Nelson's political point of view. Charlotte apparently inherited his Tory proclivities for her hero was that staunch pillar of Tory reaction, the Duke of Wellington.

More to the point, the progenitor of the Brontes was himself an author, though apparently of no special talent, in both prose and verse; and his family, bereft of all normal social intercourse on their moors, grew up in an

inherited literary tradition. From early childhood the four surviving young Brontes (two died early) Charlotte, Emily, Anne and Branwell, set to work to produce on microscopic copy-books and in microscopic hand writing, an entire literary corpus in both prose and verse. The germs of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, first sprouted in connection with the mythical African kingdom of Angria, composed and ruled by Charlotte and Branwell, and the fabled Pacific island of Gondal adumbrated by the combined genius of Emily and Anne. The fabulous island of Gondal has long since sunk without trace in the trackless wastes of the Pacific Ocean, but the still extant juvenile literature relating to Angria equals in bulk the most famous adult writings of the three famous sisters.

To attempt to retrace here in any detail the stormy and tragic lives of the four Brontes—itsself the replica of that melancholy saying culled from Greek tragedy, "those whom the gods love, die young"—would be clearly superfluous in view of the extensive treatment the story has received in both fact and fiction. As and when considered in its purely human and non-literary aspect, there can have been few sadder or more frustrated lives than were those of the four individual Brontes. The scornful *bon mot* of the French wit—"happiness, that is too much to ask for! One must leave something for the unsuccessful"—applied both individually and collectively to this amazing family. For none of them except Charlotte exceeded the age of thirty.

Branwell, in whom some have seen a frustrated genius (though the claim that he not Emily, was the author of *Wuthering Heights*, appears to be baseless) drank himself to death at the age of thirty after years of slow and inglorious decay of which echoes exist in his sister's novels. Emily, perhaps the greatest of the Brontes in both prose and verse, and her younger sister and only intimate friend, Anne (whom that George Moore ranked above her more famous sisters as a pure literary artist—perhaps a personal idiosyncrasy of the brilliant author of *The Brook Kerith*) both died miserably at respectively 30 and 29 in 1840 and 1849 after years of ill-health. Even Charlotte, (1816-55), the longest-lived as also the only one to arrive in contemporary literature in her lifetime (*Jane Eyre* being an immediate success) perished miserably at 38 only a few months after contracting what seems to have had all the promise of a highly successful marriage with her father's curate.

Considered again in its purely human aspect, the Bronte story resembles a Greek tragedy, drawing inexorably to its predestined melancholy close—or perhaps even more aptly to one of those grim Norse sagas played out *Peer Gynt* fashion against a sombre northern background very similar to the harsh Yorkshire fells amidst which the three Bronte sisters lived out their mortal lives and wrote their immortal works.

How immortal are they today, over a century after they originally composed? This also is a question that has engaged many gifted pens far better versed in Bronte lore than is this recent pilgrim to their northern shrine. In wide literary popularity Charlotte took the lead from the start: alone of the sisters she achieved contemporary fame and has maintained it ever since. *Jane Eyre* has remained a best seller no doubt a proof of enduring human and literary qualities. But most critics have detected in

(Concluded on page 364)



## This Believing World

Some Roman Catholics must be sorry that the Vatican Council was ever convened. And the Pope must be wondering where is the "Lead Kindly Light" in the Council? There does not appear to be much unity among them on any serious subjects. This is particularly the case with the problem of birth control on which, in spite of some of the more vociferous clergy, the Lord has said absolutely nothing.

★

Yet the way God does interfere in other things is shown by the fiasco of some rain-making machines in Ottawa. Fifty of them were installed to break a long drought (*Daily Express* October 29th) and see what happened! The rain came for 69 consecutive days, swamped the district, and ruined the farmers. Mr. G. Laprise, MP, sadly remarked that rain-making should be left to God though, as farmers in other districts have often found out, "it never rains but it pours". On these things, the Lord seems particularly devoid of a sense of proportion.

★

A writer in the "Church of England Newspaper" is urging Mr. Wilson (who is not an Anglican) to appoint clergymen in their thirties as bishops. It is pointed out that the Church of England "can ill afford to have old men, however honourable in leading positions". But isn't the *C of E Newspaper* a little optimistic? Does it think that young men can bring an out-of-date institution in line with the modern world? Be that as it may, the journal says (*Daily Mail*, October 28th), that a bench of bishops handpicked by the Archbishop of Canterbury would be "an appalling catastrophe". There's unity for you!

★

Some of the most horrific pictures ever painted or drawn have been those in which Christians are shown hanging or burning alive or torturing poor old women—and children! — for witchcraft. We now know that there have never been any witches—in the supernatural sense—but witchcraft is still with us, and the BBC is planning to show viewers the complete ritual. Well—not quite complete, for nearly all witches do their stuff in the nude. Modern witches are not the dreadful old harridans usually depicted as witches, but quite nice people who would never cause a hurricane to blow up, kill off herds of cattle, or poison lovers with love-philters. They are according to the BBC "sane and balanced".

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Miracles of healing have nearly always been the very backbone of religion—Jesus being the greatest healer the world has seen, followed by Luke whose reputation as the second greatest healer rests on the fact that there is no record that he ever healed anybody. Apart from these, we have many modern healers who are either helped by Jesus direct, or by Jesus through dead doctors in spirit form.

★

These healers have been "investigated" by J. D. Potter for the *News of the World*, and his conclusion (September 27th) is that it is possible they do do some good but in the main they do very little to "cure". Most of the cures, says Mr. Potter, concern people with "phantom" ulcers, or "sub-conscious nervous conditions." In fact, neither Jesus nor spirit doctors have anything to do with any cures.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Quatercentenary of the birth of Christopher Marlowe

LECTURE AND READING by Richards Clements, David Tribe, Paul Hansard in the Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1., on Friday, December 4th, 8 p.m.

## American Priest attacks Catholic Schools

IF the first Roman Catholic president of the United States had gone to Catholic schools, he would probably never have reached the White House said a priest, the Rev. John M. Joyce, editor of *The Critic*, of the diocese of Oklahoma City-Tulsa.

"John F. Kennedy would not have become president," Father Joyce argued (*The Washington Post*, 21/10/64), had he received his formal education in Catholic schools, precisely because Catholic schools are what they are. Catholic schools do not train men and women to be leaders in our society. They do quite the opposite. They tend to separate, to divorce men and women from our society."

Most graduates of US parochial schools tend, according to Father Joyce, "to involve themselves almost exclusively with church groups and in church activities." President Kennedy "very likely" would have been one of them, had he "gone to Catholic schools from kindergarten through university."

Very few Catholics were "deeply involved" in community affairs, the Father continued. The vast majority who do involve themselves are, like Kennedy, products of non-Catholic schools, Parochial schools are "ghetto" schools.

"Education cannot be genuine, unless it is received in and by the community to which we all belong . . . Only to the degree that we are actually involved in the pluralistic society that is 20th-century America can we possibly say that we are at grips with reality." Catholic schools made "very little sense" because they were preparing children for life in a Catholic community "that doesn't exist".

The defence most often offered for a separate school system in the US was the value of a Catholic environment. This was described by Father Joyce as a "huge delusion". Christian growth and development came through conflict, by "plunging into the deep." There was no Christian formation without risk. Recent sociological studies had shown that American Catholic school graduates were more faithful to their religion in terms of practice than Catholics who went to non-Catholic schools, but the Father regarded this as an unfair comparison, because nearly all the Church's efforts now went into the parochial schools, and Catholics in the public (state) schools were neglected.

Father Joyce implied agreement with the view expressed by a Catholic writer, Mary Perkins Ryan, who started a major debate in the US last spring with the publication of her book, *Are Parochial Schools the Answer?* She called for their gradual abolition and said that better religious education could be provided for all Roman Catholics, if the Church were relieved of the burden of providing secular education.

### A YORKSHIRE PILGRIMAGE

(Concluded from page 363)

Emily's solitary novel, *Wuthering Heights*, which achieved little recognition in its author's lifetime, signs of a more profound imaginative originality and of a more starkly dynamic elemental power; whilst (as already noted) at least one famous critic has given the nowadays little-known Anne his first preference over her more widely known sisters. But the Brontes also wrote verse, and here Emily is *facile princeps*; her best verse like her solitary novel has an extraordinary power and a quite unique originality, although its outspoken mysticism, even if coupled with a suggestion of definite unorthodoxy may repel some humanist readers.

Truly an amazing trio! Their gaunt residence will surely long remain the Mecca of literary pilgrims.



# THE FREETHINKER

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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 J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD.  
(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: 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 15th, 6.45 p.m.: M. BOWEN, "Are We Civilised?"  
Havering Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, November 17th, 8 p.m.: ANTONY GREY, "Homosexuality and the Law".  
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 15th, 6.30 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Religion in the School".  
Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1.), Sunday, November 15th, 7.30 p.m.: CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL, "Thomas Paine and the Age of Reason".  
National Secular Society, Secular Education Month, November, 1964. Details of Public Meetings on "Religion in the School" on page 368.  
Richmond and Twickenham Humanist Group (Room 5 Community Centre, Sheen Road, Richmond), Thursday, November 19th, 8 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, November 15th, 11 a.m.: Dr. J. A. C. BROWN, "Developments in Parapsychology". Tuesday, November 17th, 7.30 p.m.: E. PETRAKIS, "Helping the Social Misfit".  
Surrey (Assembly Rooms), Tuesday November 17th, 8 p.m.: Debate: "That the Bible is the word of God," Mr. ATKINSON (Christadelphians) and J. W. BARKER, (Kingston Branch NSS).  
The Thomas Paine Society Annual General Meeting, Lewes, Sussex, Saturday, November 14th: Speaker, F. H. AMPHLETT  
MICKLEWRIGHT, Details from R. W. MORRELL, 443 Meadow Lane, Nottingham.

## Notes and News

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S "Secular Education Month" opened to a gratifying amount of publicity in such papers as *The Guardian* and *The Yorkshire Post* but none so far as we could see, in the *Daily Telegraph*—perhaps because Peter Simple was on holiday. It was left to *The Sunday Times*, therefore, to supply a faintly derisory touch under the heading, "That old-time irreligion" (1/11/64). "Even with a Labour Government, the campaign has little prospect of success," it said. "Although founded almost a century ago, the Society's only real Parliamentary victory was the passing of the 1888 Oaths

Act." But the campaign, coupled with the social work of the British Humanist Association, may, *The Sunday Times* went on, "herald a return of some of the Secularist movements' former militancy." Well, there was a lot to be said for that old-time irreligion!

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ONLY a "miracle of revival" could prevent the proportion of Christians in the world dropping by at least a third before the year 2000, the Archbishop of York told the Wakefield Diocesan Conference on October 31st. Are we ready to realign our forces?" Dr. Coggan asked. "Whereas 33 per cent of the world's population in 1950 were Christians, this figure will have dropped to 20 per cent in 2000" when the population will have doubled (*The Yorkshire Post*, 2/11/64). The Archbishop expressed concern that the "millions coming up in the world" should be fed with "salacious and Communist literature."

★  
To illustrate the first of its extracts from the recently-published *Objections to Roman Catholicism* (Constable 18s.), *The Observer* (1/11/64) reproduced a child's view of hell, a drawing by a 14-year-old pupil at a Catholic school. It depicted a number of skeletons among the flames, an additional one hurtling headfirst into them, and a residue of odd bones and skulls below. Mrs Margaret Goffin refers—in the book—to Mill's remark that compared with the doctrine of eternal torment, any other objection to Christianity sinks into insignificance. Mrs. Goffin regrets that Rome is not yet prepared to give it up, and tells of a book published in 1964 with the Southwark *imprimatur*, intended for Roman Catholic grammar school children, which "speaks of the physical fires of hell and the wicked writhing in envy and remorse for all eternity."

★  
ENGLAND wouldn't be the same without its pageantry, we are told. Without the fancy-dress Ceremony of the Installation of Knights of the most Honourable Order of the Bath, it would be a little less ridiculous—as *The Observer* clearly showed (1/11/64). During rehearsals, someone it seems, had tripped over the Coronation chair, and had set off an alarm in the process; there was joking about "whether old so-and-so would make the altar steps"; and Earl Alexander of Tunis had thought it a bit of a shambles. In the Queen's presence, however, the Knights dutifully swore to "defend Maidens, Widows and Orphans" and were admonished to "use their sword to the Glory of God." It's lucky there are no more dragons to defend maidens from, *The Observer* remarked, because, "By the time people have climbed the slow honours promotion pyramid... to the pinnacle of Knight Grand Cross, they are a bit old for sword play."

★  
PETER HOWARD, leader of MRA—but described by *The Guardian* (30/10/64) merely as "the author" and by *The Glasgow Herald* as "author and playwright"—told a women's luncheon in Liverpool of the evils of the Edinburgh Festival. It had produced good shows and entertainment, he conceded, but it had also produced "a naked lady being wheeled across the stage in public, a posse of poets, who use their talents to thrust Godlessness and dirt down the national gullet, to proclaim that God is dead, and that right and wrong no longer exist." It had even produced a troupe of African ladies, naked to the waist, "who display themselves in their dances to the slobbering eyes of art-lovers". Why couldn't Liverpool put on a festival, Mr. Howard asked the ladies, that would "restore faith, decency, and traditions of sound family life to our island"? What he was really calling for, we suppose, was a festival of his own pure—and puerile—plays.



# My Story

By A REVERENT HUMANIST

I AM a reverent Humanist. People often ask me how I came to adopt this outlook or—as I prefer myself to put it—how I didn't come to adopt any other outlook. I suppose really it was inevitable. Like going to the old man's public school, one had never seriously thought of doing anything else. I mean, intellectually it's quite impossible today to be a dedicated *Christian*, but it would be equally dreadful to think of being actually *opposed* to Christianity.

Normally I'm very placid and easy-going. Life's far too short to get involved in unseemly or embarrassing bickering. The world is so complicated it's impossible really to be sure of *anything*, and it does seem to me that if you go to the trouble of understanding them, all *positive* ideologies are tending in the same direction anyhow. There's only one thing that can really make me mad, and that's the *negative* outlook of some Humanists—the aggressive Rationalists, Freethinkers, Secularists and the rest. All rather distasteful; *outré* if you get my point.

Sometimes its faulty education. I mean, nobody with a mellow Oxbridge background could dream for a moment of calling himself an *Atheist*. For one thing, it's so old-fashioned. Of course it's all right for proper scholars like the Bishop of Woolwich to do it just to make a point, but for anyone to make such a claim *seriously* is nothing but downright bad taste. Often I'm sure the reasons are psychological too:—didn't get on well with their father, got too much religion when they were young, exhibitionists, like to shock people, had some nasty experience with a vicar in the vestry, that sort of thing. Dreadful people, poor dears. I hate being beastly to *anyone*, but I honestly don't mind being beastly to them. Not that I really see them much. I'm usually too busy seeing bishops.

The fact is, when you view it in its correct perspective, Christianity is such an ennobling creed. Its propositions mayn't actually be *true*, but I can't see how European civilisation could have got on without them. I'm not a professional historian, but it's clear enough even to me that we are all of us enormously indebted to Christianity for our Christian heritage.

Compared with this—let's face it—what can humanism offer? I'm sometimes asked what I mean by humanism I'm not really sure that I can explain it. It's something you *know*—you feel it deep down inside you. I always find it a little embarrassing in university debates to defend it. I suppose it's to do with people—being for people. What it amounts to is that I haven't ever found much time actually to study the good points in humanism. I've really been far too busy studying the good points in Christianity.

You know, it does seem to me that this is an enormously important thing to do. It does so much to foster goodwill and tolerance in the world. Happily my researches have led me irresistibly to the conclusion that Jesus was the greatest Humanist who ever lived. I've also been able to show that all the great figures in Christianity—Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, Dominic, Francis, Luther, Calvin, Xavier, Cranmer, Newman and Chardin—though not of course as great as Jesus, were outstanding Humanists. I feel that if only I'd been allowed a bit more time I could have shown the same of those much-maligned men Torquemada, Cotton Mather and Pius XII. I wasn't surprised that some of those negative Humanists

misjudged my work, but I must say I was surprised—and deeply hurt—when some Christians also failed to understand. I remember one occasion when there were four of us in a room: an old-fashioned Christian, an old-fashioned Secularist, a Modernist Christian and myself. After we'd been talking half an hour or so, the old-fashioned Christian and the Secularist went off for a drink, apparently the best of friends, and as they went out of the door the Christian said that he couldn't stand people who didn't know what they believed, and equally—with what looked like a nasty glance at me—that he couldn't stand people who didn't know what they didn't believe.

But what impresses me enormously is how enlightened Christians are today—certainly the Christians I meet, but it's true the world over. Look at the inspiring example of the Second Vatican Council. Wasn't it magnanimous and in the true traditions of Christian charity when the Church Fathers humbly admitted to the separated brethren that they may have made some mistakes in the past—and I don't believe reports that that section has been entirely rewritten by the Curia. And then again look at that wonderfully progressive and liberal pronouncement by the prelates—or some of them anyhow—about the Jews, saying that living Jews can't really be held responsible for decide two thousand years ago because if they (i.e. the biblical Jews) had known Jesus was God they wouldn't have done it. This may sound a bit complicated, but I think it is a simply wonderful gesture. Then look how understanding and democratic the Vatican's become. I mean, imagine the bishops having women present as observers, and admitting that ordinary people, even Catholics, do have intellectual, social and economic *problems*.

From my own personal experience I can pay tribute to the new atmosphere of tolerance and co-operation abroad in society. I've frequently been asked to do book reviews for the Sunday papers or broadcast on radio and television, and it's not because they don't know what my views are. I've never compromised in any way by claiming to be a Christian, even a *liberal* Christian. No, not a bit of it. I've always said straight out, no beating about the bush, that I was a Humanist and that was that and I wasn't going to apologise for it. And do you know, everyone has been so understanding. Naturally (it's the least I can do) I've always taken care not to say anything to *offend* people, and I really feel that I can claim some credit for the new *rapprochement* between belief and non-belief.

I've been able to explain, in non-scientific language suitable for mass media (and of course I must confess that I'm not a science man myself), how there's no longer any essential conflict between religion and science, that they're simply talking in different languages which are both valid in their way. I've emphasised the great *mysteries* there are in nature, and the need of ordinary people to have some ritual to bring meaning to their lives and to interpret the numinous. I think I've also done a lot to show how powerful are the latent forces in man and what a lot he can learn from spiritualism, parapsychology and mystical experiences. And I've admitted how arid scepticism is and what a nasty lot the nineteenth century Rationalists really were. I can honestly say that nobody has ever attempted to censor any of my Humanist articles and broadcasts, nor, as far as I am aware, even complained.

It was the same when I was teaching. You know the noise Secularists are making with the worn-out catcheries



about "secular education"—just when we all thought things were settling down nicely—and they've complained (among a lot of other things) about humanism being a bar to promotion. All I can say is that it was never any obstacle in my career. I became a headmaster all right, and was never at all embarrassed by collective worship or religious instruction. At least once a week in assembly I was able to have between the hymn and the prayer—a reading from the works of a well-known Humanist like Julian Huxley or Teilhard de Chardin. As for religious instruction, I told the bishops quite bluntly that religion would have to be taught *educationally*, and they agreed at once. I was even invited on to some of the committees working out Agreed Syllabuses, and I must say I found everyone very easy-going and tolerant. Perhaps I was a little surprised to find when the reports were actually written that there was rather more Christianity in the syllabus after than before, but they told me, quite properly, that as a member of the committee it was my duty to uphold the decision of the majority.

I must say that recent events have been a great shock to me. I knew of course that some Atheists had suddenly disappeared, but I naturally assumed that they had been picked up for some vulgar demonstration of blasphemy or suchlike. And I also knew that many clerical gentlemen had been seen in the vicinity of some heaps of wood being assembled on Tower Hill, but I supposed it was some sort of Harvest Festival. When they actually revealed the purpose and told me I was on the list—well, I confess that at first I felt rather bitter. But they assured me it would be done in all clemency and without the shedding of blood. They explained politely that human pride was a dreadful thing and that it was necessary for the wellbeing of my immortal soul that this be done to my temporal body. Naturally I offered to recant at once, and said that it wouldn't be necessary even to baptise me as that had been done already. But they considered that I'd never said anything definite enough to recant. They simply quoted Jesus to the effect that "he who is not for us is against us".

## Mediums and the Police

By H. CUTNER

THOSE readers who are interested in spiritualism will have noticed that I have often pointed out how easily mediums can get in touch with uncle George or aunt Martha in Summerland, and prove their case by remarking on the "albert" always worn by the gentleman, or the antique necklace always a distinguishing mark of the lady, while living in this vale of tears. How could a medium know these things, and many more, if not in touch with the spirit world? While on earth, the ornaments were quite "material"—in Summerland they must be in "spirit" form, but there all the same. On the other hand, murderers have never been caught because of clues supplied by a spirit to a medium and by the medium to the police. The answer to this has come readily from the Editor of *Psychic News*, Maurice Barbanell. Mediums were not out to help Scotland Yard but to prove man's eternal life. And that is that.

However, there are exceptions to almost every rule, and if mediums miserably fail to help solve murder mysteries—as they so far have done—there are exceptions; and Mr. Barbanell has been good enough to send us a cutting from his own journal headed, "World-famous medium helps baffled police" which sets out to prove that unsolved crimes can be solved by a medium.

We are informed that the "world-famous" medium is an American lady, "a plump warm-hearted grandmother"; who has "strange, extra-sensory perception abilities"; and has "probably helped more people than any psychic in America." She has earned the title of "a one-woman FBI," and is not only frequently consulted by police who are baffled by crime, but also because "she has located countless objects and missing persons".

One would have expected this record of success to have been broadcast and to have filled countless American journals—never slow to publicise any proof of extra-sensory perception. Alas, the story as given in *Psychic News*, does not come direct from America but from *Australia*. Its author is Jack Harrison Pollack, and it is not an unfair question to ask how does he know and how can he prove it? For, in the whole of the article sent us—which occupies nearly two columns—there is not a scrap of

evidence for anything the medium claims; we learn purely and simply what Mr. Pollack says *she* says.

When remarkable claims are made, we want full documentary proof, names, dates, locations, and so on. Simply to tell us that "the police" were baffled, and the plump grandmother, Mrs. Sternfels, solved all sorts of mysteries and crimes for them is expecting from us the same sort of credulity demanded of Christians. Have faith, and don't ask questions! Alas, for Mr. Barbanell, I have no faith whatever either in Mr. Pollack or Mrs. Sternfels.

In one case, we are told, she had a "vision" of a "limping man," and immediately the police picked up a limping man, and there you are. Obviously, if she hadn't had the vision, the police would not have known of the limping man, and no arrest would have been made. But why does not Mr. Pollack give us the fullest particulars of the limping man, together with the grateful thanks from the police to the lady, and the full names of everyone concerned, together with the sentence given to the unlucky criminal? I ask these questions without expecting them to be answered. Such questions never are.

There are people in Australia no doubt, who will believe everything Mr. Pollack writes about his plump grandmother from America, without making the least effort to check his story, and his articles may well be quoted years hence. You have an apt illustration of this in *Psychic News* for October 24th. There we are told for the 20,893rd time that "the famous medium D. D. Home floated in and out of an upper window". There is not a scrap of truth or evidence for this, but it will appear in all spiritualist journals and books for many, many years yet. Like Christian lies, this yarn can never be caught up with.

Let me reiterate what I have pointed out so often in criticising spiritualism. We have now dozens of unsolved murder cases in this country, and if there was the slightest truth in spiritualism, mediums galore could have solved them by getting in touch with the departed spirits of the victims and thus helping the police in their fight against crime. They—the mediums—have never solved *one*.



## Points From New Books

THE bizarre encounters of Adam, a contemporary writer of obituaries for a popular newspaper, with a mysterious gentleman whose face is his own death mask create some delightful sick jokes in Andrew Sinclair's amusingly grotesque novel, *The Raker* (Cape, 18s.). Then when Adam's wife begs him to pray his way out of his difficulties, Adam replies that prayer may be coming back as modern science confirms that kneeling's the best method of slimming! Later, Adam has an encounter with the vicar. Can Adam really think that a whole church with millions of communicants can be wrong? the vicar demands. Adam retorts: "Why should an error that lasts become a virtue?" The vicar pleads with Adam and asks him if he can bear to live without the thought of Someone to grant grace and forgiveness. Adam answers: "Argument by nonsense. It's bum deal, the world, vicar. God's the only excuse that saves the weak from the strong." Anyone who can make it on his own two feet, Adam suggests, has no need of God. The dialogue progresses through the vicar's argument by false hope, his argument by terror, etc.; and finally the cleric has to depart defeated in a scurry of cassock. Adam is left to sum up: "Of course God did not exist; but He certainly made enough trouble for those who knew He did not!"

Like the saint, Michael Harratt, the narrator in John Pollock's *They Wouldn't Stop Talking* (Blond, 18s.), hears voices. But Michael's visitations occur because he is a lush. The theme has been handled before, yet Mr. Pollock's novel stands out because his chats with "Them" (the voices of paranoia) and his own meditations are exceptionally lively. For instance, he tells himself: "I did not believe in God, not because He had been ruled out by positivists, but because nobody so unpleasant and incompetent could, in my opinion, exist. But if one pretended he was around somewhere, why should one praise Him for work that one did not like? God, judged on His record, was like some hopeless inefficient general, some said in outer space, endlessly sending people 'over the top'. If God is going to be credited—or discredited—with the existence of the world, the churches should be full of complaint boxes. Not all toadstools are poisonous, but sufficient amount are to make one annoyed."... All right then, God, let's start talking about those damned toadstools!

OSWELL BLAKESTON

## CORRESPONDENCE

### HUMANIST AND FREETHINKER

May I comment upon two points raised by Mr. Starkie's letter? The first is that of the distinction between Humanist and Freethinker. At the present time, it is blurred and indistinct merely because the term, "Humanist," is apt to be used with a varying imprecision and because too many who use the term are apparently opposed to any form of anti-religious, secularist or rationalistic activity. As a result, a *sol-distant* religious Humanist wing has been thrown up which would seem to see co-operation with Christians as the final end to be achieved! Indeed, Dr. Victor Purcell has recently hinted that a fifth column is at work, so far has this type of propaganda bitten in. It is up to Freethinkers to show that their label still denotes the historic anti-clerical, anti-ecclesiastical tradition which left its mark upon the England of the last century and which still has much to do today before it can say that it has won its battles. I would suggest that a time is fast approaching when the rationalistic Freethinker will be forced to disown the amorphous pro-religious wing of humanism as representing something running counter to his viewpoint and inhibiting the type of work which he wishes to see undertaken.

On Mr. Starkie's point over Moses, it seems to me to be a pity when historical perspective is abandoned. Seen historically, the Mosaic tradition was certainly a progressive movement forward from its Babylonian sources within the history of primitive

jurisprudence. Regarded from a contemporary standpoint, the Mosaic tradition is something which, if advocated today, can only be regarded as belonging to the distant past in human thought. The whole issue of Moses, Calvin or Stalin depends for its assessment upon the exact standpoint from which judgments are measured and made.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

### OLYMPIC GAMES AND HUMANISM

F.A. Ridley would have us believe that the Olympic Games are a humanist festival, but who is going to believe him? Humanism is supposed to produce harmony, and it is very questionable indeed if the Games succeeded in that respect.

Regarding Theodosius the Great, I should like to say that by his time the true classical deities were no real menace to Christianity. The public city-cults had long since been inwardly dead, and had little or no hold upon the Greek mind. The formidable enemy to Christianity was Hellenism, emerging as a powerful new church, born of the self-same spirit as Christianity itself. The pagan churches had their anchorites, prophets, miraculous conversions, scriptures and revelations.

The greatest of Plotinus's followers, Iamblichus finally, about AD 300, evolved a mighty system of ritual for the pagan church, and his disciple Julian devoted—and finally sacrificed his life to attempting to establish this church for all eternity. He sought even to create cloisters for meditating men and women and to introduce ecclesiastical penance.

No wonder St. Augustine dared to assert that the true religion had existed before the coming of Christianity, in the form of the classical.

If Mr Ridley had been alive at that time, he would not have had much to choose from, and I don't think the Olympic Games then would have appealed to him very much. Aristotle said that the boys who train for the Games suffer in health, as is shown by the fact that those who have been victors as boys are hardly ever victors as men.

RONALD SMITH

### SECULAR EDUCATION MONTH, NOVEMBER 1964

#### "Religion in the School"

**Nottingham** (Adult Education Centre, 14-22 Shakespeare Street). Friday, November 13th, 7 p.m. (tea) 7.30 p.m. (meeting). Speaker: David Tribe. Nottingham NSS and Nottingham Humanists.

**Birmingham** (Digbeth Civic Institute, Digbeth) Saturday, November 14th, 3 p.m. Speakers: Richard Clements, David Tribe, Professor P. Sargant Florence.

**Leicester** (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate) Sunday, November 15th, 6.30 p.m. Speaker: David Tribe.

**Manchester** (Register Office Hall, 64 Lower Ormond Street, All Saints) Sunday, November 15th, 7.30 p.m. Speaker: Margaret McIlroy.

**Reading** (Rainbow Hall, Cheapside) Tuesday, November 17th, 8 p.m. Speakers: Margaret McIlroy, James Johnson, Dr. Ronald Goldman, Bob Crew. Chair: David Collis.

**Richmond** (Parkshot Rooms, Parkshot) Tuesday, November 17th, 8 p.m. Speakers: F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, Hilda Flint, G. N. Dev. Chair: Nigel Sinnott.

**Poplar**: (Bromley Public Hall, Bow Road, E.3) Friday, November 20th, 8 p.m. Speakers: David Tribe, F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, Simon Ellis. Chair: Mrs. E. Venton.

**Westminster** (Alliance Hall, 12 Caxton Street, S.W.1.) Monday, November 30th, 7.45 p.m. Speakers: Harold Pinter, Margaret Knight, David Collis. Chair: David Tribe.

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