

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXV—No. 32

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

TRADITION has fossilised a great many customs that were considered necessary by primitive man but have lost all meaning nowadays. Take for instance our greeting habits; they arose at the stage when every stranger was a suspect enemy. So if people approached each other in a peaceful spirit they had to show that they did not carry arms and trusted each other. They did this by putting down their helmets and thrusting a hand into the other's hand. The lifting of one's headgear, and the shaking of hands are our survivals in this respect; in the Far East the palms of both hands are put together and the Semites express the wish of "Peace".

Similarly, our traditional wedding customs arose in conditions when marriage had a quite different aspect. Without going into the intricacies of matrilineal or patrilineal society, exogamy or endogamy and totem magic with the restrictions of marriage groups, it can be broadly stated that primitive man and woman have different but complementary tasks. Apart from producing and rearing the offspring, the woman generally toils, the man has to be ready to protect and defend his kin. Labour is divided between groups—at one stage sex groups. Marriage is the safeguard for the smooth functioning of this division of labour.

The Economic Contract

It has become fashionable to deny that society is regulated by economic considerations, and marriage in particular is presented as a predominantly sexual union, with the transfer of bridewealth for the sole purpose of providing the necessary sanction to the offspring, i.e. making them legitimate and affiliated members of a certain clan. However, this is explaining primitive conditions in terms of modern society. So long as a man kept within the magic blood bonds he could have any amount of sex relations without recourse to marriage, and Malinowsky reported that the Trobrianders were unrestricted in their pre-nuptial intercourse until marriage, which was concluded by publicly sharing a meal. This clearly points to an economic contract.

The wife has to be purchased just because she represents labour that is to be transferred from her clan (or father) to that of the husband; if the groom is unable to pay her value in kind or cattle, he may do it in service, but as the main domestic or agricultural worker the woman is an asset which is frequently stolen or captured. The "Best Man" is in fact the groom's best friend who knows about his plans of rape and accompanies him; and the honeymoon journey is a survival of the elopement into hiding.

In many parts of the world the bride is hidden before the wedding day and there are mock fights between the parties, not seldom with a ceremonial abduction of the bride.¹

Fertility Rites

Nowadays when so much is talked of the birth control pill and family planning, it is slightly ridiculous that customs should still be strictly observed which originally were nothing less than fertility rites. In olden times when more

hands secured more wealth, a large family was what everybody wanted; to express this wish to the benevolent life spirits, flowers were carried or thrown at the bride—now symbolised by coloured paper shavings (sometimes called *confetti* or *coriandoli*, as sweetmeat and sugar-coated coriander seed were thrown). The children who now follow the couple into the church were formerly put in the bride's lap. And the "old boot" is not only a vagina symbol, it

represents Fortune's cornucopia, the horn of plenty. Prior to producing containers and vessels, primitive man used what nature provided: gourds or calabash, cranium and horn. Sexual lust being epitomised in the he-goat—hence purely procreative nature deities from

Pan to the devil were conceived in his image—his horn is connected with the idea of fertility. Its substitute is the boot (or shoe), successor of the ancient hose. That is why children—now the recipients, no longer the presents themselves—put out shoes or stockings to receive their Christmas presents.

In the wedding ritual, the boot or shoe is so to speak the visiting card for the defloration in the bridal night. The wedding cake is an ancient sacrifice, and the ceremonial cutting of the cake testifies to guests and ghosts (i.e. the spirits of the home) that the couple have started a common household.² Feasting together, the bride was introduced to the kinsmen; the wedding banquet today is a survival of this ceremony.

Superstitious people are always afraid that their happiness may arouse the envy and wrath of evil spirits, hence the necessity of appeasing sacrifices on the occasions of births, weddings, etc. All our greetings and wishing formulas are part of old magic. In Central Europe people would, however, be angry and inconsolable if you wished them luck instead of "Break your leg and legs", because wishing well would attract the spite of a host of evil spirits. The throwing away of money is an appeasing sacrifice of the bride.

The Rite on the Threshold

The fire of the hearth was the most sacred place in the home and the newly weds used to go round it so that the *genius loci* might get acquainted with the new mistress of the house and sanction her presence and right to cook. However, before you can reach this altar of the private homestead you have to pass through the entrance door and cross another seat of spirits: the threshold.

The Roman god Janus, being the main protector of gates and doors, carried the keys that open and lock everything; he survives in St. Peter, the celestial doorkeeper. Janus had many domestic helpers, among them the spirits of the threshold. The Bible deals with them frequently (cf. Ez. 9, 3; 10, 4-18; Zeph. 1/9; 1. Sam. 5, 4ff) and the capsule (called *mezuzah*) nailed to the doorpost in a way reminiscent of a penis in erection (cf. the Greek *Hermi* in front of doors believed to ward off the entrance of evil spirits) is an apotropaic charm (wrought by means of nakedness or noise).³ According to Exodus 28, 33ff,

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Wedding Customs and All That

By T. HILL

priests must have little bells on the hem of their robes in order to scare away the demons of the threshold, and the priests of Dagon at Asdod did not tread on the threshold of the temple (1. Sam. 5, 5).

The bride, arriving as a stranger, must therefore be borne over this magic seat of the domestic spirits.⁴

The dead hand of tradition—including religion—petrifies the dead shells of originally magic action, now devoid of all meaning in a modern world. In a society of slave owners it was easy for the masters to observe a full sabbatarian rest, i.e. to have just a bit more leisure than generally on other days, without any harm to the community, or to fuss about food taboos engendered from magical ideas: ritual slaughter for kosher food aimed at cleansing the meat as much as possible from the blood which was thought to house the "life spirits" of the victim, crying out for vengeance (Gen. 4, 10). Catholics eat fish on Friday i.e. the day of the goddess Freiya—one of the many personifications of Virgo, to whom the fish was for astrological reasons holy.

Marriage is foremost a union of persons, hence there are various symbolic features connected with it, such as joining of hands, binding together of garments in magic knots, exchange of rings and other symbolic shackles. Presents of jewellery and ornaments tend to secure the magic power of precious stones and metals; in particular, ornaments are amulets to guard the various orifices of the body against the entrance of evil spirits. Plant magic also serves for protection. Then we have rites in which bride and groom eat together or march round a fire and present themselves as joint masters of the house.⁵

The majority of the rites, however, are performed to promote the fertility of the union (e.g. pouring of rice, wheat, flowers, and in particular water on the head of the bride; the use of children in the ceremony, etc.). Since the low technical level of primitive labour required many

hands, there was never a danger in too many. If the community grew too quickly there was always room for the surplus to settle somewhere else, but shortage of labour meant extinction, and infant mortality among primitive people is very high. The magical rites closely connected with marriage and childbirth were the ideological expression of a stage in human development which we have long since left behind. Living in the machine age, we rather are afraid of overpopulation, but we still perform the primitive fertility rites.

1. Simulated rape of the bride or conflict for her possession are surviving features of marriage by capture or elopement. As soon as slaves (or other servile classes) did the actual work, the clan or family of the bride was no longer at the receiving end but had to pay a dowry for the maintenance of the girl.

2. At the *confarreatio*—the solemnised wedding in ancient Rome—a cake was offered to Iuppiter Farcaus and sacramentally shared by bride and groom in the presence of the Pontifex Maximus, the flamen dialis and ten other witnesses.

3. On this doorpost symbol cf. also Dt. 6, 9; 11, 20. The practice of inscribing doorposts and lintels with holy signs, words or texts to guard the home against the entrance of evil spirits is attested in many lands.

4. On the bells on the skirt of the Jewish high priest's robe see also Ex. 39, 25. The bride still being a stranger must treat the spirit of the threshold with great reverence—she may step over it (never on it), provided she does it with the right foot foremost.

The ancient Slavs called these spirits *domovoj* and propitiated them at certain periods by offerings. The threshold—associated with the hearth—was the first shrine where sometimes even the dead of the house were buried. Tradition has it that the Britons buried their god Belinus at the gates of the Thames (Billingsgate).

5. The Roman bride after having been taken with a ritual show of force from the arms of her mother, was led in procession to the house of her husband by three boys, sons of living parents, whilst nuts were thrown. At the gate, the young wife smeared the doorposts with oil and fat and then tied a thread of wool around them as sacrifice. She was then lifted over the threshold and "received into community of fire and water" (i.e. permitted to cook at the hearth). Then she shared out three coins (*asses*), one to her husband, one to the spirit of the hearth, and the third she threw at the nearest crossways.

From Believer to Disbeliever

By DORINE CLARK

I TOOK that giant step—from believer to disbeliever. Rather, it was a gradual walking away from the trodden path of cultist religion, starting with my abrupt affranchise from the Catholic faith and its precepts I was raised in.

I was born in Austria, where the Catholic faith was the main religion as I guess it still is. My father was what they called a "Taufbuch Christian", meaning one baptised in the faith, but not a regularly practising church member, while my mother was an ardent adherent of the faith, writing tracts and articles for countless Catholic magazines. At age nine, I, an only child of well-to-do parents, was placed as a boarder into the convent school of Sta. Christina, in the vicinity of Vienna, where I remained in the care of nuns till age sixteen. No matter what may have been going on in other convent schools, I cannot say one word against the nuns, who were dedicated teachers. Nothing immoral or unethical took place within those convent walls while I was there.

Looking back, recalling the unsanitary, unhygienic conditions we had to contend with, the rigid discipline we underwent daily, hourly, I know any American child would have rebelled. I do not intend to dwell here on the sad fact that we were only permitted a full bath once a month—this, to be taken with our shift on, for decency's sake—the weekly foot baths, and changing your underwear, no matter how soiled, once a week. But it was the rigid spiritual routine that dented my mind, endowing me with

a deep-rooted guilt complex that made suffering an attractive necessity for redemption. I became a show-off, a saintly hypocrite, kneeling on the ice-cold dormitory floor, with the chaste curtain enshrouding my bed left open, eyes closed, blonde hair falling picturesquely, (so I hoped), down to my fat behind, my hands in the well-known "praying hands" position. I was partly praying, but the greater part of me wanted to be noticed and admired as a budding saint. I caught various colds, spending time kneeling on the cold floor, holding my private mass. Now fifty years later, I'm still trying to catch up on sleep I missed then, getting up at dawn to attend daily mass in the ice-cold chapel. At weekly confession, I invented interesting sins, that were forgiven in order for me to partake of the holy communion afterwards. Exposed to this mental assault for seven years, I became a fear-ridden girl, burning with a false humility, over-anxious to turn the other cheek—a glorified humility that made me unfit for the daily struggle of life and the competition going on outside convent walls.

Maybe this spirit of false, misplaced humility was the gravest wrong inflicted on me by my Catholic convent upbringing, endowing me with a lasting inferiority complex I was unable to shed for years. To me, a dreamy, anaemic child, endowed with a writer's luxuriant imagination, the sensuous imagery, the ornamental liturgic rites of the Catholic Church, held immense appeal. So much so,

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The World is Too Much With Us

By GILLIAN HAWTIN

IN TACKLING the problem of "The Worldly Church", the second essay in *Objections to Roman Catholicism*, John M. Todd, of the religious publishing firm Darton, Longman and Todd, attempts to outline some answer to an objection—almost a series of objections—historically very much at the heart of English Protestantism. Those Anglican worshippers who have kept themselves aloof from neo-Catholic movements within the Established Church, find repose in the quiet and simple dignity of what has become a native tradition of worship, in the vernacular, with (by any standards) a fine musical heritage, a married and approachable clergy, and a hallowed insularity. Anathema and remote from the country parsonage, the yew-lined churchyard with its lynch-gate and the bells floating across the buttercup meadows of grazing cattle, is the pomp of the prelate and pontiff of what Todd terms "the triumphal tradition". This, to the Anglican, is of the quintessence of the "Scarlet Woman", repudiated at the Reformation. To the Catholic mentality, reared in the feudal love of symbolism it is, rather, the "visible and outward sign" (to employ the phrase always used of the sacraments) of a divine authority, the power of the Keys. Probably the average lay Catholic rather likes it; the Protestant mistrusts it utterly.

Hitherto, the Catholic apologist, attempting to "explain" this paradoxical contradiction between the men who rule in the Vatican, as in some spiritual—and perhaps not so spiritual—Kremlin or Pentagon, and their profession to follow an Exemplar who is "meek and humble of heart", have pointed to a basic paradox at the very heart of the Christian position. The Church is "in the world and not of it". It addresses to salvation all kinds and conditions of men. For this, it has been pleaded, a rigid, uniform and authoritarian organisation has necessarily been evolved. Yet the organisation exists solely to bid men put their whole trust and whole purpose in another, an unseen, world, to the deprivation of comfort, and the loss of life itself, should need demand. Itself an *imperium*, it demands that its members sacrifice themselves in any clash with the "worldly", the kings, the powers. The most earthly system the world has seen, exists only for the sake of the most other-worldly philosophy the world has ever heard. But though the spirit giveth life, the letter killeth. The problem of the Church is seen in little in the problem of the mendicant orders. An ethereal St. Francis of Assisi inspires: Elias of Cortina carries on in the second generation! Supranationalism becomes merely internationalism; uniformity become rigidity, orthodoxy becomes convention; in a word "the objection we are concerned with is that the Catholic Church, in accepting . . . involvement with the world has institutionalised" itself.

Todd gives a long and important quotation from Père Congar's *Problem of Authority*, (London, 1962), a work which traces the rise of "legalism" to the medieval period, to the effect that from the 11th century the authority of the Church borrowed from the "vocabulary, insignia, style and ideology of the imperial court", things themselves often traceable to pre-Christian times. From these, even more objectionable effects derived—more especially the Church's adoption of the secular penology for ideological offences. Todd admits that a Christian cannot honestly accept these things as the inevitable results of economic and political forces, because "it is precisely part of the Christian case that man can control his destiny on

earth to some degree, that this world is not purely the result of material factors outside his control".

The villain of this undesirable position is the Curia, described as the "Church's Civil Service", both Home Office and Foreign, with every decision underlined by God Himself! Todd turns again to Père Congar and his views on the results of "this combination of centralisation and infallibility" in the period following the Council of Trent. Père Congar is alive to the peril of the Church's dilemma. "At a time when the modern world is attempting to build its life on the principle of the individual personality . . . the Catholic Church since the sixteenth century has put into practice a genuine 'mystique' of authority . . . which . . . may be characterised as the notion of complete identification of God's will with the institutional form of authority".

It might be argued nowadays that the *aggiornamento* is in full pelt from all this. Todd is prepared to concede that the Church is still committed to these bad traditions, and that "the objector can say that the *aggiornamento* has in any case not yet had the seal of success put upon it".

Todd has now put the case as harshly, as bluntly, and as seriously as he can. No doubt his intention is not least to make his reply the more convincing. While we are stating the case for the prosecution he seems to say, let us paint it severely; this gives us more scope to clear up more misconceptions when we advance to the defence. A reply and a defence he does possess. If these objections were, to him, unanswerable, he would not, he says, and he says it truly, have any right to remain in the Roman Catholic Church, and moreover, "a sincere and committed member of it".

Let us not forget this when we examine that answer. There can, he avers, be only one answer to the particular objection he has examined. It is that "the Church is a sacrament of the divine assistance, that the balance of charity, of goodness, of holiness, and . . . of achievement . . . outweighs the bad". Even at the height of the era when the legalistic tradition was growing, that Church could produce St. Francis, whose life was "a living contradiction of legalism" and who was yet "totally loyal to the Roman See". Todd quotes again from Père Congar, that one protest made against the Church's authoritarianism was never taken seriously enough, that of the

anti-ecclesiastical spiritual movements so frequent in the twelfth century and which continued in the Franciscan spiritual movement down to the fourteenth century when it was succeeded by Lollardism and subsequently by the Hussite movement.

Moreover:

. . . theology preserved many elements of the ancient ecclesiology, in a balanced view which lasted until the death of the two greatest thirteenth century doctors, Thomas and Bonaventure . . . We should be guilty of a serious omission if we failed to mention what we might call the right of conscience.

And finally from Père Congar: —

. . . the exercise of authority in the Church today is marked by a predominance of pastoral care over prelacy, of tasks and responsibilities over the claiming of privileges.

Todd finds other grounds of reconciliation for his conscience; that the Church is still changing and adapting itself; if her face retains some medieval features, she is fast assuming more modern ones. In short, this apologist finds his personal comfort in the doctrine of a *changing*

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This Believing World

ONE claim Spiritualists often make is that they have on many occasions solved murder crimes by furnishing the police with all the necessary explanatory details. Unfortunately, these claims are often thirty or forty years old, and more often than not, concern crimes which took place in Iceland or the Fiji Islands, or some such place—rarely if ever in Britain. So one way or another they can never be checked. A delightful example of the kind of thing we get here is the lurid case of “Jack the Ripper”, the murderer who was never caught, and whose name, as far as the police records are publicly known, has never been revealed.

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A BIOGRAPHY of the Ripper has just been published, and *Psychic News* immediately came forward to tell us the glad tidings that “Spiritualists, of course, have long been aware of the sadistic murderer’s true identity”, a statement which is really funny. It appears that a Spiritualist, R. J. Lees, left a “secret” document relating how he went to the police about a murder, but was treated as a crank, and no notice taken of him. The point is that the only person who says he saw the murderer is Lees himself, and the only account of this is “secret”. Obviously, the police estimate of Lees was correct, for Lees’s solution has long been known as a mere supposition.

★

THE London *Evening News*’s pet theologian holds forth every Saturday, and in the July 10th number, we are told that the Sermon on the Mount “represents the peak of ethical doctrine”. Like so many literary discourses, we have an idea that it is much more talked about than read. So here are a few of its “peaks”—“Blessed are the poor in spirit”, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth”, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow”, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”. And so we could go on. Much of the Sermon has long been discarded as useless by Christians themselves.

★

IN FACT, one of them, the late Dr. Magee, Bishop of Peterborough, insisted that “a Christian state carrying out in all its relations the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount could not exist for a week”. And more recently, the Bishop of Ripon said, “Any man who lived strictly by the Sermon on the Mount would find himself in the workhouse”. But then, who reads it these days?

★

HERE is a vicar who thinks that “blue jokes” are better than a “blue pencil”—a point of view not at all common in Christianity. He is the Rev. G. Austin of Eaton Bray, near Luton, who in his parish magazine attacks censorship, which he considers at best “comical”, and at worst, totally “abhorrent”. Mr. Austin however appears to know very little of the history of sex under Christian rule. He says that connecting it with “obscenity and pornography” is a

“totally unchristian idea”. One can point out to him that the idea of “equating obscenity and pornography” with sex was almost the full burden of Christian fulminations during its long history. Has he ever read the Church Fathers?

THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US

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Church. “When we look at this . . . the objections begin to look much less cogent”.

Catholicism is sure, he reminds us, that Jesus did not intend a purely “charismatic” association of followers. Institutionalism is objectionable, but institutions are not.

This is a closely argued, deeply felt, essay; it is sincere, perhaps more so than others in the book. Yet having said that, we have perhaps said the best that can be said. An attempt to state the difficulties, in terms which accord with the tone of modern controversy, is not enough. When all is done, the only answer he can fall back on, is the changing nature of the Church. Does this not beg the question? What extraneous forces are making it change, has it really repented of its medieval authoritarianism? The truth is, of course, that this world is here, but the existence of another yet remains to be proved. It is all very well for the Church to become shamefaced about its pomp after two thousand years. This put it in power, this keeps it in power, camouflage it as you will. Now the Church has the weight of inertia behind it, it may better be able to afford this self-criticism. Abstract concessions to rights of conscience are far from being concrete respect accorded to those rights. We may be forgiven if we more than suspect recent changes, and more especially those, quoted by Todd, which emanated from Pius XII, that they are an attempt not to be left behind rather than a bid for enlightened leadership. Too truly, whatever the theory, the Church neither has been, nor is “charismatic”. For most of us, the institution remains the supreme example of institutionalism.

To quote St. Francis is dangerous. Even apart from the question as to whether this poet can have understood the complexities of curial politics (surely relevant to his too oft-quoted unquestioning obedience to the See of Peter), his life above all reproduces in exactly parallel form the criticism levelled against the Church. The Franciscan movement is notorious for its splinters and its branches, which still persist. That they *survive* is due to a common allegiance to the central government of the Church.

To quote the Lollards and Hussites is disastrous, whether it is to be understood that earlier protests ended logically thus, or whether it is to be understood that somehow they have now been absorbed into the Catholic tradition! Fewer heretics can have been more savagely suppressed by the “worldly Church”. And so much goes by default; there is not, for example, a single reference to Boniface VIII, to the Borgias, or to the Conciliar movement. Would, too, the world today, stand for anything else than responsible pastoral care? The churchmen who became arrogant in their heyday have been forced to take leaves out of the secular reformers’ notebooks.

There remains so much that I would like to say about Mr. Todd’s contribution to this volume but space forbids. I content myself with concluding that the attempt is unlikely to convince Freethinkers, and Catholics themselves must be disappointed that he leaves far better arguments in the traditional armoury of Catholic apologists to rust unused.

[*Objections to Roman Catholicism* is published by Constable at 18s.]

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INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, August 8th, 6.45 p.m.: A Meeting.

Notes and News

THIS week we print three articles by women Freethinkers who were formerly Roman Catholics. Our popular contributor Gillian Hawtin, for some time a teacher in a Catholic school, continues her criticism of the various essays in *Objections to Roman Catholicism*. Phyllis K. Graham, already known to readers as the author of "How I Became a Humanist" (which appeared in our May 21st and 28th issues, and is soon to be issued as a pamphlet by the Pioneer Press) is particularly qualified to write on the effects of "A Meditation on the Crucifix", after her experiences as a Carmelite nun. And Dorine Clark—whose article, "From Believer to Disbeliever" is reprinted from the *American Age of Reason* magazine—was educated in a convent and "almost decided to become a nun". Luckily, as Mrs. Clark told the Editor of the *Age of Reason*, "the boys changed that". But, she added, "those convent teachings have left their indelible mark on me. I have carried a guilt complex with me all these days".

THE June-July issue of *Portuguese and Colonial Bulletin* reported "another great victory", the freeing of Manuel Guedes after 18 years' imprisonment. PIDE asked for a further extension of the "security measures" for Guedes—whose sentence ended in 1956—and the Plenary Court agreed to this demand, prolonging the "measures" for another three years. However, an appeal to the Supreme Court, based on irregularities of procedure, was upheld, and the prisoner was released in April. There was no doubt, the *Bulletin* said, "that the determining factor in this great victory was again the weight of international public opinion plus the feeling of the Portuguese people. Once more a political prisoner who was at the centre of our campaign has been freed". But the *Bulletin* reminded us that there were still many more political prisoners in Salazar's jails. The successes should encourage us to increase our efforts on behalf of men like Jose Vitoriano, the trade unionist who has spent more than 14 years in

jail, Antonio Dias Lourenco, Carlos Costa, Pires Jorge, Blanqui Teixeira and Octavio Pato; and women like Maria Alda Nogueira, Fernanda Paiva Tomaz, Sofia Ferreira, Dr. Julieta Gandra, Albina Fernandes and Natalia David.

"AM I a Jew?" asked Bernard Levin, in a perceptive article in the *New Statesman* (23/7/65). He had, he said a Jewish name and a Jewish nose—though there was no such thing. But Mr. Levin soon admitted that he was begging the question. He knew perfectly well that he was a Jew; what he was really inquiring was, what this meant to him. He rejected Judaism "more or less as soon as I was old enough to have any understanding of what religion was about"; and didn't know whether he felt further from it than from most religions because of its silly dietary laws or "the savage monotheism of Jehovah". Such "objective religious sympathies as I have" were, Mr. Levin said, with "the quietist faiths, like Buddhism" or with "a straightforward message of salvation like Christianity". But he was "unable in fact to accept any of them".

MR. LEVIN then turned to other aspects of Jewishness. "Has an idea so old and tenacious, so provocative of generosity and malice, good and evil, responsible for such prodigious outpourings of words and deeds ceased to have any meaning at all?" For Mr. Levin, it had. If, he asked, "you do not consider yourself Jewish enough to go to Israel, and not Judaistic enough to go to the synagogue, what is left but a vague necessity to belong?" And this, he added, "will disappear, or at any rate be dispersed, with further intermarriage and assimilation" as will "the superficialities attributable to upbringing and environment".

SWEDISH Radio (SR) has, we learn from a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* (23/7/65), "been severely criticised recently for some of its programmes" which the writer, the Rev. Richard Cedergren, described as "indecent and in bad taste". Complaints from listeners over a programme "blaspheming the Holy Communion" forced SR to broadcast a public apology; "and the police followed up by having four of the producers summoned before the Stockholm magistrates' court, where they were convicted and fined as blasphemers". It seems that SR also ridiculed "the request to the Government by more than two million citizens that religious instruction be continued in the schools". However, as Mr. Cedergren reported with relief, the Swedish Government has decided to continue its RI.

DURING the second world war, young Swedes like Mr. Cedergren looked up to our own BBC as "the voice of freedom, dignity and democracy". Today, he believed, the responsibility of the BBC was even greater when "the emerging nations" still looked to Britain for a lead. And he would regard it as a tragedy if there should be any departure from the original concept of the Corporation as a "temple of the Arts and Muses dedicated to Almighty God", where "the people, inclining their ear to whatsoever things are beautiful and honest and of good report, may tread the path of wisdom and righteousness".

"IN HIS capacity as Congregationalist or as Chief Minister in a secular Government, Mr. Wilson couldn't care less about the appointment of Anglican bishops". That is the view of the Rev. Christopher Wansey, proctor for the diocese of Chelmsford, who accordingly asked the Prime Minister not to nominate a new Bishop of Liverpool, Dr. C. A. Martin, who is retiring. Mr. Wansey suggested that Mr. Wilson should instead pass to the Crown, recommendations from Church authorities.

A Meditation on the Crucifix

By PHYLLIS GRAHAM

THE prioress moved with measured pace down the long cloister, accompanied by the sub-prioress at a respectful half-step behind. A shadow over against one of the low arched windows caught the ever-watchful eye of the prioress, who paused for a moment to investigate. Her second-in-command drew up automatically, waiting like a faithful hound in the rear. The pause expanded into a full minute, but not by so much as a shuffle was the cloistral silence desecrated.

The prioress turned at last and looked at the other, a strange look that said many things and left more unspoken. The regal, rather hard-bitten face had softened; a half-smile lit it from some unfamiliar hearthfire within. "Look", she said, and stood aside graciously from the window.

What they saw was a young novice sitting on a tree-stump in the courtyard beyond the window. Nothing unusual in that, for along the length of the cloister ran a whole series of such tiny walled patios, where sisters could enjoy the triple benefit of prayer, solitude and good fresh air. What had caught the attention of the prioress had perhaps appealed to some long-sacrificed aesthetic sense—for at heart she remained the artist her vows had renounced for ever. The white-veiled novice in her fresh young beauty certainly made a picture, all the more moving for its total unselfconsciousness. Her crucifix, supported on her slender hands, lay in her lap like a child. Her eyes were fixed on the dying face of the Crucified, her whole being concentrated in a passionate yet serene absorption.

"Now that", murmured the prioress, so softly that the silence was scarcely broken, "is a very beautiful sight".

And the sub-prioress, no artist but a good artisan among the labourers of the vineyard, loyally concurred.

This little vignette from the pages of memory was the starting-point of my Meditation. I, too, once as ingenuous—if not as beautiful—as that fellow-novice (whom I remember with sisterly affection), could gaze upon the symbol of redemption with appropriately pious feelings, and never a qualm of the nausea it inspires in me today. But love can turn to loathing, and the banquet of the soul goes sour. No tender sentiment is left in me today to veil the harsh outlines of what I now think of as the Christian swastika.

For I can no longer regard it as an object of contemplation on its own; I see it chiefly as a tool or a weapon in the hands of power. I cannot say, "This is a record of historical reality", because there is no proof that it is anything of the sort. I cannot tell myself, "This is the image of your dying God", because my sanity rejects the notion of a gibbeted god and the whole sordid transaction of "divine appeasement" behind the obscene spectacle. I cannot see the crucifix except in the context of what humanity has done with it. And that, on the whole, is a sordid subject for meditation than the grisly image itself, for it leads to an appalled understanding of what the crucifix has done to humanity.

To pass through the innocent gateway of that nun's devotion into the secrets of her heart might help us on the first step towards understanding. She has, after all, given her life to the crucifix; she glories in her status of "Bride of the Crucified"; a study of her mental attitudes should reveal something of the power of the crucifix in action. What lies behind the rapt absorption, the personal surrender, the mask of serenity?

A state of mind cast in the same mould as the millions

of believers; only, shall we say, more firmly, irrevocably set, by the inclinations of her temperament and the rigidity of her way of life. A review of her interior, therefore, will provide a facsimile of the "crucifix-mentality" stamped on the mind of Christendom through the centuries, clearer in outline, no doubt, than its imprint on the muddled masses, and so more ruthless, more absolute—but not more indelible. For the fatal seal has pressed itself deep into the collective unconscious of the white races; the West, and the progeny of the West, carry it in the hidden life-cells like a cancer. The pincers of this sinister crab induce the multiple pains of our civilisation, from malaise to anguish.

To borrow the words of John the Evangelist (though I speak not of Jesus and what he did, but concerning the idol we made of him and what our idolatry has done for us) "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" on this awesome subject. In an effort to comprehend *in parvo* the magnitude of its significance, I shall try to contemplate it under four simple headings, namely, Guilt, Fear, Gloom and Blood. For these seem to me the four great fruits of this Tree of Death, and the logical reward of an era of Meditation on the Crucifix.

Our little nun murmurs words of love to the figure on the cross: she has these moments of tender, exalted emotion, ripples of light across the dark deep waters of the night of faith. While they last they seem to her the touch of ultimate truth; they leave a faint glow when they are gone, a memory that may have to sustain her through long-lasting "nights of the spirit". This is the gentler, poetic side of the commerce between "God" and "his creature". The harsher aspect is as crude and immoral as the baser kinds of human transaction. Or rather, infinitely more so, since they at least have the excuse of human limitation, while here we are doing business with "the infinite".

For the "Divine Lover" of mankind has plastered his beloved with guilt, and cashed in on it with a scheme of blackmail inconceivable by the genius of mere human crime. Our little nun, innocent and loving, knows that she was born in sin, tainted with the inescapable shame of "our first parents' disobedience". I am aware that we are in the second half of the twentieth century, but what I have just said, incredible as it may seem, is as firmly fixated in her mind as if she were living in the Dark Ages. She may, or may not, have heard rumours that these revered but reprehensible progenitors of ours were probably semi-apes who had never heard of Jehovah or any other brand of deity, and whose sole concern was to keep alive in a hostile and predatory world: which, all honour to them and the race they parented, they contrived to do without benefit of clergy or assistance from divine grace. But to her indoctrinated mind evolution is a ghost word, meaningless—apart from its aura of danger—beside the august reality of "Original Sin". She knows that man is a "fallen creature", and never can unknow it, for the whole structure of her faith is raised on this foundation; though there is no evidence anywhere in the story of mankind that man-of-ape fell from anything more lofty than the trees he once swung in!

As surely as a bastard she is, therefore, "outside the inheritance" and "debarred from the society of the blessed". This unfortunate fact endows her, naturally,

with every undesirable quality associated with birth on the wrong side of the blanket. Against these dreadful propensities in herself she must struggle unremittingly all the days (and nights) of her life. She knows all this very intimately, not merely from having had it dinned into her from the cradle, but because she is only too aware of the ceaseless call of nature in many guises. (She lumps them all, alluring or otherwise, under the generic term "Sin").

But she knows, also, that she has been redeemed. Some colossal heavenly machinery has been set in motion: the heart of an aggrieved Father has been tapped for mercy by a devoted Son. Result: her bastardy is officially wiped out by baptismal waters, though these are powerless to remove the said propensities to wickedness, against which she must continue to struggle to the death. Provided she observes this, and other conditions laid down by Holy Mother Church, her "inheritance" will be restored to her and the Blessed will no longer look down their noses at her base estate.

And this is where the crucifix comes in: the Super-blackmail. For she cannot contemplate her "Spouse of Blood" (to quote another fervent gazer on the Crucified) without a deeper and more personally painful involvement in the mire of Guilt. Her unconscious participation in the

universal Orgy of Original Sin, her unavoidable bastardy, was not the only hammer that drove those cruel nails into sacred flesh. Her own wicked thoughts, words and deeds crucify her Lord anew, thus implicating her in a veritable anguish of guilt, which cannot be assuaged even by perpetual self-probing, frequent confession and the most rigorous mortification and penance. The very form of the crucifix—the image of a criminal paying for his crimes on a gibbet—ensures and drives home this induced guilt-fixation to the last turn of the screw. The more she gushes love and pity and sorrow for the Crucified, the more convinced she becomes that she is personally guilty of his sufferings and death. Her ever-mounting frenzy of remorse develops an obsession to expiate her imagined deicide by the holocaust of a life consumed in acts of reparation and sacrifice.

One cannot imagine any human situation, even among the most savage and primitive mentalities, more completely dominated by psychopathic superstition; or, outside the sphere of actual insanity, a more insidious and total degradation of the dignity of human nature. Those nailed and helpless fingers of the Crucified have, it seems horribly apparent, their nightmare doubles in the pincers of the crab.

(To be Continued)

The Pope's Daughter

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

"CESARE, this is poison just as mother used to make it".

"Lucrezia, you're a wonder".

"I'm a poisoner".

"That's it darling and you deserve all the money bags you're going to get when your Alfonso has tasted your home brew".

"Cesare, it's a work of art, not a home-brew. For weeks I've been in the mud searching for the damned flowers which look as if they grew just to be given enemies. Christ! the suck of that mud. It's taken me right down to the navel".

"Dear one, you dramatise. Lots of ladies take mud-baths as beauty treatment".

"You could be more generous, lover-brother. Night after night I've sat up distilling the flowers, making their life turn into one life. I've almost been asphyxiated by my own breath".

"You're a miracle, Lucrezia".

"You may not know it, brother, but you've just made one of the seven best poisoning remarks of the season. Another fortnight and my chalice of death will be no more than a phial of essence, all ready and eager. Exit Alfonso, Duke of Ferrara, my third husband, my bore".

"A funny taste in the wine, Cesare? Of course there was. Don't you see there simply had to be? You can't . . . come and tell me calmly that you've stabbed Alfonso in a temper. Cesare, no. It was dreadful to hear you say that. At once I bled for you, I wept inside myself, I screamed. It was too terrible for . . . the poison was ready as I promised. When it's ready, it has a life of its own. I told you. Can't you comprehend that an essence with the power of death must have a will? For weeks and weeks I've been giving it this will, by bringing it to the peak of its perfection. Oh brother, darling brother, I had to give it to you when you said Alfonso was dead, for the poison was hungry. I had to put it in your wine. Oh Cesare, my heart is broken. For me the whole afternoon is poisoned . . .".

FROM BELIEVER TO DISBELIEVER

(Continued from page 250)

that at the age of sixteen, I contemplated seriously becoming a nun. World-removed contemplation appealed to my lazy nature; it would eliminate daily struggle for existence and competition, for which I thought myself unfit, aware, all too aware, of my many shortcomings. Serving God would still permit me to indulge in dreamy visions and, although giving me no status as a world citizen, would make me eligible to partake of Heavenly Glory and certain redemption of all my sins—real and imaginary ones.

Even though I escaped convent life at age sixteen, I still remained a visionary captive of the Catholic dogma. It warped my entire outlook on life, made my every act and decision dependent on whether a strict Catholic god would sanction or disapprove—disapproval meaning eternal hell-fire and damnation.

But perhaps the most eroding, corroding, damage to my psyche was the delicate delight in suffering, making it an ennobling state, a virtue, something that would bring me nearer to the Crucified One. Not content with ordinary suffering daily living may hold, I sought out martyrdom in untold ways only a visionary imagination can dream up. Thus I became an almost dedicated and willing loser in any healthy debate or struggle, surrendering without really trying to stand up to obstacles or people, with inner readiness and glee. This degrading mental attitude I maintained even years after staying away from Sunday church services.

Slowly, timorously, I began to look for some other spiritual anchorage, studying other religions, finding in each one something my probing mind could not fully accept.

Spending three years in Italy, studying art and sculpture, almost brought me back into the Catholic fold. Gazing enraptured at Fra Angelico's blue and golden angel paintings, at the huge canvasses of saints and Madonnas with or without Child, I had to admit those works of art had been inspired by deep religious faith. Later, years later, I could see how the Church hierarchy had been able to support great artists like Michelangelo and Leonardo Da

Vinci, keeping them from starving, allowing them to paint panels and church murals and sublimely lovely statues of saints and martyrs, with money those holy monarchs had gathered in pennies and dimes from the poor they kept in spiritual submission, fanning their fear with the threat of eternal hell-fire and damnation.

Although I kept on searching for some credo to adopt, something to believe in, something to live and die by and for, in moments of crisis, of imminent catastrophe, I still crept to the God of my childhood, asking Him to spare me His wrath, humbly acknowledging my many sins. Here and there, and in various places, I would sit in some cathedral while no service was going on, eyes closed, heart and mind open, waiting, hoping to be imbued with some feeling of faith. But, I felt nothing.

Then, in San Francisco, I started studying some Rosicrucian pamphlets and became convinced this was for me. It appeared more of a spiritual science, a cult for the thoughtful, without pomp and rite to impress the gullible. Thus, I travelled to Santa Cruz to visit their headquarters and was duly impressed with their world-wide correspondence branch. They claim to belong to the Essene Brotherhood—a brotherhood Christ was supposed to be part of—and a brother, garbed in chaste white, took me on a conducted tour. So far, so good. Here, finally, was an organisation based strictly on spiritual concentration and betterment—nothing much on the outside, all directed towards your inner man.

The white-robed Brother halted in a huge dark room, apparently a lecture hall. He walked to the wall and pressed a button, projecting a niche and bathing some figure there in a ghostly green light. I stopped in my tracks, waiting, as by pressing another button, he changed the light to blood-red.

"What's the gadget for?" I inquired disrespectfully.

"It's to heighten a member's concentration when meetings are held here", he stated.

That ended my interest in the Rosicrucians. They too, like all other cults I had come to know, resorted to some device to catch the impressionable, the gullible ones.

All through the years, studying up on Buddhism, Zen, Unitarianism, et al., I was invited by well-meaning friends worrying about my morale, to attend various religious services. Why not? I went to temple, to prayer meetings in tents, lectures by priests, doctors, converted movie stars, mental healers. Result, nil.

I finally came to the conclusion that a man could be decent, believe in moral values, be of service to others, without the degrading fear of hell-fire and damnation. That every human being has a moral indicator, a built-in device nature provided him with, telling him clearly what is right or wrong. Namely, his conscience. No conscience does *not* make cowards of us all; sorry Mr. Shakespeare, it endows a man with the necessary courage to be fully responsible for his actions. This eliminates a wrathful, vengeful God who holds men in abject terror. Such a belief can make man free in the finest, most noble sense of the word.

Yes, it takes either strength of mind or goodness of heart, to be such a man—an Atheist, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge so wisely stated.

HIS HOLINESS HAILS HIS SON!

The
ruins
are
inhabited

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

CORRESPONDENCE

POINTLESS

If the Rev. C. Strother already knows my points in advance, I see no sense in preparing a reply.

GEORGE R. GOODMAN.

NEW MORALITY OR NONE AT ALL?

A controversy between Gillian Hawtin and myself, on the nature of Christian morals is unlikely to affect the illegitimacy statistics of Oxford University, so let us fearlessly and calmly continue the argument.

Christian morality is not common sense. It is based on belief alone as the road to salvation, and the acceptance of suffering here for a reward hereafter. I quote from a tract recently put into my hand, "How many are trusting to their own righteousness and good works to take them, or help them into heaven, whereas God declares that the precious blood of Christ, trusted in by the sinner, is his only shelter from the coming wrath". I contend that, far from rejection of Christian morality because of the rejection of supernaturalism, the young question the god idea because of the immorality advocated and inherent in the Bible and the Christian scheme of atonement.

Christian ethics do not equate with common sense, they are the ravings of a nature-hating fanatic: hate your parents, desert wife and child, revel in persecution and poverty, love your enemies, endure suffering thankfully, abase yourself before tyranny. It is a Christian "sin" to look with lust at a woman, punishable with damnation, it is commendable to castrate oneself for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake, hardly conformable with a rational advocacy of birth-control in a university. Common sense! Rather uncommon nonsense! In short, Christianity is a degrading Oriental superstition, entirely responsible for the evils in sex matters of which Gillian Hawtin complains. My objection to "reverent Humanists" is that, by giving lip service to Christian "morality", they do a disservice to both truth and morality.

EVA EBURY.

HUMANIST TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

You and your readers may be interested to know of the formation of a Humanist Teachers' Association. This was begun as an independent organisation by members of the British Humanist Association and aims to give mutual support and confidence by discussion of, and help with, the problems of Humanist teachers; to secure revision of the Education Act with regard to the teaching of RI in schools; to consider ways of replacing RI by a reasoned approach to the moral problems young people must face; to advise the BHA on educational matters and to gain support from teacher members for BHA policies in this field.

I should be glad to hear from any interested teachers.

DOROTHY ROBERTS,
213 Pennymead, Harlow, Essex.

THE JACOBITE MOVEMENT

I should like to know what F. A. Ridley is trying to prove by writing an article on "The Jacobite Movement".

He seems to think that France aided Prince Charlie a great deal in the rising, whereas in truth France gave him very little aid. He landed in the north of Scotland without even an expeditionary force, and the clan chiefs of the Highlands tried in vain to dissuade him from what they thought a hopeless enterprise. Among all the world's heroes, as Frederick the Great told him, he was the only one who had made the attempt to conquer a kingdom without an army behind him. And, of course, he nearly did. The English regular soldiers were no match for the Highlanders man for man, and the defeat at Culloden was due to the vast superiority in numbers of Cumberland's army.

Cumberland had 9,000 trained men in excellent condition; Prince Charlie had but 5,000, and these exposed, and robbed of their night's sleep.

The butchery that took place after the battle against the wounded and dying Highlanders is best forgotten. Byron mourned the fall of the Highlanders in his "Lachin y Gair":

Ah! were you destined to die at Culloden!
Victory crown'd not your fall with applause:
Still were you happy in death's earthly slumber,
You rest with your clan in the caves of Braemar;
The pibroch resounds, to the piper's loud number,
Your deeds on the echoes of dark Loch na Garr.

R. SMITH.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone: HOP 2717.