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A MERRY . . . ?

TWO YOUNG BOYS, varying in size and shape to an extent reminiscent of Laurel and Hardy, rewarded my tramp down the corridor to answer to a lengthy blast on my door bell with a shrill, almost in tune, attempt at "We wish you a merry Christmas". Hopping slowly from one foot to the other I stood through two verses and felt myself forced to interrupt with: "Thank you very much. What exactly do you mean by Christmas?"

They looked from one to the other and "Laurel" put a finger to his lower lip and executed a circular movement with his head, which came to rest pointing towards his feet. "Hardy" giggled and said, "Well . . . er . . . (more circular movements from "Laurel") Jesus was born in a manger". I didn't think it appropriate to point out that if Jesus was born at all, let alone in a manger, he certainly wasn't born in the middle of winter, so I gave them two bob and referred them to this issue of the FREETHINKER and suggested that they might sing to my neighbour, a retired naval commander: "We wish you a Merry Xmas", an idea culled from the following seasonal press release from David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society:

"An editorial in the Roman Catholic Universe (December 5) draws attention to the growing tendency to regard Christmas as 'a suitable occasion for atheists to give each other presents and take a more genial view of each other's characters'. In the same issue Paul Jennings notes the 'serious attempt to reform Christmas' by 'demythologising (smart word for dechristianising) it, removing the central idea of the Incarnation, frankly recognising it as a pagan winter festival, a light in the gloom, a celebration of life reborn in the dark of the year, seed germinating, etc.'"

The National Secular Society will be happy to unite with its Catholic friends in taking Christ out of Christmas. Divine incarnation and death for the sins of the world are also pre-Christian pagan concepts. But there is paganism and paganism. Some of it, like the Saturnalia festival, when slaves were waited on by their masters and there was general merry-making, is delightful, liberating and unifying. A December feast of the winter solstice might not be universal, as it has no relevance to the southern hemisphere, but it would unite the majority of the world's population in celebration of life-giving forces that are of universal impact.

The idea of Christ has always been divisive. It has cut off Christians from the bulk of the world's population that repudiates Christian dogmatism, clericalism and its demoralising belief that human problems are insoluble without divine intervention and sacrifice. Even within Christianity the Incarnation has led to vendettas and persecutions involving those with rival views of how the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ are combined and what is the exact status of Christ within the Trinity. Today, beneath all the tinsel and the fairy lights, the Christmas Crib is still

fouled with the secretions of superstition and the charred bones of heretics. If few Christians notice them now it is because basic religious belief has become secularised and sentimentalised.

Fortunately we already have in "Xmas" a word intended to commemorate the cross but which to most people simply suggests the unknown. If that name became universal in the secular world it could be invested by Christians and other special groups with particular significance while not offending that large body of opinion which resents the way in which Christians try to monopolise all aspects of our national life and international relations. In public ceremonies, stamps and broadcasting, only events of universal significance should be commemorated.



And so the National Secular Society wishes all its friends a very MERRY XMAS, a very SCINTILLATING SATURNALIA."

MARRIAGE MANIA

MR JUSTICE SCARMAN, the Chairman of the Law Commission, has been quoted as saying that in the future everyone may be required to marry in register offices. *The Times* attacks him with leader-written waffle about "the status and purpose of any subsequent ecclesiastical ceremony (being) largely frustrated", only to be attacked from

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the rear by the Reverend D. H. Palmer, who amongst other things reveals that a clergyman receives £1 18s 6d for a marriage and an extra pound if his organ is used!

Such a discussion as to the nature of the expected reform of the laws relating to marriage is a sure symptom of the widespread lack of sanctity now accorded to the unholy institution of matrimony—a lack of sanctity which is rapidly increasing as religious prejudice loses hold. That marriage in its legal sense is fundamentally unchristian can be appreciated if one remembers that Christ preached love. For society to endeavour to uphold love with laws and traditions, which engender prejudice against those who disregard them, negates the principle, which Christ and many other people have upheld and indeed died for. Western societies suggest, and indeed infer in their legislation and *mores*, that one man must love one woman—and one

woman only—throughout his entire lifespan. Marriage can thus be said to be an obstacle to love. It is self-evident that this is anti-social. Some western societies have comparatively recently acknowledged, by permitting divorce, that a man, or woman, can love more than one person. Even in such societies, there still remains the underlying socially divisive prejudice, which is found reflected in the law, against anyone loving more than one person at the same time.

Apart from this, the marriage institution breeds hypocrisy like polygamous rabbits. The vast number of people, who “commit adultery”, are being hypocritical. The pregnant brides are being hypocritical. The majority of participants in church weddings are being hypocritical. The Pope who permits divorces almost exclusively to his devotees, who fall within the super-tax bracket, is being hypocritical. The large numbers of enlightened people who marry to humour the taxman are being hypocritical. Hypocrisy is a canker in any society and should never be encouraged by law.

Why cannot the marriage laws simply be repealed? People would then be allowed to love as many people as they liked—or of course the traditionally acceptable one—without being pressured by state, or tradition, or laws, or a religious millionairess of a great aunt. If they wish to reinforce their love psychologically with a ceremony, they can always take an oath. The law commission could then turn its attention to devising legislation to safeguard children, instead of providing *The Times* leader writers and parsons with exercises in semantics.

COMING EVENTS

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.

INDOOR

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, December 21, 6.30 p.m.: “Coping with Anxiety and Stress”, Ken Leigh.

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

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

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ALEISTER CROWLEY

OSWELL BLAKESTON

THE YOUNGER GENERATION has rediscovered Aleister Crowley, the magician who in my youth commanded sensational headlines with what were regarded as sexual outrages and diabolical blasphemies and attempts to steal the towers of Notre Dame!! The importance of Crowley for the young is that they believe his story suggests that it is only in times of poverty that one needs asceticism to get turned on. In our age one can have all the kinky clothes (and Crowley loved dressing up in rich wizard garments) and plenty of money (Crowley spent a fortune publishing his own books) and yet be a "saint" of the "Gnostic" Church and live in a psychedelic dream.

But poor old Crowley doesn't show up well in what he called his autotheography, and which is now published for the first time.¹ He certainly brought some meaning to the childish magic rituals by using them as background for sex experiments; but in this book he makes hardly any reference to such achievement, and even pathetically pretends that everything was suburbanly virtuous in his "monastery" in Cefalu, a farcical community if one leaves out the idea that the lust of the goat is the glory of God. Alas, to get full value out of Crowley's sex magick (as he called it) one has to turn to another book, Jean Overton Fuller's *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg*.

In lots of other ways too Crowley betrays his legend: the petty fights with other "magicians", the feeble vulgarity of most of his abuse, the fascist taint in his reactionary political opinions, his absurd claims of genius for his indifferent verses ("my work will be automatically cancelled when the globe becomes uninhabitable to man"), his "aristocratic" pretensions and golf playing and shooting of anything that came within range of his sporting gun, his proclamations of titles granted to him on the astral plane by The Hidden Masters, just as missionaries in India used to aver that they must have caught syphilis on the astral plane. No, if one wants to keep one's illusions about Crowley, it's wiser to read John Symonds' biography, *The Great Beast*.

But of course there's plenty of interest for students of religious mania in this enormously self-indulgent outpouring of some nine hundred pages. First there is the superb illustration of the dangers of religious instruction. Beast 666 was brought up with a Plymouth Brethren background; and his first school master seems to have been a religious maniac. The atmosphere was one in which the Demon Kings were smo-king and drin-king; and surely William Whitley had several fires at the Almighty's repartee to the merchant's assumption of the title "Universal Provider"? Was it any wonder that the boy should react and pray: "Evil be thou my good"? and that he should dream not only of knowing the Devil but of becoming his chief of staff?

Then, as he grew up, and because he was ashamed that the family money came from a brewery, he bestowed distinctions on himself by claiming magick, in the same way that he himself held that Wilde had been ashamed of his father being a mere knighted doctor and had tried to make himself interesting by becoming an apostle of homosexuality. (Who but Crowley would pretend that Wilde was a perfectly normal square, and fail to see that the argument of Wilde being driven to homosexuality for snobbish reasons applied with force to his own concern with esoteric make-believe?)

The magic charades were a good bit of drag when Crowley was young and had the charisma of a small part actor; but it was pretty ludicrous when he aged and looked like Mr Pooter dressed for a conjuring act. Yet his power did not fail him? When I knew him, I found him pitifully devoid of any magnetism, although he did his best to win me over, even inventing a drink for me which he called an eagle's tail (I think it had laudanum in it) in his attempt to bind me as a disciple. But, inevitably, even at the end when he had nothing to offer and had spent all his fortune, he could still produce the mumbo-jumbo for the feeble-minded and bamboozle them into giving him what they had. It's the old story of religions and rackets, that there will always be those whose lives are so empty they welcome any diversion and are willing to give "magically"—which means more than you can afford—to priests, adepts, gurus, those who say they have won diabolical VCs.

Frankly, I have little patience with the so-called magickal (but unsexed) passages in this hodge-podge book. If I may be permitted a digression, may I tell a story of another black magician, a rival of Crowley's, who attracted the attention of Father Robert Hugh Benson. Father Benson planned a test. He left his bedroom slippers at the foot of the stairs, and told the magician to make them walk up to the bedroom by themselves. Then priest and magician sat in the presbytery parlour drinking and willing. The housekeeper found the slippers and, having a tidy mind, carried them back to the bedroom. Both priest and magician declared the test was a success—for the Power always uses the most economical channel for manifestation!

What can one think of the "problems" which bedevil the life of a magician? Can one take them seriously? ". . . he knew not whether to direct a hostile current of will against DDCF and VNR, supposing them to be guilty of cherishing within their bodies the spirits of two reincarnated vampires, or perhaps Arab-Melin demons under the assumed forms of SVA and MSR, or to warn DDCF; supposing him to be innocent, as he perhaps was, of so black and evil an offence." As for Crowley's claims to be the reincarnation of Cagliostro and Pope Alexander VI—I think such vapours belong to the fortune tellers at the end of piers in those seedy resorts which would have given Crowley the formula of the original curse on creation without magic rigmarole.

No wonder the Beast was driven to periodic frenzies of mountain climbing. He had to do something real for a change every now and then or else collapse into complete mind blowing. But of course there are lucid moments. I appreciate Crowley's statement that the real secret of Yoga is non-thinking. I think that at times he can put things well: "To declare oneself a follower of Jesus is not only to insult history and reason, but to apologise for the murderers of Arius, Molinos and Cranmer . . ." I find that at times he can put forward a stimulating idea, such as the notion that Jack the Ripper was performing an operation to obtain the Supreme Black Magic Power, the seven women killed so that their bodies would form a "Calvary cross of seven points" with heads to the west. I can admit that, on rare occasions, the man can be witty: a lady "described on the charge sheet as a poetess". I can grant that some of his short stories which I have not read but

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FIFTY EDUCATION YEARS AGO

ISOBEL GRAHAME

ALL THE TALK about learning by finding out, of the new maths, new methods of teaching reading and writing (or of not teaching them at all), free expression, projects, integrated syllabuses and what not is very stimulating, but it is not all that new. Many educational experiments were mounted by private schools and progressive teachers 50 years ago and more. It seems strange that much of what proved successful has only recently filtered into the State school system, together with some ideas found to be unsatisfactory by those pioneers.

Mother taught me reading, writing and reckoning at home until the end of the first World War, then at the age of seven I was sent to a small private progressive school. The only alternative was a one-room Church school which stopped at fourteen. At school I refused to read for months because my special torturer was pinching and kicking me black and blue under the table during lessons. My handwriting has never recovered from learning pothooks at home, then a disjointed script at school and leaving school before being taught how to join the letters up.

The two youngest Forms consisted of twelve children each, seated in threes at small brightly painted tables. Nobody sat still for long because we were engaged on projects—learning by experiment all together. I remember two heretics, a boy and a girl who could read fluently, who complained that spending a week finding out what was already known and could be read from a book, was a waste of time. There were sand trays, live plants, seeds, fish, lizards, mice, etc., in their appropriate containers which we tended under supervision.

In 1918 we were doing movement and music, called eurythmics, class music and singing, mime, puppetry, speech training and elocution which was taught by a young visiting specialist—Margaret Rutherford. There was mid-morning milk and biscuits which we loathed, and after a two-course hot lunch everyone between 8 and 16 had to lie down on rugs for half an hour while teachers read to us. The under eights went home before lunch.

Brainy lessons happened in the morning, and afternoons were devoted to games every day, swimming and sport in summer, and Brownies and Guides once a week. Non-brainy lessons like sewing (drawn threadwork on white material), drawing and other crafts often happened immediately after a hard game of Lacrosse or 100 yards sprint practice, when hands were sticky, frozen or shaking from exertion. Every day ended with an hour of supervised prep. until 4.30 p.m. The only homework was at weekends two subjects of half an hour each.

Every Form in the school had one period a week called "Appreciation". We provided the material to be appreciated which could range from conkers to concertos and these periods inevitably became occasions for much DIY moral education. Where children today ask why, we asked how do you know, and that I think was more rational. Sex, babies, love, marriage were unmentionable at school and at home, and religion was considered indecent as a topic of conversation. At the age of 11 onwards each child had to give a talk lasting eight minutes on some subject she had chosen and researched.

The school was self-governing except for the two youngest Forms. Mondays began with Form meetings. Committee procedure was introduced by the teachers who thereafter withdrew to the sidelines acting as referees if Chairmen and Secretaries could not cope. There was a School meeting every term. All this was ponderously time con-

suming, and we were often hard put to it to think up something to put on the agenda!

French was taught at age 7 and elementary physics and botany at 9. Forms IV, V and VI had optional German, Latin and more advanced Maths from visiting tutors who took one, two or three pupils at a time. Each form had its own room and Form Mistress, except the Sixth who inhabited the Head's study, so with all the visiting specialists there was a lot of individual attention. Many teachers were unqualified except as to their dedication—though we did once have an MA for Maths who was upset by our casual way of moving about the room during lessons and spent most of the time pleading "take your seats and mind your manners, girls". Fortunately she didn't last long for we were wasting much time ostentatiously holding one hand on our bottoms and the other over our mouths.

This incident apart, I don't remember any discipline problems. We got ticked off of course, but as the staff were on the footing of respected older friends, we tended to feel devastated by the mildest reproof and really did try outwardly to behave well.

Until I was 9 I walked the two and a half miles of unmade hilly roads to and from. After that I was promoted to a bicycle with oil lamps which frequently blew out in winter or let the wet in. If we got drenched we were stripped on arrival and wrapped in our rugs while clothes dried in the specially provided hot cupboards. These were delightfully hilarious occasions.

Every day opened with Prayers, the Lord's Prayer and a hymn followed by a moral pep-talk from the Head. Religion at that school was peculiar and made little impact on me either for good or evil. We had Bible stories called Scripture, but I never believed them to be factual and I don't think we were expected to. Often we learned texts from printed cards and then coloured the patterned borders. During the painting part the teacher would read to us from Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* or Ernest Thompson Seaton's animal books. Our general ethic was the stiff upper lip, playing the game, and a kind of ritualised chivalry inculcated by the Head's references to Arthur and his Knights in her pep-talks. (We were Knights, it never occurred to us to think of ourselves as being even potential ladies!)

Plays were written and produced annually by each Form. As there was IQ entry test, the school population was truly comprehensive, including various disabled girls and some who would be classified ESN today. Great care was taken by everyone to help these lame ducks, and we wrote suitable characters into our dramatics so that they could take part. Usually they were cast as Royalty who wore gorgeous clothes and stood or sat looking splendid, merely nodding or gesturing appropriately. There was selection by income, of course, but many girls came from families who had made fortunes during the 1914/18 war but whose parents had little education. Thus we had plenty of deprived children who knew little of books and found communication difficult. Their speech was poor, their parents punished them with "a leathering" but their language was colourful. I learned to swear on my first day, but had the prudence not to show off with it at home.

Our uniform was flared tunics in which we actually did Gym, so they were worn short enough not to catch on the handles of the vaulting horse or knock the rope down during high jump. Under these were white silk blouses, briefs and gym tights. (Having worn mini skirts and tights

at school, maxi skirts in the middle thirties, trouser suits during the last war and the New Look after it I do wish somebody would invent a fashion that I have never yet worn!)

This school was a good start on the whole and I learned to think, to keep my eyes open, be inventive by looking at simple objects with a view to converting them into something exciting or decorative. However, although the self-government part may sound ideal—like a participating democracy—that was in fact the least successful experiment. Especially at the younger levels the system was wide open to every bossy power seeker and sadistic neurotic to keep the rest of us feeling unhappy and insecure.

The socially deprived individuals were in the minority. They conformed outwardly to the high-minded ethic of personal service, self-sacrifice, emotional control and almost courtly deference to others—an example which was set by the staff. But behind the scenes, in unsupervised cloak-rooms and the extensive grounds laid out with an orchard, a spinney and thick shrubberies “so that we could be alone”, there was brutal bullying, intimidation and mental cruelty with inevitable blackmail and protection racketeering. Our ethic forbade telling, and enforced the explaining away of tears and injuries as the victim's own fault.

I was taken away at 12 because my Father could no longer afford to pay, and sent to a County School where for £12 per annum everything changed. During the previous five years I had felt confident with adults and frightened of other children, but in the new school my peers were kinder to each other, less two-faced, less intense and much less well-behaved, but united against authoritarian adults. The teachers were all qualified. Two we loved and admired, but they taught the young ones, so I met them only as games and prep supervisors. Two were cruel neurotics whom we feared, taking turns at buying them flowers to bribe them into relatively tolerable behaviour. The balm lasted only half the lesson and one woman used to stomp around calling us smudgy little brats and cuffing, slapping, pinching and ruler-knuckling anybody unfortunate enough to occupy a gangway desk. The other was acidulated, insisting on absolute silence and immobility while detecting talking, fidgeting, passing notes and “looking insolent” every few minutes, and dishing out more and more lines and longer detentions. The rest were generally distant frigid figures to be kept on the right side of. I was told that they thawed out when you got into the Sixth, but that was too late for most of us.

Uniform was not compulsory at the County School except for gym and games when we wore box pleated tunics which were too long for gym and sports so we had to take them off and perform in our knickers. Some parents considered this improper and forbade their offspring to

disrobe. Other days we could wear “what we liked” which meant suffering Mum's frugality and wearing out grubby bedraggled party frocks and other humiliating attire. My first summer, our form asked to be allowed to make uniform cotton dresses during sewing, and this smart rigout became the envy of the school. Soon after uniform cotton dresses became compulsory in summer.

Brainy lessons happened mornings or afternoons. There was nowhere to swim. There was one tennis court for the Sixth. Once a week we trekked to playing fields the other side of the town on foot and there followed the boredom of cricket in summer and the chill filth of hockey or netball on slushy grass in winter. We used to pray for rain so that we could go into the library or play in the gym, or just sit in our desks and do what we liked so long as no noise was generated.

Scripture became Religious Knowledge (not a bad name for it) but it was still taught as though nobody was expected to believe it. (Not a bad method perhaps?) We were given the choice for Matric of doing The Acts or The History of the Jews, and by unanimous vote we opted for the latter. Alas it proved to be even more boring than Christianity, but the syllabus must have been designed for non-Christians, and we did get quite another view of our established religion as a result and I passed with distinction!

We learned human biology under the title of Hygiene. It was very thorough and useful knowledge but it stopped short of sex and reproduction—that we learned from other children who had older brothers or sisters, and were duly disgusted by the whole prospect. Every Easter the Fifth Form was taken to one of the nearer European capitals for ten days, but as parents had to pay the full amount for these trips, several girls had to be left behind and we spent most of our money on presents to bring back for them. When my turn came we stayed in a French school in the heart of Paris which, for the first time, made me glad to be at my school.

The private school paid scant attention to Examination Boards, we were encouraged to be much too busy doing our things not theirs, but the County School was obliged to get us up to Matric standard or at least General Schools. Few stayed on after that although one devotee hung on until she was nearly 20 becoming a venerable institution on her own. I insisted on leaving at 16, after which I entered a long period of do-it-yourself re-education lasting over 30 years before I felt poised, self-confident and a proper person.

But of course so much has changed—nobody is afraid to go to school because of the children or because of the teachers nowadays. Or are they, and if so why?

MAN'S SEARCH FOR PEACE

DEBORAH DODD

THE communist believes that capitalism engenders war. This may well be true, for an inherent characteristic of capitalism is the search of each individual for the more, for gratification of the self at the expense of others. But does communism provide a satisfactory alternative? The ideology it sets out—freedom, equality and the brotherhood of man—is sound in the eyes of anybody searching for an answer to the state of the world today. For the pacifist, the words of the Appeal of the World Council for the Congress of the Peoples must shine out like a beacon in the darkness of the world. The words: “Men and women of all faiths and views come together. Your will for peace must be expressed. Peace must be saved. Peace can be

saved.” So too must the words of Ilya Ehrenberg at the second world peace Congress in 1950: “War is not the midwife of history: it is an abortionist of the flower of humanity. War runs counter to our philosophy, to our ideas of good and evil, to everything to which we aspire, because we have confidence in the future, because all the children of the world, not only the children of Moscow but the children of New York too, are our hopes, our friends and our allies”.

Yet it has become clear that this is merely theory, it is not how communism works in fact. There is proof that

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communism *can* work: the small communes that exist in Britain and the USA today show us this. But whether or not it works depends entirely on the psychological structure of each individual who is involved. If every person in the community has not seen for himself the point of equality, brotherhood and freedom, then the community as a whole must suffer.

Organised communism fails because it is militant, thus contradicting its ideals. There is no integration between the philosophy it sets out and the action that the adherents of this philosophy perpetuate. It forces its views on people who do not want them, who rebel against them and consequently undermine the community. As D. S. Savage, a one-time communist and a conscientious objector during the last war, says: "No revolutionary action can be of any use unless it issues from and consummates the individual's desire for personal fulfilment. What this implies is a wholeness, an integration of being and action". If communism was to work, he believed, it must begin with ethics, be carried out ethically, and to the very end be based on ethics. So communism as it exists in most places today has failed to bring about the peace it advocates. It is not based on ethics: it is willing to trample on the individual for the sake of the policy.

Neither has capitalism succeeded in bringing about a

peaceful society. There must be a society of some sort, for human beings—whether they like it or not—are dependent on and involved with one another. In capitalism this dependency reaches the point of exploitation of the individual: in communism, of the suppression of the individual for the sake of the society. Both envisage a future society in which mankind in general shall be brought into unity by a radical change in the outward structure of social relations. But no revolution will be brought about by outward change: what matters is the *inward* change. Krishnamurti, the Indian speaker and writer, says: "When you have perceived for yourself what is true; when you know that to kill another is not love, when you inwardly feel the truth that there must be no enmity in your relationship with another, then no amount of reasoning can destroy the truth". He believes that the social, economic and political problems of the world will not be solved through any ideology of system—however good—but only in man's inward knowledge of himself, his perception of the truth with his whole being.

Similarly, the anthroposophist, T. J. Weihs says: "Man's search for peace is his search for himself, his search to find what is truly human". That which is truly human can only be found in each human being for and by himself: not in communism, capitalism, or any ism in the world.

THE DAY OF THREE THOUSAND CANDLES

ELIZABETH COLLINS

CHRISTMAS DAY 800 AD was not a day to celebrate the seasonal re-birth of the Sun, nor to commemorate the mysterious birth of an unidentified babe in a remote Palestinian province. The occasion was far more sinister in its implication although the participants would not have recognised it as such. A day of warning significance for future generations which was concealed at the time under a semblance of holiness and majestic pageantry. The urge to become a dominant political power in the tradition of the Imperial Caesars manifested itself very early in the history of the Christian Church, and never more so than by that cunningly contrived and skilfully conducted ceremony which took place in St Peter's basilica in Rome on that Christmas Day.

The Church, not so grandiose and embellished as it appears today, nevertheless presented a scene of much splendour. Between the pillars of the central aisle were draped rich purple hangings, while the entrance to the eastern apse was framed by a triumphal arch from which hung suspended 3,000 candles! These were only lit at high festivals of which this day was one. They diffused a glorious brightness over the whole scene, especially on to the reputed shrine of the apostle Peter situated immediately below, cased in gold and studded with precious stones, the whole richly gleaming.

The Church was filled with notables of the Papal and Frankish Courts to hear Mass celebrated by Leo III, that none too virtuous Pope whose moral character had just been subjected to a judicial enquiry from which he had emerged scathless as was to be expected. The principal attraction on that Christmas morning however was the herculean figure of the king of the Franks (Charlemagne) who, attended by his two sons knelt before the sacred shrine. Here, amidst the chanting and the clouds of incense, the king was about to be rewarded for his inestimable services to the Faith and the Papacy. At the end of the service, with apparent suddenness Pope Leo stepped forward and placed a gold jewelled crown on Charles's head saluting him as "Carolus Augustus! Emperor of the Romans!" Immedi-

ately the cry was taken up by every voice in the basilica shouting "Carolus! Crowned of God! The great pacific Emperor! Long life and victory!" How human beings can deceive themselves!

Charlemagne always declared that the coronation ceremony had surprised him though that can hardly be credited. Such a co-ordinated demonstration must have been well planned and prepared in advance. Official records issued for public consumption are contradicted by the "Annals of Lauresheim" which state that Leo had previously consulted with the clergy, Roman and Frankish magnates and other notables. It was decided that as Charles was in possession of most of the Imperial cities including Rome, Milan and Ravenna, it was right that he should have the Imperial crown. That right legally belonged to the Emperor of Byzantium but as all was in confusion in that quarter it appeared to be Charles's opportunity and he took it readily—it was the goal he had been aiming at. In his view the one flaw was that he seemed to be beholden to the Pope for this high temporal honour that in reality he felt he had earned by his own military skill in subduing the pagan territories. He forgot the decisive part those theological advisers at his Court, by whom he was surrounded, had played in helping him to place the conquered nations securely under the heavy yoke of the Church, which they were to groan beneath for centuries and only now are beginning to throw off.

This semi-barbarian king, had dominated Europe during some of the darkest days of its history, and brought under his control and that of the Papacy extensive areas from Spain to the Eider in the North, much of central Europe and Italy. He had spread a reign of terror wherever he went making conversion to Christianity compulsory. Refusal of baptism meant death. There were no half-measures with Charlemagne. With him the Church became the supreme authority and he is regarded as being the real founder of the ecclesiastical State which became the Holy

(Continued foot of next page)

Book Review

MARTIN PAGE

The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters, John Gross (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 63s).

WITH THIS informative and thought-provoking work, John Gross has come within range of providing the first comprehensive survey devoted to tracing the evolution of the man of letters in England from 1800 to the present day. Literary connoisseurs might lament the omission of writers like A. C. Benson, Clutton Brock, Gerald Bullet, Sir John Hammerton, Robert Lynd, York Powell, and A. B. Walkley. There is the barest reference (and it is in the bibliography at that) to H. S. Salt: Gross refuses to evaluate Salt's contribution to our understanding of Shelley, De Quincey, Tennyson, James Thomson, and Richard Jefferies, not to mention Thoreau and Melville. He misses a golden opportunity to say something useful and valuable about Sweetland Dallas's *The Gay Science* (1866), a pioneer analysis of art now virtually forgotten. He discusses Leslie Stephen at some length, yet he does not even mention *Essays on Free Thinking and Plain Speaking* and *An Agnostic's Apology*, which marked Stephen's conscious acceptance of a rationalist philosophy. Some of Gross's criticisms of J. M. Robertson are fair enough, but his knowledge of Robertson's work seems dimly sketchy and superficial: he gives a most inadequate account of JMR's claims as a literary critic outside Shakespearean studies; he does not so much as mention Robertson's charming classic, *Elizabethan Literature*; he seems ill-acquainted with the facts concerning JMR's influence as a Shakespeare scholar; he ludicrously suggests that Robertson's Shakespeareana alone entitle him to be remembered. Clues as to Gross's motivation might be detected in his references to "devout rationalism, that opium of the mid-Victorian intellectuals" (p. 100), "Morley's favourite humanistic hymn" (p. 105), "the deficiencies of ironclad rationalism" (p. 126); he also declares, "Today humanism seems little more than a word, and a rather unhelpful word at that" (p. 61). He does not take up Robertson's suggestive comment that "there would seem to be significance in the fact that in the modern age in which religion has undergone the greatest deflation the practice of fiction has become the outstanding literary form".

Yet Gross also praises Robertson; he gives a sympathetic estimate of James Thomson; and he acknowledges the anti-libertarian influences of the Anglican Church: "as late as the 1890s Lord Acton could decide against asking Morley to contribute to the volume of the Cambridge *Modern History* covering the French Revolution because he was afraid that Bishop Stubbs would make trouble if he did" (p. 104). Robertson may have had his limitations as a stylist—as John Gross reminds us—but he would surely have winced at the following sentence from a man who taught English literature as a Cambridge don: "And coming down to our own time, and to someone more comparable to Leavis in intellectual stature, supposing, say, Geoffrey Grigson had been able to inflict his views on generations of freshman" (p. 284). Gross's style is perhaps too chatty and too reminiscent of "instant" journalism at times; yet he is frequently witty, as when he says of Leslie Stephen, "his lack of enthusiasm can be infectious" (p. 83).

Following in the wake of the Two Cultures controversy between Snow and Leavis, John Gross makes much telling criticism of the latter, who was his senior in the English faculty at Cambridge. He treats George Orwell far more sympathetically than he treats the Marxist critics of the Thirties, and he declares: "Christopher Hill's studies of Marvell and *Clarissa Harlowe* are a good deal more accomplished than anything of the same kind to be found in Caudwell or Fox"—yet he does not even mention Arnold Kettle. Of contemporary critics, Raymond Williams appears to have had more impact than most on Gross, who rightly says of Marshall McLuhan: "few of his admirers seem particularly interested in the job of sorting out the insights from the verbiage" (p. 300). For Gross, the role of the man of letters has been subverted—or at least transformed—by the development of science, sociology, the cinema and television. With the rise of the mass media and the growth of centralised institutions, he believes the literary tradition may become confined to the universities.

John Gross's Epilogue is particularly stimulating; and it is to be regretted that so wide-ranging a critic does not give references for his quotations, for his readers' benefit. Yet most of the personalities he describes come alive in his sprightly pages—and the appeal of his work is enhanced by an absorbing set of photographs.

ALEISTER CROWLEY

(Continued from page 403)

which he is always describing in this book, may have had impact: the idea that since thoughts are accompaniments of modifications of cerebral tissue, curious ideas are concomitants of putrefaction. Yet . . . I will not be bowled over by his description of a mystical vision of ultimate initiation: "nothingness with twinkles in it".

So I dare to say that Crowley lifts the crown off his head with this book. Personally, I did not need the book to tell me that so much of the legend is bogus, for I knew the man and so many of the people mentioned in these so-called "confessions". But now, I suppose, as I have said as much in print, all sorts of terrible things will start happening to me if I step out of the pentagram the editor is quickly scribbling at this moment on the office floor. Or perhaps I can learn to make myself invisible? I knew a lady who told me that Crowley was teaching her how to make herself invisible. She said it would be very useful on buses to avoid paying the fare, which was then twopence.

¹ *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, edited by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (Cape, 5 gns.).

a euphemism for deeds of terror perpetrated in the name of the Holy Church.

A witness to the severity of Charlemagne's regime is a collection of ordinances known as the Saxon Capitulary, one of those which he issued from time to time and which bears the mark of its clerical origin—the stultifying hand of theology at work:

1. 'If any man despise the Lenten fast for contempt of Christianity let him die the death.'
2. 'If any man among the Saxons not yet baptised shall hide himself and refuse to come to baptism let him die the death.'
3. 'Let every man of every hundred give to their Church a house, two hides of land, a male and a female slave.'
4. 'Let all men whether nobles, free, or serfs, give to the Churches and the priests the tenth part of their substance and labour.'

Taken at its lowest reckoning of 30 acres to the hide, two hides of land represented a not inconsiderable 'free gift'—and slave-dealing was a profitable side line. It will be seen that Charles's fiscal policy gave tremendous support to the building and endowment of monasteries and bishoprics throughout the empire by what looks strangely like sanctified robbery. Thus he earned the acclaim of ecclesiastical authorities and was mis-titled 'Great'.

On that famous Christmas Day the Church certainly had something to celebrate (even if the peasants of Europe were starving in their burnt-out villages), acquisition of civil power—enormous areas of real estate—commodities and treasure—well worth the price of a golden coronet for their obliging Emperor and the cost of 3,000 candles to illuminate the scene of triumph! But may it be that the pagans have the last word after all? That the revered 'Earth-tree' of the Northern peoples, destroyed by Charlemagne at Eresburg has now become in the form of a decorated fir tree the universal symbol of the Winter Festival.

THE DAY OF THREE THOUSAND CANDLES

(Continued from previous page)

Roman Empire of later centuries. A result achieved by some of the bloodiest deeds ever recorded. The massacre of 4,500 Saxons in cold blood in one day at Verdun is an example of Charles's policy of extermination of those who refused Christianity. Zeal for the Faith was in those days

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LETTERS

What Line on Capital Punishment?

IN THE MOOD of Laura Campbell's "What Line Humanism" (November 15) I would like to plead for careful rationality in the death penalty discussion. Let me say at first that I certainly feel that, on the basis of present knowledge, it should *not* be re-introduced.

But the argument should be based on deterrent value, not on sanctity of life. Control of life and death is prominent among humanist aims (abortion, euthanasia, contraception; quality before quantity). Let us not declare life sacred and beyond all possible interference, even though we value it very highly and protect it in almost all conceivable circumstances. If the death penalty were an effective deterrent, then taking the 'global' view more lives would be saved by its adoption. We would have to adopt it, if we valued life, unless we either placed life as sacred or regarded an execution as a worse calamity than a murder.

It is a sordid business to compare such calamities but (generally) I do not regard the (humane and physically painless) execution of a murderer as worse than a murder (considering also the distress to all involved), and a brutal murder would seem as regrettable as the execution of an innocent man. In my experience, those who

feel we should, *under no circumstances*, adopt a death penalty, do so because they regard life as sacred and inviolable.

The BHA recently moved, and David Tribe recently announced on behalf of the NSS, that the death penalty should be abolished *permanently*. That is dogmatically and regardless of any new evidence which may ultimately be available. You also quoted John Grigg (November 8, front cover) "even if it could be demonstrated that capital punishment was a unique deterrent . . . it would still be quite wrong . . ." Is this humanism? M. J. O'CARROLL.

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