

Freethinker

Registered at the GPO as a Newspaper

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

VOLUME 88, No. 51

Saturday, December 21, 1968

Sixpence Weekly

Greetings

That time of the year is now upon us, which for thousands of years has been an occasion for celebrations. Nowadays it is most often referred to as Christmas, but that we have no reverence for the gentleman who gave his name to this event is no reason for us to abstain from merriment.

Christians call it a season of goodwill and demonstrate this with such acts as halting the bombing of North Vietnam. Secularists have no need of a special occasion to show their goodwill. Thus as a secular event, Christmas becomes a holiday for those who work and a time when we all make merry. It may be asked, why should we make merry? What have we got to be merry about? Many people throw parties for no specific reason but the party is no worse for that. Why should there be a specific reason? Is not the happiness derived by the participants in Christmas, or Yuletide, gaiety enough reason? It seems superfluous to claim even that we are celebrating the joy of being alive.

The celebrations themselves by tradition revolve around the family, which indulges in feasting and present giving. It is this last coupled with the customary decorations such as the Christmas tree, which make the occasion one which is particularly enjoyable for children. To Freethinkers the history of this festival, which of course originated long before the alleged birth of Christ, will be of interest. This combined with some serious on a Humanist Christmas, some (traditionally!) more merry material and something intended primarily for children comprises this special Christmas edition of the Freethinker, which it is hoped will make the traditional happy Christmas a little less traditional and a little more happy.



Freethinker

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

Editor: David Reynolds

WELL IT'S CHRISTMAS

"OH, THANK YOU Daddy, mmmmm. You were clever to marry Daddy, Mummy." Jill relinquished her hold on her father and turned to her mother, who smiled first at her daughter and then turned towards her husband.

"I was dear, wasn't I?"

It was Christmas morning at 96 Beechtree Avenue, Salfordley. The Williams had just finished unwrapping their presents. Lights flashed on a tinselled Christmas tree, throwing a myriad of colour on to the flowered wallpaper. A bright array of Christmas cards enlivened the mantelpiece and the tops of bookshelves. Holly hung down from the three pictures, obscuring a pastel drawing of George Williams' grandfather. Ten-year-old Eric, sucking a sugar mouse, played with his new Meccano set, while his fifteen-year-old sister held a new dress up to herself and studied the mirror. Happiness held supreme. Mum and Dad allowed the mistletoe to hang over empty space once more.

"Now we must get dressed for church."

"Oh Mum", Eric's treble and Jill's soprano joined in a concerted wail. Mr Williams stared at the floor and rubbed his chin. He had argued with his wife about this in bed the night before, after he had filled Eric's stocking. This morning it still seemed a hypocritical thing to do. They hadn't been to church since the previous Christmas. They couldn't really call themselves Christians in those circumstances. When he had made this assertion, his wife had sat up and turned on the light.

"George Williams! If we're not Christians. I'd like to know what we are. Heathens? Besides that nice new vicar came round the other day while you were at work. Such a nice man. I gave him a cup of tea, and promised we'd be there. So we've got to go."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and MCRAE.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOORS

Student Humanist Federation Conference: Loughborough University of Technology, Royce Hall: January 3-5: "A Sin to be Different"—Speakers: Cynthia Ried (Lesbianism), Peter Fryer (Pornograph), Gratton Puxon (Gypsies), Tony Smythe (Differences). Also symposium on "The Rights of Students" and a party. £5 all in. Further details from SHF, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8.

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, December 22, 6.30 p.m.: "The Brain", Kenneth Leigh.

George, never much good at arguing even when he wasn't tired, had given up at this point, and now he realised he couldn't continue the argument in front of the children.

"Do as your mother says, Eric."

"But Dad. I don't see why. We haven't been since last Christmas, and it's so boring."

George bit his lip. "Well it's Christmas son."

"What difference does that make Dad," Jill joined the argument. George looked towards his wife, who answered her daughter.

"All Christians go to church at Christmas."

"Well I'm not a Christian then." This was Eric.

"Eric Williams! Don't let me ever hear you say that again. Now go and put on your suit."

"Yes, Mum." Eric wandered off sulkily. Jill remained.

"Well, I'm not going. I don't see why I should. I'm not a Christian. I only went last year, because you made me, and I don't see how you two can be Christians if you only go to church once a year."

"If you're not a Christian, what are you Jill Williams!" George had difficulty holding back a smile.

"Well I don't know Mum. Must I be something?"

"Of course you must. Otherwise you'd be a heathen and that would never do. Now go and change dear . . . please . . . do it for me."

Jill disarmed both by the thought of being a heathen and the appeal to her daughterly instinct, hesitated and then followed her brother sighing, "Oh, all right Mum, but I still don't see why?"

"Well, if we're going, we'd better get ready as well I suppose." George's sigh was almost more expressive than his daughter's.

* * * *

"If you're ready you could get the car out, George."

"But it's only about five minutes walk, dear."

"Yes, but its cold dear, and you know how the cold gets at my spine."

Knowing that he had never won an argument, into which his wife's spine had been brought, George went off to get his overcoat on and the car out. He parked by the kerb outside the house, hooted the horn and waited. Eric appeared first and got into the back.

"Daddy."

"Yes."

"Do you want to go to church?"

"Er . . . yes, dear."

"Why?"

"Well . . . because it's Christmas." George quickly turned on the car radio.

Yes, but Daddy." George pretended not to hear.

"Daddee." George signed again and turned to look at his son.

"Yes, Eric."

"Daddy why . . . why because its Christmas?"

"Well that is why—because it's Christmas. We have to go at Christmas."

"But why Daddy? Why at Christmas?"

"Well, we could go at other times if we wanted, but generally people who don't go . . . er very often, go at Christmas."

This appeared to kerb Eric's curiosity and George turned away frowning and wondered why he should have to trick

his own son with an ambiguous answer. He hooted the horn again and eventually his wife and daughter appeared. No sooner were they settled in the car, than Mrs Williams remembered that she had forgotten her prayer book.

"Eric could you . . . no don't worry I'll go. I'm not quite sure where it is." She hurried back into the house.

"Daddy. Do you think we have to go to church?" Jill leant over the seat towards her father biting her lip and looking puzzled.

"Er . . . wait a minute dear. I've forgotten something."

George got out of the car and went off back into the house. He entered the living-room to be greeted by a cloud of dust, which had just been blown from his wife's prayer book.

"Oh sorry, dear. I didn't know you were coming in. I really must get round and dust more often."

"Look . . . darling. Both the children have asked me why they have to go to church. I can't answer them, because I don't see why myself really. It's plain we're being hypocritical. If you want to go, you go, but don't make me and the children come too. It's really very awkward."

"Yes dear. I know, but I have told the vicar we'd go and the Clarks down the road would think it most odd if we didn't appear and what about the Edwards next door and that nice new couple on the other side. They'll be there. She told me only yesterday they were going. And look we're all dressed up now and besides we can't appear to be unsure of anything in front of the children. They look to us for firm guidance. We can't suddenly change our minds. They'd lose faith in us."

"Yes. I suppose you're right, but we'll discuss the whole thing properly before next year."

"Yes dear, of course, come along then."

* * * *

George stretched his hand towards the self-starter, and then suddenly drew it back.

"Which one are we going to? We've been to them both in the last couple of years. Last year you said you didn't like the one by the crossroads. It was too draughty or something. Which one is this new vicar of yours attached to?"

His wife looked blank. "Well I don't know. He did say, I think, but I can't remember. What's that?"

"It's Mr Clark, Mum. He's tapping on the window."

"Hallo, Fred. Happy Christmas."

"Happy Christmas all. Look did you have a visit from a nice young vicar last week?"

"Yes I did."

"Oh good. So did Maureen. It's just that she can't remember the name of his church."

"Well, nor can we Fred. We're all ready to go and don't know whether it's the one by the crossroads or the other down by Goodall's garage."

"Oh Lord. Ah, there's John Edwards getting his car out. I'll ask him he's bound to know."

John Edwards was in the same dilemma. Snow began to fall. As the people in the street came out of the houses, it fast became clear that they were all in the same boat.

Before long Mrs Williams found herself in the centre of about fifty adults and between two and three times the same number of children. George was on the edge of the group with Fred Clark.

"Do you know? One of our main reasons for going was because of what you might think if we didn't go." Fred laughed heartily.

"It's the same with us George. Come on everybody. Come in and have a drink. It's getting cold out here and it doesn't look as though we can track down this vicar, who has so impressed the ladies. I haven't got enough drink for you all. Can you bring some over?"

* * * *

"Well, that was fun wasn't it? Even if we won't be able to have dinner till four o'clock. It was good to meet the new neighbours properly. I'd been wondering how to break the ice and those people from forty-two, the Cummings—they're nice and do you know George I think Jill's found herself a boy-friend. That Harper boy from nineteen—Peter his name was wasn't it? Did you see him chatting to Jill in the corner? It'll be good for her to have a boy-friend, now she's the age she is. I hope she doesn't stay over there too long though. She isn't used to drinking sherry. Oh, here she is now . . . George, George come here. She's swaying up the path. Oh well, it's Christmas isn't it."

"Yes, it's Christmas dear." George nodded smiling.

Jill burst into the room. "Honestly, Mum. Peter's taking me to the pictures tomorrow night. My first date. Oh, Mum! Dad! My first date and isn't it funny all because of that new vicar. I think he must be a right devil."

HUMANISM, CHRISTIANITY AND SEX

David Tribe

6d plus 4d postage

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

Bertrand Russell

1s plus 4d postage

RI AND SURVEYS

Maurice Hill

1s plus 4d postage

RELIGION AND ETHICS IN SCHOOLS

David Tribe

1s 6d plus 4d postage

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN STATE SCHOOLS

Brigid Brophy

2s 6d plus 4d postage

TEN NON COMMANDMENTS

Ronald Fletcher

2s 6d. plus 4d postage

WHAT HUMANISM IS ABOUT

Kit Mouat

10s 6d. plus

100 YEARS OF FREETHOUGHT

David Tribe

42s plus 1s 8d postage

Obtainable from the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

FREETHINKER FUND

THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-Humanist paper in the country. It is still only 6d. How much do YOU care how many people it reaches? To advertise we need money, and our expenses are ever-increasing. Whose copy are you reading now? Have you got a subscription? Couldn't you contribute something to the Fighting Fund, say 6d or 6s or £6 or £60? How much do you really care about Freethought and helping other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can. The FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1

HUMAN VICTI (On Human Food)

POPE SIMONS I

An encyclical for Yuletide

VENERABLE festive brothers and beloved festive sons:

The most serious business of food consumption (not, beware, to be confused with that other appetite, s—l consummation), for which human beings collaborate with the natural processes of turkey-fattening, cake-baking, and fermentation, has always been a source of great joys to them, even if sometimes accompanied by nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

However, with the recent evolution of society, changes have taken place that give rise to new questions which the Church could not ignore. Firstly there is the rapid demographic development (read—population increase). Secondly, which Our conscience will not let us omit to mention, there is the wanton attack on Church authority.

Our mission is to enlarge the study commission which Our predecessor, Pope "Twinkle-Toes" John XXII, of happy memory, erotic dreams, and ingrowing toenails, had instituted in March 1963. That commission included—and note this, festive brothers!—people who (dare the word pass Our lips?) who *eat*. Yes—so objective was the enquiry! The commission had as its scope the gathering of opinions on the regulating of *eating*, so that the Magisterium could reply to the trembling expectation, not only of the hungry faithful (and some were lapsing into sins of consumption!) but also of world opinion (so much does the world, the whole world, the global scene, the entire orb, nay, the very universe!—hang upon Our every word, issued as it is by the contraction of Our Holy lungs and the pursing of Our Holy lips!).

Therefore, having sifted the documentation before us—but not having *eaten* or even thought of *eating* or dreamt of *eating*, or read books about *eating*, or thought, or thought . . . much as we . . . being tempted by the flesh . . . *we did not eat*—having sifted, piously and with the aid of Christ (a darn fine sifter!), we are able to give Our reply.

In conformity with Our landmarks in the human and Christian vision of *eating* we again declare that any artificial pursuance of consumption is illicit as a means of sustaining life. We must therefore, by the light of Christ the Sifter, prohibit all artificial foods, all sauces, all cakes, all artificially fertilised crops, all artificially tended cattle, all artificially fattened fowl, all ice-cream, sweets, biscuits, all artificially produced bread and pastry, all artificially contrived drink, all tea (artificially chopped and cooked), all coffee and cocoa (artificially ground and burnt), all liquors, all everything which—in partaking of the artificial—ignores natural law and the will of God.

If there are serious motives for wishing to sustain life then it is permitted to observe the natural rhythm of the seasons, and to consume naturally occurring roots as they grow, and naturally occurring water as it falls from the heavens in divine munificence.

The Church is coherent with herself in maintaining the illicit nature of eating of artificial foods, for artificiality in tending cattle and rearing crops impedes the development of natural processes such as blight and animal disease (all God's creatures).

Upright men can even better convince themselves of Our wisdom if they reflect upon the consequences of artificial food eating—the demographic (read—population) situation deteriorates; more pagans are born and the Holy life of the Church is threatened. We need to encourage the faithful, as all mankind, do not *eat*, be like us, *do not eat*, avert your eyes when you see others *eating*, do not think of *eating*, do not let the mind dwell on *eating*, and if you have nocturnal dreams of *eating*, if you have nocturnal emissions of saliva, turn over, say three "Hail Mary's" and, with God's grace, all will be well.

There will be those amongst you who will say that this is a council of perfection. To those We reply that the *holy martyrs* of the Church have shown that *eating* is not essential to the *holy life*. The martyrs have shown this, and even if they have gone mad in the process, they are the *proof*. Some decide to remain pure (unto death, an early death) for God's sake; some do not allow temptation to overwhelm them, to awaken their appetite for *food*, their carnal lust for consumption. The Martyrs showed that the fleshly appetites can be controlled and conquered by the righteous will.

But for those of you who insist on *eating*—and there will be some (*yea*, even among the faithful), Our word is this: Avoid artificiality, follow the natural rhythms of the seasons, eat the naturally occurring herbs and grasses, and the rabbit if you can catch it (without a net, without a trap—for these contrivances partake of the odium of artificiality), for did not St "long-in-the-tooth" Paul of the epileptic seizure say "It is better to masticate on an old root than to bury one's chops in the flank of the fatted calf"?

Not much experience is needed (and We, least of all, have had experience of . . . of *eating* . . . much as we . . . but the temptation . . . thinking and writing and talking of *eating* . . . but Our experience is . . . the flesh calls, but with God's grace, *we have not eaten, and we will not eat*, despite the frescoes in Our Sistine, despite the hungry Popes—bad, bad Popes—*we will not eat!*), not much experience (and that's Us) is needed to know human weakness and to understand that men—especially the young who are so vulnerable on this point—need encouragement to be faithful to the moral law, so they must not be offered some easy way of eluding its observance.

Let it be considered also that a dangerous weapon would be placed in the hands of public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies; authorities, that is, who put the flesh before the spirit, who believe (and the truly faithful may avert their eyes) that people have a moral right to *eat*. Yea, it is so, brothers and fathers, as we know from Our experience (though limited, though pure). Thus men, wishing to avoid social difficulties (such as starvation, a transitory thing of no importance) encountered in the observance of the divine law, reach the depraved, illicit and unnatural point of placing at the disposal of the public authorities the means to *feed* the hungry. Yea, brothers, the sin of this is overwhelming. (We are overwhelmed, Our Holy heart is overwhelmed) yet it is true. There are those—and we know who they are (there are dungeons ready under St Peter's with their names on the doors)—who comfort the starving and remove the blessings of penury and malnutrition.

Public authorities have their difficulties, beset by sin and temptation, but the way is not to ignore the natural law, but to suffer righteously and to make others (particularly others) suffer too. There are those who say that the seasonal rhythm cannot be trusted, and they may have a point, and so we appeal to scientists (as is our wont when we can't

burn 'em at the stake for their impieties), we appeal that science may yet (and soon) discover a way of regulating the seasons so that the natural rhythms can be relied upon and we can all praise God as we munch our daily root, even if the odd thousand million sinners die (justly) in the process.

WINTER FESTIVAL

ELIZABETH COLLINS

"TRYMMYNG OF THE TEMPLES with hangynges and boughs and garlonds was taken from the heathen peoples which dressed their houses and idols with such array." Polydore Vergil 1550 A.D.

Well, the idols have gone, Polydore Vergil has gone and the religious system he represented is fast disappearing, but the spirit of the Winter Festival and of the old Saturnalia survives and is still with us. The secular jollification now called Christmas represents the fusion of many and diverse primitive cults that have little to do with Christianity. This festival was an important seasonal event long before recorded history, our knowledge of which is limited to archeological discoveries, to cave and temple paintings, and to the legendary tales of wonder-workers or professional storytellers of the market place or round the ritual fires. We do know however that feasting, dancing and merry-making and the giving of presents, especially to children and old people are of very ancient origin. Whoever the god in fashion at the time whose name was attached to it—whether Korè Saturnus, Mithras, or Christ—the festival had one overriding motif or theme—homage to the Sun.

When Christianity became a licensed cult under Constantine (312 A.D.) only one-tenth of the Empire was nominally Christian and that in the eastern section. Theodosius in 378 A.D. finally abolished the pagan rites, in reality substituting one fictional cult for the many others in vogue, and the people were justifiably confused. What real difference between homage to Mithras, to Christ, to Caesar, or the Sun? By edict those practising other than Christian rites could be fined twenty pounds in gold or suffer confiscation of property. Many strongly held beliefs and customs associated with Christmas were practices to ensure a renewal of the sun's waning power so that in its early days the Church was confronted with a firmly established calendrical pagan ritual which, despite all efforts, it found itself powerless to abolish. In this connection it is interesting to note a letter written by Pope Gregory I (Gregory the Great) to Augustine in England (597 A.D. approx.) urging him to "accommodate the ceremonies of Christian worship as much as possible to those of the heathen so that converts might not be too much startled by the change", also "to allow them to kill and eat a great number of oxen to the glory of God as they had formerly to devils"! On the principle of "if you can't beat 'em join 'em".

One difficulty lay in fixing the date of Christ's birth; neither the year, month nor day was known. Every conceivable date was suggested but January 6th was most popular especially in the East. In 353 A.D. however Pope Liberius, in order to counteract the prevailing influence of the Saturnalia and the Mithras cult, decided to establish December 25th as the official day of the Nativity. Epiphanius of Constantia disagreed and wanted the event commemorated 13 days after the solstice in order to coincide

with the Koreion festival at Alexandria celebrating the birth of Aeon (the Earth) from Korè (the Virgin) when much the same ritual was performed, but December 25th remained fixed. This brought about conflict with the Armenians owing to the association of that date with the mythological victory of Light over Darkness (rebirth of the sun as the giver of light) hence the Armenian accusation against the Latin Church as being guilty of Sun-worship!

The people of Northern Europe put up a vigorous defence against the new religion for they had strong faith in their own gods. The Tree, now our popular Christmas tree was one of the principal religious symbols of Woden-worship, and the cross was an ancient mystical sign known as the "Hammer of Thor" while the Yule log still carried home so ceremonially in some countries on Christmas Eve was originally an ancient Aryan custom. The Anglo-Saxons kept the festival of the winter solstice as Yule, derived from the old Norse word Jól denoting revelry and feasting, from when the High Feast of Odin was held in mid-winter. Before their absorption into Christianity heathen folk-festivals tended to stress enjoyment of the good things of this life.

Present giving was one of the most notable features at this time. On Christmas Day 1067 William the Norman dispatched the greater part of the treasure captured at Hastings as a present to the Pope complete with Harold's banner! And after laying waste to Northern England with fire and massacre this Christian king celebrated Christmas 1069 at York. A time long remembered by an oppressed people.

With Henry II began a new era of elaborate feasting and entertainment at Christmas. It is claimed that in medieval times poor as well as rich benefited from the lavish hospitality of kings and nobles at this season. Richard II is said to have feasted 10,000 people a day! And in Henry III's reign during Christmas 1248 Westminster Hall is reputed to have been filled for a week with poor people feasting at the king's expense. It was the age of wandering minstrels, jugglers, dancers and of mystery plays and pageants usually based on some religious theme. The Church tried putting on rival plays and there is on record a petition from pupils of St. Paul's School to Richard II complaining that secular actors used scripture histories to the detriment of Church performances. But the transference of mystery plays from Church to Guildhall or market place, and spoken in the vernacular, continued and finally won the day. Towards the end of the fifteenth century the old Saturnalian custom of dressing up was revived together with the Mummings and 'Lord of Misrule' frolics; but the sumptuous entertainments and revellings of Tudor and Stuart times ended with Puritan rule. The Calvinistic Scots condemned Christmas as a blasphemous relic of paganism!

(Continued overleaf)

(Continued from previous page)

The first Christmas day after the Pilgrims landed in America they spent felling timber, there was no revelry although they did have a little beer to drink after their day's labour. On June 3, 1647, it was decreed by the Commonwealth government that Christmas and certain other religious festivals were no longer to be observed. A London newspaper *Mercurius Civicus* wrote, "In these times too many people are addicted to the superstitious observance of December 25th", while Parliament sat every Christmas Day from 1644 to 1656. With the Restoration Christmas came back into favour, but not with its former medieval magnificence. It began to anticipate the family and holiday celebration of the later Victorian age. The age of the pantomime, the professional Father Christmas, the

Christmas card, the tree decked with lights and presents, and the secular approach which has now become almost complete.

For those who like mystery ancient astrological lore concerning the Birth story may prove interesting. In the original Babylonian Zodiac Virgo was the Moon-goddess and Gabriel governed the Moon. The halo sometimes visible round the Moon was called by an Akkadian word meaning "sheep-fold". Here we have the framework of an intriguing legend from an ancient source when the study of the stars was a paramount occupation. Curiosity is further aroused when we find the font in a thirteenth century Romney Marsh Church (Brooklands), bears the twelve signs of the Zodiac! The implication is interesting.

A HUMANIST CHRISTMAS

PETER CROMMELIN

IN SO FAR AS Christmas produces a brief increase in material prosperity for a large number of persons, the festival may be granted a qualified welcome by secular humanists. There is certainly no reason why atheists should fall behind Christians in the enjoyment of good food and drink. Atheists, however being more rational than Christians are more likely to practise moderation in the use of all those things that are a factor in the making of a good and happy life. We who believe that the one and only purpose of life is to enjoy life as much as it can be enjoyed, are not likely to diminish our capacity for enjoyment by actions that are known to be injurious to health and happiness. Nor are we the kind of people to make the whole year suffer for the sake of a merry Christmas.

In view of the fact that Christmas Day brings with it an outburst of religious piety that induces more people than usual to go to church, it seems rather a pity that there cannot be a similar outburst of militant atheism to celebrate the same day. I fear that there will be no public meeting for atheists on Christmas Day, nor is the BBC likely to broadcast any rational criticism of the gospel story of the birth of Jesus. This particular humanist belongs to a school that teaches that Jesus was never really born at all, except as a product of male imagination. No woman whether virgin or otherwise played any part in the making of Christ. The Mother was clearly an after-thought in the creation of the central character of the gospel story. To this school of thought it seems highly probable that the peculiar character presented to the world as Jesus the Christ was a product of Roman rather than Hebrew imagination. Though it may well have been the work of Jews, it seems almost beyond reasonable doubt that the Christian mythology originated in Rome rather than in the state of Israel. I have no doubt whatsoever that the most ancient form of the Christian myth is to be found in Roman catholicism, which provides a very good reason for being neither Christian nor a Roman Catholic.

The coming of Christmas now renews in me a feeling of gratitude that I have lived long enough to outgrow completely the religious piety in which I was born and bred. I regret the many years of my celibate priesthood, but perhaps without those wasted years, I could never have come to the ultimate contentment of my married life. I had ceased to believe long before I met my wife, but without the love of my wife I would never have come to possess the courage of my own convictions. I only wish that all unmarried bishops and priests could come to the same

kind of philosophical humanism that has given me so much pleasure and satisfaction.

While the Christians are at church on Christmas Day, humanists should be strengthening their humanism with suitable reading. As I have said there are not likely to be any humanist meetings on this day, but there is plenty of humanist literature to provide much more nourishing food for the mind than Bible stories or carols. And if it comes to music, there is much more secular music that is worth listening to, than any of the "sacred music" performed in church.

It is taking a long time for dead religions to become extinct. But as secular humanism grows more powerful in its capacity for rational thought, so must it become more effective in communication. It must always be remembered that religion functions on the same intellectual level as idolatry, superstition and magic, and on the same moral level as obtaining money by false pretences. We cannot regard such things as incurable diseases of human nature. We must regard all human errors as amenable to correction.

It is a complete waste of time, either at Christmas or at any time, to pray for peace on earth, to any supernatural "Prince of Peace". There is no such person. It is not, however, a waste of time to work for peace. It is not a waste of time to endeavour to enlarge the number of those prepared to offer a genuine conscientious objection to war. It is not a waste of time to increase the number of those who honestly feel that it is pleasanter to die than it is to kill. Above all it is not a waste of time to co-operate in the removal of those political and economic conditions that are the real cause of war. Peace on earth is by no means an impracticable or utopian ideal. It cannot be achieved by any form of Christianity, but it could be achieved in the course of time by a perfectly rational advance of secular humanism. And Time itself is a human invention. Apart from the mind of man, there would be no such thing as hours, days, weeks or years.

The festival of Christmas is supposed to be "for the children". There can be no greater service rendered to children than to save as many as possible from being subjected to what is called "religious instruction". It is bad enough for children to be subjected to compulsory education, but when that compulsory education is infected with religious dogma, then it becomes a violation of human rights. And that is a crime, whether it is committed by teachers against their pupils, or by parents against their children.

(Continued on page 408)

GOD JUL—A WINTER STORY

ISOBEL GRAHAME

Isobel Grahame intends this story to be read to children. However, the adult reader who enjoys it may rest assured. He is not alone.

RICHARD held Auntie Fay's hand not because he was frightened but because he liked her and they were going to the toy department to see Father Christmas and a Spaceman.

"Are you a god?" he asked the bearded old gentleman sitting on a kind of throne before a sledge and two antlered animals of painted hardboard. "No, I'm a very old idea," replied Father Christmas—"some people call me Santa Claus and others Uncle Frost, the idea has many names." "But you're an ordinary man underneath your make-believe robes and beard?" asked Richard. "I'm an ordinary man acting an idea about the coming and going of the Sun. People, in countries where the sun disappears during the depth of winter and its dim light lasts only a few hours each day, used to fear it would not return and the Earth would die of cold. So they invented a winter festival of fires and lights and bright warm things and evergreen branches to remind the sun how things are in summer and tempt it to come back again. But I'm not doing my act properly, I should ask what you would like best for Christmas?"

Richard pondered a moment and then—"I know what I'd like best for me. Those things behind you are Red Deer only their antlers aren't right—I'd like to see real Reindeer in the Land of Long Winter." "That's a splendid idea, so would I," said Father Christmas and called to the Spaceman on the other side of the toy department, "How can we get to where the Reindeer live?" Fay began to laugh till her eyes had that kind mischievous look which made people look at her a second time, and Father Christmas and the Space man looked at her and she seemed so like a fairy that her umbrella turned into a wand. (Of course Richard had thought of her as a fairy ever since he was a baby.) "There's a ship called *North Star* which goes right up the coast of Norway past the North Cape to Kirkenes. I'll take you to Bergen in my Rocket and you can go to Honningsvaag which is on Mageröya in Finnmark—the Lapps keep Reindeer there," answered the Spaceman.

Sure enough, there was the ship berthed at the Bergen Steamship Company's quay. All the lights were on in the town and the harbour and on the ships because the sun was far away and children went to school in the dark, but there were so many lights reflected from so much snow that it didn't seem properly dark and they could see the ships name—*Nordstjernen*—on her side. (In Norway it is pronounced like Norse Chair.) Very soon she was off on her long dark icy voyage.

At Aalesund Richard, Fay and Father Christmas went ashore and met a lone Kittiwake. "My people have left our rock in the middle of this town until next year's breeding season, but I have a broken wing so I keep that man as a pet. He's good company and no trouble and I share my home and food and warmth with him. Have a good journey—God Jul," he said and waddled away towards a man who was writing down everything which went into the ship's hold.

The Arctic Winter is a difficult season for birds. Redwings and Fieldfares flew south to Britain, Gulls sought ships and fish processing factories, and the Puffins scuttled

through the waves when *Nordstjernen* approached, keeping themselves warm in the Gulf Stream. The sea churned and the engines chured and the black rocks were all around and Father Christmas told stories about them and Fay shone her wand's light so Richard could see it all. There was the great lighthouse called Grip just north of Kristiansund, and a little thing, half sextant half sundial, on a rock marking the Arctic Circle which passes through the Horseman's Isle, and the Torghattne mountain with the Giant Hestmann's arrow hole through it, and at Stamsund in the Lofoten Islands a Fjordinger horse called "God Jul" again to Richard. It looked just like a coffee cream sandwich horse with the dark list running from forelock to tail for chocolate filling.

While passing the Lyngen Alps a splendid Herring Gull soared over the ship and swooped low attracted by Fay and her light. Gulls normally fly with legs stretched back, orange-pink feet pressed up under their tails, but this one was white and smooth as an egg underneath. "Poor bird, it will never survive the winter with no legs," said Richard in distress, but the gull gave a horse laugh and a kind of fluffle withdrawing both legs from under its breast feathers. It landed on Richard's shoulder nearly knocking him down. The Captain said he'd seen only one other gull which tucked its feet up in front to keep them warm.

The North Cape loomed a thousand feet and black, too sheer to hold the snow which was thick and hard on the flat top. At Honningsvaag the travellers waved Goodbye to *Nordstjernen* calling "God Jul" to her Captain and crew. Richard asked what the words meant and Father Christmas said it was "Good Yule" which is the real name of the old idea, the winter festival, and Christians later decided to celebrate Christ Mass at the same time.

There was a Snow cat on the quay and an electronics engineer offered them a lift to the Lapp camp on his way to the Decca station on Nordkapp. The sharp-eared Huskies heard them coming and barked a noisy welcome, and Richard tucked Warmfeet safely under his jacket. The Chief Lapp, dressed very like Father Christmas, came out of his tent to greet them, and behind him stood a herd of Reindeer looking smaller and shaggier than Richard had expected—even their noses were covered with thick dark fur.

The Lapp children crowded round Fay while their elders exchanged a sledge and team of their fastest Reindeer for preserved fruit and nuts from Father Christmas, evergreen boughs, red berries and a little spruce tree in a golden pot from Richard, and Fay gave them her wand and decked the tree with all her spangles. Warmfeet just croaked under the jacket and everyone thought it was Richard. Then the visitors climbed into the furlined sledge and sped down the Arctic Highway to Bergen and into the cavernous hold of the old God *Jupiter*, now working part-time as a ferry across the North Sea.

The Spaceman met them at Newcastle and invited Father Christmas and the Reindeer to his home in Scotland. The Redwings and the Fieldfares were waiting to help distribute Father Christmas' sackful of New Ideas for Children everywhere, and Fay took Richard and Warmfeet back by train. Richard fell asleep until Christmas morning when the gull squawked "God Jul" from the window sill and woke him up.

LETTERS

Sexual permissiveness

MAURICE HILL'S letter, derisive of the sentiments contained in those of Messrs Tindall and Turner, opposing advocacy of visual sexual intercourse and obsession about sex, provokes me to take up the torch for decency. The recent trend of the FREETHINKER to exclude pornographic subjects from its columns has been appreciated by no inconsiderable a number of its subscribers, and a wash back of such matter would be gravely detrimental to its health and the regard of the public which it must woo in order to survive and enlighten it as to the case against God and the medieval superstition which it was founded to expose and destroy.

Factual education (Mr Hill's term) on the salacious should have no part in the literature of the sole secularist journal to which we can look for hope of a wholesome, rational and humanitarian society. An obsessive anxiety about sex (Mr Hill's words again) is, he says, the result of that very secrecy half-supported by Mr Tindall. So is, I suppose, the spate of illegitimate births coincident with the expansion of the new freedom Mr Hill advocates? One of the tasks of the FREETHINKER is, he claims, to present the facts factually, hair and all. In these sophisticated days, does he think youth has anything to learn about how to breed? Our honoured journal need not, and must not, be used as a vehicle for sensual and sexual ideas, and I heartily support the Tindalls and Turners in their efforts to keep the paper free of them and, by the elimination of them from its too scarce pages, ensure the vitally necessary space for the effective propagation of atheist principles.

In conclusion, I would thank Mr Hill not to further submit for publication the four-letter word with which he graced his letter, and I will be far from alone in desiring the editor of the FREETHINKER not to print it.

F. H. SNOW.

Is Man Moral?

I AGREE WITH much of what Michael Gray writes in his excellent article *Is Man Moral?* but surely he starts from the Christian attitude that all selfishness is 'sin'? (in spite of the fact that Christianity preaches 'love thy neighbour as thyself'). Inasmuch as it leads to altruism and the ability to care for others, isn't 'selfishness' moral? Man's 'superiority' over other animals is not just his cruelty, vanity, etc. (given certain conditions all animals will behave as badly?); only man has excelled in the creativity, inventiveness, ingenuity and imagination which enriches human life. I can never understand how Christians can bother with their tatty miracles when just to watch anyone playing a musical instrument really well is to be amazed at what ordinary mortals cannot do! Secular Humanists certainly don't worship man, but we need not swerve from the Christian habit of giving man all the blame and God the credits to handing out nothing but blame? I disagree that 'the nobility of man is seldom witnessed', but Christian conditioning doesn't make it easy to recognise perhaps? Michael Gray, please write some more . . .

KIT MOUAT.

[Kit Mouat's final sentence may have been inspired by a feeling that Michael Gray's article was incomplete. This is in fact so. Due to a printer's error, for which we apologise, the final paragraph of his "Is Man Moral?" was omitted. For the sake of continuity the preceding paragraph is reprinted here together with the omission. —Ed.]

The history of mankind should be studied in an objective manner, not from the standpoint of that particularly common brand of Humanism which, having forced God to take refuge in non-existence, seeks to worship man in his stead. We are often regaled with tales of the nobility of man, yet that nobility is seldom witnessed. Man is dominant, he is 'superior', not because of his moral nature but because he is the most ruthless and murderous animal on earth. Other animals may kill, as the insanely sadistic plan of nature dictates they must, but they do so only insofar as is necessary for their own survival. Man kills for food he does not need, for the vanity of dressing up in skins and furs he could do without, or for the simple pleasure that killing itself gives him (we call it "sport"). He is the only animal that continually wages war on his own kind, wasting vast wealth and resources urgently needed to combat already-existing poverty and starvation in the creation of millions more poor and hungry (and dead). Not content with the

punishment he extracts in this life he conjures up the most sadistic visions of eternal torment in the next for his enemies.

It is claimed that man's ability to choose between right and wrong is what makes him the only moral creature on earth. It would be more realistic to admit that if man is truly aware of the distinction, and can choose freely between right and wrong, he is in fact the only truly immoral creature since he so consistently chooses wrong.

How many pintas?

UNDER the title "Dogma in Advertising" in your issue of November 16, Isobel Grahame refers to one of the National Dairy Council's current advertisements for milk which includes the question "Are you giving them enough pintas?". The doubts which Isobel Grahame may have raised in the minds of your readers regarding the amount of milk which supplies the daily allowance of calcium in the diet of the age groups mentioned in the advertisement will, I am sure, be dispelled when they read this confirmation that the British Medical Association Committee on Nutrition is the authority which recommends these quantities.

This advertisement must also be seen against the background of the cessation of secondary school milk as from the commencement of the current term.

D. J. VOGLER,

Head of Promotions and Public Relations,
National Dairy Council.

Church weddings

AN INDICATION of changing trends in Church affairs can usually be gained by reading the preface to *Crockford's Clerical Directory*. The anonymous writer in the 1969 issue is concerned at the Church's attitude to marriage and advocates that it should be relieved of the obligation to marry people who are not *actually practising Christians!* The preface suggestion is that civil marriage should be legally compulsory for all citizens as in France, with an additional religious ceremony conducted by the Church if desired and "where it saw fit"! (A sinister note that.) The writer calls for a more disciplined form of Christian marriage, criticises current divorce law and much else.

Is this a belated recognition of the growing popularity of civil marriage or a recruitment ruse relying on the attraction of Church ceremonial for certain people? Marriage is after all a personal affair recognised by civil contract and always was until the Christian Church intervened for its own purposes. Even so, the Crockfords suggestion is a step in the right direction. It is to be hoped that Borough Councils will take note with an eye to the future and step up arrangements for providing comfortable and attractive Marriage Halls as many Boroughs have already done. Also that Parliament will prove willing to pass the necessary legislation.

ELIZABETH COLLINS.

(Continued from page 406)

On Christmas Day, the mass-media of communication are almost exclusively dedicated to nonsense, both secular and sacred. This fact provides a challenge to the freethinker. The voice of reason cannot be heard, but the freethinker can still think freely and wisely, while other folk are talking nonsense, singing nonsense, and preaching nonsense, and being well paid for their nonsense sometimes, and in the man-made currency of pounds, shillings and pence.

FREETHINKER subscriptions

and orders for literature . . . The Freethinker Bookshop
01-407 0029

Editorial matter . . . The Editor, The Freethinker
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 01-407 1251

POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 months: £2 1s 6d 6 months: £1 1s 3 months: 10s 6d

USA AND CANADA

12 months: \$5.25 6 months: \$2.75 3 months: \$1.40

The FREETHINKER can be ordered through any newsagent.