

# THE FREETHINKER

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## RHODESIA: WHAT NEXT?

Nobody, it would seem, went very far wrong in prophesying what would be the findings of Lord Pearce's Commission on Rhodesia. Short of an outright declaration of "one man, one vote" it was almost inevitable that any deal between a British Tory Government and the élitist devotees of "Christian heritage," Smith-style, would be treated with the gravest suspicion by white liberals and by the vast majority of Rhodesia's black African population. Even allowing for instances of intimidation either way, it seems perfectly reasonable to regard the Pearce Commission's Report as a fair indication of the feelings of the majority of Rhodesia's population, both black and white.

### Erosion of Sanctions

In anticipating (correctly) the findings of the Commission the Rhodesia Emergency Campaign Committee has called for continuing public pressure to maintain and strengthen sanctions against Rhodesian trade, and to ensure that any future negotiations "take place only with the representatives of all the people of Zimbabwe on the basis of one man, one vote."

Mrs. Ethel de Keyer, acting secretary of the Rhodesia Campaign Committee, further added: "We have also to keep a vigilant eye on the erosion of sanctions via trade and recruiting missions visiting this country, campaign more intensively against emigration to Rhodesia and against visits by sports teams and entertainers." It is, for example, reported that Cilla Black is to undertake a tour of Rhodesia and South Africa this autumn.

Looking back over events in Rhodesia during the last five years one cannot help wondering what would have happened if, instead of Ian Smith declaring U.D.I., a cabal of black African nationalists had jumped the independence gun. It would probably have resulted in a meeting with paratroops and pistols, rather than Lord Pearce and a portmanteau. Treason, it seems, varies with the colour of a man's skin.

### MORE ARRESTS OF JEWS

Since last week's news item went to press about Leonid Slepak (the young Moscow Jewish boy whose Bar-Mitzvah present, a prayer book from a group of British M.P.s, was impounded by the Soviet customs) we have subsequently learned that his father, Vladimir Slepak has been arrested together with a number of other Jewish activists.

The purpose of the recent arrests, was, it appears, to prevent would-be émigrés to Israel making appeals to the American President during his official visit to Moscow. Mr. Nixon, as readers of this paper are well aware, is not at all averse to playing the religious card in American politics, and it will be a pity if his generally reactionary tendencies in this context are not, in this instance, put to a more constructive and humanitarian use. Whatever one's opinion of Israeli ambitions, the fact remains that the

needless indignities and heartbreak suffered by the Soviet Union's Jewish dissidents have gone on for far too long. Incarceration in "mental hospitals" and conscription into the Red Army will not sweep the problem under the carpet on international opinion.

### "MOST DANGEROUS SUB-CULTURE"

"We maintain that the British humanist movement is the most dangerous sub-culture that this country has," said the Secretary of the so-called National Association for the Protection of Families recently. She was speaking at an ecumenical meeting (no less) at St. John's Catholic Church in Chorlton, Manchester.

Mrs. Frances Morris went on to denounce population control and family planning as "merely a way of creating a society for the rich, the affluent and the selfish at the expense of the unborn, the handicapped, and those on lower incomes . . . The type of society these people wish to create cannot exist in Britain, and it is for this reason that the family is currently being attacked from all sides. It is our intention to maintain Christian family life."

### A Thoroughly Sick Joke

One can well understand the anxiety that these religious front organisations have lest birth control should improve mankind's overall living standards. The poor, the anxious, and the insecure, are, after all, that much more suggestible and amenable to being controlled and exploited by the officers of organised superstition. Also, in a more affluent society there would be more resources available to help the handicapped and the have-nots, but then did not the pale Galilean say that the poor you have with you always, and it would look rather bad if the birth control movement was allowed to prove him wrong. When one considers the recent history of the Exclusive Brethren or the sociological effects of Catholic teaching on contraception and mixed marriages, the twaddle about family life must seem to non-Christian families a thoroughly sick joke. We suspect that Christian concern for "the family" often extends little further than utilising it as a vehicle for spreading their religion.

# J. M. ROBERTSON: FREETHINKER AT LARGE

ERIC GLASGOW

Certainly one of the most noteworthy bastions of British freethought during the nineteenth century was John MacKinnon Robertson (1856-1933), the poor boy from Stirling who progressed, in the jungle of London's journalism, to produce a long list of memorable books. Those readers who can still recall either the lectures or the writings of Harold Laski (1893-1950)—and few of those who have ever sat at his feet are likely to have forgotten that luminous and scintillating brain—must also remember how greatly he leant, for information and motivation, upon the more arid and solid Victorian learning of J. M. Robertson. Indeed, Laski admits as much, in the preface of his *Faith, Reason and Civilization* (1944); and we who once were students of his accepted that reliance as if its roots trailed too deeply into the dusty corridors of the past for us even to attempt to disinter or distinguish them.

Robertson must always remain, both as man and writer, one of the major liberal forces in nineteenth century England: his books—from *Modern Humanists* (1891) to his *History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* (1929)—are still conspicuous for their distinctive combination of learning and readability; and in the available records of his life Robertson yields for us, even today, a wealth of apposite facts and models. Undoubtedly the best short summary of his meaning and message, relevant still for the changed circumstances of nearly forty years later, is to be obtained from F. J. Gould's "In Memoriam: J. M. Robertson", published in five instalments in the *Literary Guide* for 1933. However, even without that first-hand assessment to lead and to propel us, it is easy to discover Robertson's importance in the heritage of freethinking in England.

## Poor Boy who made good

Coming from the Isle of Arran, on the west coast of Scotland, he was typical of that hardy Scottish legend—the poor boy who made good, and who educated himself by a life-long addiction to reading. "By his twenties he was already a walking encyclopaedia,"<sup>1</sup> although he had left school at the age of thirteen. His first literary mentor was the historian, Thomas Carlyle, but that "first great adolescent passion" was speedily modified into an almost religious devotion to secularism and freethinking, after he was brought to London by Annie Besant and joined the staff of Charles Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* in 1884. He became the Editor of that radical publication from 1891 until 1893; and his expanding powers as a lecturer and debater brought him both renown and notoriety on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean; as well as twelve years (1906-1918) as the Liberal M.P. for the Tyneside division of Northumberland. He was Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade from 1911 to 1915 in Asquith's Liberal government, and firm in his advocacy of the "free trade" notions of the British Liberal Party.

However, it is not with his political record that we are here mostly concerned; but rather with his stubborn and aggressive support of freethinking and secular organisations. In his time he "was the recognised leader of the rationalist movement in Great Britain. He was widely respected both within and outside the rationalist movement, to which his

death was an irreparable loss."<sup>2</sup> He was interested especially in the "humanistic" implications of the scientific method and outlook; and although his admiration for T. H. Huxley was by no means uncritical, he generally accepted a materialistic interpretation of history and civilisation, and made a trenchant and sustained criticism of the supernatural assumptions of Christian orthodoxy, especially in his book *Christianity and Mythology* (1900), in which he denied even the historicity of Christ: an earlier John Allegro. In *Pagan Christs* (1903), he went on to discover the acceptance of a mediator between man and "the cosmic process" as a common phenomenon, and in so doing he broke much new ground for the benefit of successors who did not always observe Robertson's own respect for scholarship and truth. His style is often somewhat Spartan and angular for modern taste. Nevertheless, some of his books are still worth reading as guides to the ancestry of so much of our contemporary apparatus of freethinking and secularism, based securely upon honest study and reading.

## Rugged Resolution

It would be dishonest to call J. M. Robertson a good interpreter of the riches of English poetry: he was too "scientific" and "cerebral" for that. But his writings are consistently good for one's understanding of the development of the humanist tradition in Great Britain; and good, too, for enlarging one's grasp of the place of Christianity among the larger mythologies of the world. There is even something quite engaging, and almost daunting, about Robertson's evident ability to retain his same rugged resolution of language, his same utter refusal to compromise or to deviate from what he conceived to be the truth (ascertained from copious bibliographical inquiries, of course), even in the uncalm autumn of his years. His most ambitious work, *A History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* (1929) betrays nothing of the assumed mellowness of time, still less its dreaded decrepitude—it might well have been written in the full vigour of some untrammelled youth, and before the Victorian Age had reached its appointed end. Indeed if that had not been so it would have been a much less effective and memorable book; and less faithful to the strong vintage of J. M. Robertson's own mind and intentions.

It is a book which still seems—as John Gross has said "exceptionally convincing."<sup>3</sup> The same cannot be said of Robertson's devious excursions into Shakespearian studies; nor is his general literary criticism very valid. Nevertheless, in his studies of humanism and freethinking he left quite sufficient to justify our remembering today J. M. Robertson's life, personality, and granite-like devotion to freedom and truth.

## NOTES.

- GROSS, JOHN. 1969. *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*: p. 124.
- JOAD, C. E. M., in Seligman, E. R. A. *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 13: pp. 411-412.
- GROSS, *op. cit.*: p. 125.

## PRISON MANIACS

The recent tragic double murder (followed by suicide) committed by a man just after his release from prison elicited from the *Daily Express* a familiar demand for longer prison sentences—a response that is as illogical and inappropriate as it was predictable.

Quite apart from the inhumane treatment of this obviously sick man, a longer prison sentence would have done nothing to protect society from him. At most, it would merely have postponed the killings and perhaps substituted other victims for the two who were actually killed. Indeed, it even seems likely that the murders were a direct result of the man's imprisonment. And it is almost certain that the tragedy would have been prevented altogether if, instead of being sent to prison, the man had been kept in a high-security mental hospital until cured of his homicidal tendencies, or, if incurable, for the rest of his natural life. Only by getting rid of the punitive aspect entirely, and making such hospitals as pleasant as possible for those unfortunate enough to require life-long custody, can society be adequately protected from the homicidal maniac. A prison sentence, however long, decides in ad-

BARBARA SMOKER

vance when the prisoner shall be released—which is tantamount to inviting him to commit violence against whom-ever happens to cross his path that day. Even an indefinite prison sentence would be inappropriate, for it presupposes an ability on the part of the prisoner to reform, and, moreover, to prove it (somehow) before release.

One can only assume that the repeated demands of the *Daily Express* and its ilk for longer prison sentences are based not so much on a desire to protect the public as on a sadistic desire for revenge. In fact, one wonders *who* the "prison maniacs" really are. A mania for imprisoning others is also a form of violence.

The really dangerous prisoner represents a tiny minority of the prison population, but the same principles hold good for all prison sentences. The sooner we eschew the whole idea of punishment, and concentrate instead on crime prevention, the better for us all—criminals and victims alike. There is a ray of hope in the work of the voluntary organisation RAP (Radical Alternatives to prison), which both carries out research and acts as a pressure group.

## SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS

*Soldiers of Christ, arise,  
And put your armour on;  
Strong in the strength which God supplies,  
Through his eternal Son.*

One may well imagine lines equivalent to these being roared by lusty Britons in the eleventh century, though in a different vernacular from that of today.

Similar hymns were undoubtedly sung by Crusaders of other nationalities, going eastward to fight against the infidels, and, with God's help, to drive them out of the Holy Land. Each with a crimson cross on front or back, but variously armed and accoutred, they poured, on foot and horse, through foreign lands, animated, one and all, by the same grim though joyful object, the wresting from the abominable Turk of the country where their dear Christ ministered, and where he made the sublime sacrifice on the cross whose insignia they bore.

But let us not visualise those journeys as pleasant. They were, in fact, the absolute reverse. The longest, from Britain, was a matter of twelve hundred miles, along vile roads, and for long periods in shocking weather, with attendant hunger, the latter alleviated by robbing inhabitants of the countries passed through, often with bloodshed. Armies formed against the pilgrim armies, of which there were four in the first crusade, travelling separately and at different times. The routes to their goal, Jerusalem, were frequent scenes of slaughter, not only of combatants; and orgies of plunder and rapine. The soldiers of the cross of Christ paralleled their adversaries—often, like themselves, worshippers of the Lamb of God and the Almighty Shepherd—in unspeakable cruelties.

All four armies of the Crusaders left behind them in their eastward march many thousands of dead through slaughter in battle, starvation, the ravages of disease, and as many or more of those who withstood their unscrupu-

F. H. SNOW

lous attacks. After three years of bloody strife and incredible suffering, defeats and victories, the soldiers of Jesus captured Jerusalem, which for nearly two centuries remained in Christian hands, being then retaken by Saladin, inspiring the second crusade, which ended in rout after two more years of slaughter and terrible suffering.

### Ultimate failure of the Crusades

The third crusade, under Richard Coeur de Lion, forty years later, failed to wrest the Holy City from Saladin, but the fourth, launched ten years subsequently, at last saw the flag of Christendom flying over sacked Jerusalem, only to be torn down by the again victorious Saracens. After twenty years, a fifth crusade ended with the infidels triumphant over the faithful, and the Crescent still flaunting itself over the battlements of Judah's capital.

Having failed in their fanatical bid for custody of the place where rested the ostensible cross of Christ and the relics of his body and tomb, heaven's earthly warriors, after two centuries of most unsaintly deeds, abandoned the birthplace of their blessed saviour to the accursed Ottomans.

Few of us, I conjecture, have the will and time to engage in research on the subject of the crusades, but those who have, and try to project themselves in imagination into that period, should get a fairly true picture of those ancient Soldiers of the Cross. To them, religion represented utter truth. They did not think about it. Devils and miracles were round the corner. To worship God and Jesus and venerate the holy saints was far more important than keeping one's hands unstained by a fellow being's blood, or spurning the impulse to rob or cheat him. Jesus and the Virgin were

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

*The Freethinker* is obtainable at the following addresses.  
**London:** Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1; Freethinker Bookshop, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. **Glasgow:** Clyde Books, 292 High Street. **Manchester:** Grass Roots Bookshop, 271 Upper Brook Street, 13. **Brighton:** Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road, (near Brighton Station).

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

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

## EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone: Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Havering Humanist Group, Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane. Tuesday, 6 June, 7.45 p.m.: Miss D. Klee, "Federal and State Government in the United States."

National Secular Society, Brighton Belle Hotel, Brighton. Sunday, 11 June, 10.15 a.m.: Annual General Meeting (members only; admission by 1972 membership card). 1 p.m.: luncheon with Brighton and Hove Humanist Group—speakers: George Vale, G. N. Deodhekar and Barbara Smoker—cost 75p (book through N.S.S. Head Office, 103 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL).

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 4 June, 11 a.m.: Peter Cadogan, "The Case for Anger."

# NEWS

"The spectacle of what is called religion . . . in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always it seems to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation, and the preservation of vested interests."

—Jawaharlal Nehru.

## SRI LANKA

The decision of the Government of Ceylon to rename the country Sri Lanka is exotic, if nothing else. Its decision, taking effect at the same time, to give the Buddhist religion special status under the new republic is a poor augury for the island's future. Already the opposition party is boycotting public functions over the lack of recognition given by the government to the country's minority language, Tamil. When will they ever learn?

## SANE "MENTAL PATIENTS"

Readers of this paper were doubtless appalled to hear of the recent scandal that has come to light in connection with the detention in a mental hospital for fifty years of three (and possibly twenty) women whose "moral defect" was simply the misfortune to have conceived illegitimate babies. The time has clearly come for a careful double-check on all long-stay mental patients, in particular those committed before the 1959 Mental Health Act came into force.

Vigilance, it appears, is very necessary, even in this modern and allegedly enlightened age. Indeed, we now have a nagging fear lest some of our trendy pornutopians and sexocrats start committing young women to institutions for still being virgins at the age of twenty-one.

## SCOTTISH CATHOLIC "SCHISM"

The action of the Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow, Dr. James Scanlan, in dismissing Fr. Gerard Hughes, as the University's Catholic Chaplain has sparked off a rumour described by Malcolm Stuart of *The Guardian* as showing "all the signs . . . of developing into the most serious schism the Catholic Church has experienced in Britain in modern times."

The dismissal came about as a result of a series of conflicts with Archbishop Scanlan, particularly Fr. Hughes's desire to carry out "experimental" services, with the participation, in some cases, of non-Catholics. He also wanted to be allowed to officiate at student weddings; many of these were mixed marriages, and in such cases Fr. Hughes felt that he "could be of considerable help to the couples, but then I have to hand over to the parish priests, whose first action is often to berate the Catholic party for wishing to marry outside of his or her faith." He had also sanctioned the contraceptive pill in certain cases.

However, it appears that Fr. Hughes is not without supporters, and his dismissal has attracted sympathy for him from the Jesuit Order, the Archbishop of Edinburgh (Cardinal Gray) and most sections of Glasgow University's student body. The Catholic students are organising a petition against the dismissal; so far Archbishop Scanlan has refused to comment.

# AND NOTES

## SEMPER IDEM

"Editing a Freethought paper is a dreadful business. It brings one into contact with many half-baked people who have little patent recipes for hastening the millennium; with ambitious versifiers who think it a disgrace to journalism that their productions are not instantly inserted; with discontented ladies and gentlemen who fancy that a heterodox paper is the proper vehicle for every species of complaint; and with a multitude of other bores too numerous to mention and too various to classify. But the worst of all are anonymous bores, who send their insults, advice, or warnings through the post for the benefit of the Queen's revenue."

—G. W. Foote, *Freethinker* editorial, 4 June 1882.

## THOMAS PAINE EXHIBITION

The latest newsletter of the Thomas Paine Society informs us that plans are now well in hand for the Thomas Paine Exhibition to be held at the Marx Memorial Library in London (details will appear in *The Freethinker* in due course). Another Paine exhibition will be held in Leicester's Secular Hall in June.

## STRAIGHT OR FORKED TONGUE ?

"Congress has voted to give Alaskan natives [Eskimos] \$962.5 million and forty million acres in settlement of their aboriginal land claims. They will be well provided for—if we keep our word."

—From the American secularist magazine, *Progressive World* (February 1972).

## WAR "INEVITABLE"

"War is still inevitable because there are not enough true Christians."—Mitsuo Fuchida, Japanese Presbyterian evangelist. As a former bomber commander Mr. Fuchida led the attacks on Pearl Harbour and Darwin (Australia).

## PROBLEMS FOR WEST IRIAN MISSIONARIES

Readers will doubtless be heartbroken to hear that the work of the Asia Pacific Christian Mission in West Irian (the Indonesian portion of New Guinea) has been suffering setbacks. According to a recent leaflet, "it has been felt for some time that a new site for the Ilungwa/Wolo areas would be advantageous. A more central spot between the two areas was visited recently and measurements for an air strip were made. However, a local chief, Linggaga, his brother Lawe, and their followers have been strongly opposed to the Gospel message from the beginning and have been the root of trouble ever since, even to the extent of being responsible for the killing of a number of Christians. He holds a great deal of sway in the land ownership, and so our offers to buy the land were bluntly refused . . . but we are sure an opening will come."

So, alas, are we. Christian missionaries are not famous for a policy of cultural tolerance or "live and let live," and in the case of tribal societies who do not possess aircraft and the gatling gun there are always ways to "compel them to come in" to the consumer society.

## KNOTTY PROBLEM FOR GADDAFI

*The Times* has pointed out a thorny theological problem surrounding President Gaddafi of Libya, a country which is, as every schoolboy knows, at daggers drawn with Israel. According to the Israeli paper *Ma'ariv* President Gaddafi's mother was a Jewish girl from Benghazi (which under Jewish rabbinical law makes him a Jew) and his father a Moslem tribesman from the desert (which makes him a Moslem, according to Islamic law). Probably the answer to this embarrassing situation would be to take the third opinion of a well-trained and disinterested Jesuit (if you can have a disinterested Jesuit); better still would be the commonsense answer for Jewish Israeli and Moslem Arab to sink their godly hatred of one another and co-operate in making the desert bloom again.

## SHORT OF PRAYER

"In this crucial year in America we want to present the Gospel not only to our own people, but to people throughout the world with an intensification that we have never done before. *But we need your prayers!* During the past few weeks our income has dropped rather drastically!"

—Billy Graham, in an "Easter 1972" circular to supporters.

## RED MAKES WHITES BLUE

The White Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem has been observing "days of sorrow" during the visit to the city of the Soviet-sponsored Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. How these Christians grieve over one another!

## MODERNISM—THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

According to the *Catholic Herald* the conservative Association of Catholic Priests is getting a might rattled about the spread of modernism through the fabric of holy Church. Fr. John Flanagan, the Association's secretary, has gloomily predicted that unless liberalism is checked in Britain, it will result in the closure of Catholic churches here, as has happened in the Netherlands: in Nijmegen, where the "New Dutch Catechism" was written in 1967, ten churches have closed recently.

Even our old friend, the Catholic Truth Society, has been the object of the Association's strictures for peddling too much Teilhard de Chardin. Readers will be shocked to hear that it is "slipping rapidly downhill and at the present rate must soon become yet another mouthpiece for the modernists, renewalists and purveyors of birth prevention." Tcha! Tcha!

## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

"A great many new words have been added to the popular vocabulary since the doctrine of evolution began its triumphant career. Among these, 'environment' is perhaps the most widely used, and of late certainly the most prevalent . . . An increase in the range of language means new tools with which to beat out ideas and clarify conceptions. But, unfortunately, it is the fate of many words, good in themselves, to become in time mere pious expressions of the Mesopotamian order, or else be narrowed down in a quite unjustifiable manner. In this way they obstruct thought instead of aiding it. Both fates have overtaken 'environment.'"

" . . . So long as tools have been fashioned, or traditions handed down, or institutions elaborated, the value of ideas as environmental factors has been steadily increasing . . . We live, more and more, in a world of ideas, . . . but variation is the condition of natural selection under whatever form it is found; and if there is to be a serviceable natural selection on the psychic plane, we must have an infinite variation of ideas to begin with . . . It is for this reason that societies that have prevented this have either stagnated or decayed."

—Chapman Cohen in *The Freethinker*, 1 June 1947.

## SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS

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just objects of adoration and supplication. Morals?—they hardly knew what they were. For adversaries, no treatment was too brutal. To gorge, drink, debauch, were the chief interests of most men.

And yet, how intense was the zeal of lord and peasant, knight and cowherd, yeoman and serf, to wear the red sign of the avowed fighter for Christ against the usurpers of the city hallowed by his crucifixion! Religion was not a matter of ethics, for superstitious fear ruled them. So long as their terrible God was propitiated, personal conduct, within the liberal limits prescribed or tacitly condoned by the Church for the unecclesiastical, could be individually determined.

Nevertheless, it is astounding that men who, for all their illiteracy, had knowledge of the precepts of the gentle,

compassionate Jesus they idolised, could, when occasion served, massacre religious or political opponents and their families down to the tiniest babe, and, as at the taking of Jerusalem, cover themselves with blood from head to foot in their blind rage. And furthermore, that they could regard their gory deeds as glorification in the eyes of God, and as atoning considerations for incomparably unharmed sins.

How far have we got from the religious standard of crusading days? Modern Christians have no bloodlust; hate of those not of their faith, and, in the main, conduct themselves harmlessly and respectably. We have, however, had a survival of the fanaticism of the Crusaders, in the rise of the Franco régime in Spain, and, nearer home, in the virulent feuds between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. For the whole human race, it will be greatly happier when fighters for Reason replace the soldiers of the absurd religion founded on belief in an ever-inevitable God and the divinity of he who, two thousand years ago, died on Calvary's cross.

## REVIEWS

### THEATRE

**TWELFTH NIGHT** by William Shakespeare. Shaw Theatre.

I usually like to wander through Shakespeareana accompanied by the tragic muse. But if the comic muse is with me there is no greater delight than *Twelfth Night*. While its plot is as implausible as those of the Bard's other comedies, it has, in its characters, an authenticity that they rather lack. Not only because it is apparently based on real characters, Sir William Knollys, Controller of Elizabeth's Household (Malvolio), an actual duke called Orsino, and in certain respects the Virgin Queen herself (Olivia). In true *Twelfth Night* tradition there is satire of a more permanent sort. Sir Toby Belch is not just a comic alcoholic but a pitiful picture of a dependent relative desperately trying to manufacture self-esteem. As a ne'er-do-well with all the trappings of gentility but none of its nobility, Sir Andrew Aguecheek is a timeless prototype of Walter Mitty. Even Malvolio is more than a canting, and hilariously conned, bureaucrat, but is a classical picture of religious pedantry and ambition in an "opportunity" society. That the play is an attack on Puritanism is well-known, and Catholic apologists have had the nerve to claim this fact as an index of Shakespeare's crypto-Catholicism, but there is a strong anti-clerical flavour about the whole proceedings. Finally, in Feste we have the most sympathetic of all Shakespeare's fools, who also has the best songs.

Hitherto the Shaw Theatre has attracted more *succès d'estime* than box-office success, at least on the occasions I have been present. Now all this has changed. Sixth formers—and discriminating playgoers who have outgrown setbooks—are pouring in from all over the country to see a triumphant staging. The presence of the gifted, gorgeous and above all famous Nyree Dawn Porter and Vanessa Redgrave as Olivia and Viola will not keep too many

culture vultures away. But everyone and everything is splendid, especially Jonathan Cecil (Aguecheek), Windsor Davies (Belch), Peter Jeffrey (Malvolio), Oscar Quitak (Feste), Colin Wootton (lighting), Christopher Lawrence (set) and Michael Bakewell (direction).

DAVID TRIBE

## BOOK

**HITLER: The Man and the Military Leader** by Percy Ernst Schramm, translated by Donald S. Detwiler. Allen Lane The Penguin Press, £2.50.

This book is not another biography as the title might suggest, but two essays in which Hitler's conversations activities and military decisions during the last three years of his life are used to construct an anatomy of the dictator. Professor Schramm was official war diarist at the German High Command from 1942 to the end of the war and as a medieval historian has all the prerequisites to analyse a medieval throw-back like Hitler.

His first essay headed "The Anatomy of a Dictator" is based to a large extent on the so-called "Table Conversations" between Hitler and his party cronies, as well as the occasional staff officer or guest at his war time headquarters in East Prussia. I say "so called" because having read a fair number of these talks they are mainly monologues delivered by Hitler to an uncritical and approving audience who rarely dared to interrupt his flow and then only to have points elaborated on or to register approval. Since these talks were recorded, Hitler obviously intended them for posterity, hence it could be argued he left things unsaid which he may have considered detrimental to his image. Nevertheless, they do shed a revealing light on Hitler's mentality and outlook.

Hitler the man, we are informed, had radiant eyes, was far sighted (in the optical sense), had an ugly nose, bad teeth, a pinched mouth and a figure that appeared to "hang down" from his head. He kept himself spotlessly clean, was a bad dresser, needed little sleep and possessed

an astonishing memory. He showed loyalty to his friends and comrades from the early days of his power struggle and overlooked their shortcomings but could turn ruthless when his suspicion was aroused, as the case of Roehm shows.

He prided himself on his ability to judge a person's character, capacity and usefulness at a glance, yet as the author points out, the most important posts he gave to completely unsuitable men. Ribbentrop, Hess, Frick, Rust and Axman are mentioned, one could add Bormann, Goering, Ley and Streicher.

Hitler enjoyed the company of beautiful women, yet his attitude to women in general would bring no cheers from Women's Lib. "The world of woman is the man. Only now and then does she think of anything else" was the Fuehrer's categorical conviction.

Amongst Hitler's pet aversions were the bourgeoisie (a raff of idiotic stupidity), professors whom he distrusted, lawyers because they raised legal obstacles, financial experts (all rogues and villains), the Christian Churches (a satanic superstition) and of course the Jews whom he persecuted with pathetic hatred.

Of foreign countries and their people Hitler had but perfunctory knowledge. Here, as in many other fields, his opinions were based on books and he mainly read works that confirmed his preconceived ideas on a given subject. Thus he said of the British: "They are incomparably insolent, but I admire them nonetheless. We still have a lot to learn from them." One wonders if he arrived at this conclusion after watching the film *The Bengal Lancers* four times.

His taste in art was conservative and philistine to say the least. Visual art, he insisted, had to be representative. The truer to life, the better the art! In music, operetta and opera ranked high in Hitler's esteem. Bach and Beethoven were lost on him as were lyric poetry and the German classics.

Thank God, one is almost tempted to say, that Hitler was not an atheist for we could never have lived that one down. His view on atheism is clear-cut: —

The fact is that we are weak creatures, but there is a creative power. It would be stupid to try to deny it. The person who believes in something which is untrue stands higher than the one who believes in nothing at all.

The German Freethought Movement was suppressed almost as soon as Hitler came to power, their president was murdered in a concentration camp, and today that movement can state with pride that not one single Gestapo butcher or war criminal emerged from their ranks.

Prof. Schramm is mistaken when he states that Hitler used the word "Providence" instead of "God". In his pre-war speeches Hitler frequently evoked the "Herrgott," his harsh southern intonation making the word sound like the firing of a mortar. Providence came in when the Fuehrer realised that God had joined the other side in the war and had to be put in his place. Hitler's ruthless fanaticism was largely due to his own peculiar monism, his conviction that he was "the tool of providence" would serve as a justification for any outrage against humanity. How far Hitler was influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche has never been properly established; I cannot

conceive that Nietzsche with his abhorrence for the mediocre envisaged something like Hitler and his disciples when he postulated the Superman, they were more fitted for the role of what the philosopher called "the many too many."

As a military leader "the greatest warlord of all times" (as the over-enthusiastic Goebbels once called him) was an unmitigated disaster. At the outbreak of war Hitler commanded a highly trained and well equipped fighting force which enabled him to overrun the ill-prepared neighbouring states within a matter of months, but like a gambler after an initial lucky streak he decided to play *va banque*. General Jodl was of the opinion that Hitler realised as early as 1943 that the war could not be won by Germany, but how could he ever have expected the the German Army to garrison the hostile occupied territories and simultaneously fight the world's three largest powers with almost unlimited resources in material and manpower? The book records all his blunders during the last three years of the war. This man, who had never commanded as much as a company appointed himself supreme commander of the armed forces; he ignored the advice of experienced strategists; interfered with commanders in the field hundreds of miles away from his H.Q.; stubbornly refused to withdraw troops from hopeless positions when such a move could have saved whole armies from annihilation as in the case of Stalingrad and in the end blamed the generals and indeed the whole German nation for his incompetence. The statement, made in April 1945: "If the German people loses this war, it will have proved itself not worthy of me" must surely rank as the *ne plus ultra* in arrogance. By that time Hitler was probably completely insane; his irrationality grew in proportion to the defeats suffered by the German army and reached the state where he was convinced that Providence would save him if only he persevered in his effort. Unfortunately for the warlord, Providence favoured the stronger battalions.

S. D. KUEBART

## THE LAWS OF FACTS

Senses and reason lying side by side  
As bed-mates in the edifice of Man  
In harmony evoke a living plan  
In discord but foreboding suicide;

Senses teach the truth of facts: taste, touch, sight,  
Smell, feel of heat and sound—these six measure  
What we know in terms of pain and pleasure  
To form a lawful scale for wrong and right;

But here's the catch: when reason counteracts  
These truths with tests of faith, perverts the scale  
To some inhuman end, then senses fail  
To match emotions to the laws of facts;

And so, unmated, senseless reason must  
Speed Man and his unwisdom into dust.

JEAN STRAKER.

# LETTERS

## Early Christianity

It emerges from Mr. Morrell's letter (*Freethinker*, 13 May) that he should have referred to "the possibility that Tacitus was a friend of Trajan, and the fact that he governed one province just conceivably before Pliny governed a different one." I am baffled as to how that suggests anything. Secondly, Mr. Morrell uses the words "Pliny's ignorance of the Christians" (which he finds "inexplicable") in two senses: ignorance of how to deal with them; and ignorance of their beliefs. As to the first, Mr. Morrell would apparently have us believe that, had there been a Neronian persecution, Trajan, following Nero's "precedent," would at once have told Pliny that Christians were either to be torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or turned into human torches. No comment! As to the second, even if there was a Neronian persecution in Pliny's lifetime, it took place when he was about two (or if we reject Tacitus' dating, at the most, eight). Thus his ignorance of their beliefs is not terribly surprising.

There is much greater plausibility in the theory Professor Wells adopts, that Tacitus confused the Christians of the second century with Messianic Jews of Nero's time, who proclaimed that "the Christ" had come. But one cannot dismiss the passage in Suetonius because it is "in the middle of the enumeration of minor police reforms"; that is precisely how Suetonius would have regarded the execution of Christians—as a minor police action. And if the disparaging references to Christianity show that the Tacitus passage is genuine, then the reference to this "new and criminal superstition" equally shows the Suetonius passage to be genuine. In that case, we should have to suppose *both* writers to have made the confusion with Messianic Jews.

On the whole, it seems simpler to assume that it was Christians whom Nero persecuted.

NICHOLAS REED.

## Epilepsy and Responsibility

In reply to Michael Lloyd-Jones's letter of 20 May, let me first apologise if any members of Derek Bentley's family have been, or are here, exposed to my insensitive and ignorant "insults". Similarly, I apologise to Mr. Lloyd-Jones for my having read into his review implications that were not there; if I did so wrongly, I did not do so in any way of pretence or dishonesty. It so happens that two of my own family suffer—in their different ways—from epilepsy, and I may well be unduly concerned over references to epilepsy which seem to ignore its diversity as a nervous condition. Likewise, the fact that some illiterates are far from being feeble-minded makes one perhaps unreasonably concerned that illiteracy should not be thought of as some state of feeble-mindedness. Allowing for my unreasonable anxieties, it still seems to me reasonable to criticise Mr. Lloyd-Jones for omitting, in his review, any specific reference to feeble-mindedness.

As regards my questioning of the point concerning "responsibility," which to Mr. Lloyd-Jones "would seem self-evident," I had hoped my letter of 6 May made it clear that, whether or not it is self-evident as the law stands, it does not seem to me self-evident that "encouragement of a crime after arrest" should *not* justly involve joint responsibility. This general point arises from the specific Craig/Bentley case in which, as Mr. Lloyd-Jones is surely aware, it was argued (questionably) that Bentley shouted an "encouragement" to Craig to shoot the policeman and that Craig shot the policeman. I hasten to add that my support for a public inquiry into the case is based on a desire to see that no facts, relevant to the case, are suppressed.

CHARLES BYASS.

## Voluntary Euthanasia and Social Pressures

I am delighted to see two of the "If in doubt, chop it out" school replying to my letter (*Freethinker*, 6 May) which doubted the wisdom of a Voluntary Euthanasia Bill. I apologise to Nicholas Reed for being "highly emotional." Unlike himself, perhaps, I find life and death rather emotional subjects and I must have let this colour my letter. My thanks to Ian Harris, incidentally, for his letter in *The Freethinker* of 20 May which spoke against the arrogance of many who claim to be guided by reason alone. I apologise too, to Charles Byass for misquoting a word of Peter Crommelin's article, "The Right to Die". The fault was unintentional and fortunately did not alter the author's original meaning.

Mr. Reed's parallels between abortion and voluntary euthanasia are not valid. The former prevents the development in a potential mother of what would become an unwanted child, while the latter is the destruction of an identifiably individual member of our

society. Abortion prevents misery, euthanasia tries to forget it. Is there not a difference?

Mr. Byass raises more serious questions. We cannot discuss the "quality" of an individual's life outside the context of the society in which he lives. As soon as we accept the principle that those who are not happy amongst us may opt out once and for all, then the pressures upon society to adapt itself to accommodate joyfully each individual are greatly diminished. We lose a great force for reform. The sight of the aged, lonely and miserable stimulates us to try to help them. The fact that hundreds of depressed people kill themselves each year drives us to inquire into mental illnesses and the evil effects upon sensitive people of the world that we have created. Terminal cancer patients fill us with compassion and a desire to end this horrible disease.

As soon as voluntary euthanasia is available, the pressures are reversed. By giving an individual, albeit with the kindest of intentions, permission to end his suffering through death, we are shifting much of the responsibility for the happiness of the community from our shoulders to his. There now becomes available a ghastly alternative to help for the aged, psychiatric medicine, and cancer research. The forces at play would be infinitely subtle—but they would be there all right. I do not claim for one instant that, upon a Bill for Voluntary Euthanasia obtaining the Royal Assent, all old people's homes and cancer wards would shut their gates with a clatter of relief. But what I do say is that by accepting an Act which may offer relief to a very few, we would be opening other doors through which could pour floods of misery for many, many more.

J. STEWART ROSS.

## Christianity and Marxism

I would like to oppose Philip Hinchliff's claim that Marxism is based like Christianity on unprovable hypotheses. Marxism is based on economic and social facts—the ownership and control of the means of production by a tiny group, inequalities of wealth, restrictions on the freedom of choice of the majority of the population—all of which can be verified by empirical methods. Christianity on the other hand is based on subjective beliefs which cannot be verified or falsified.

What Philip Hinchliff appears to be objecting to is the Marxist interpretation of the facts, but all ideologies, including Conservatism and reformism, structure facts and interpret them in particular ways. The Marxist interpretation as it happens has accorded with the actual experience of the working class at numerous times in the last hundred years. Philip Hinchliff might as well argue that sociology and history are to be as equally despised as Marxism since they also interpret facts. Sets of unrelated random facts would be completely meaningless and useless.

His claims that Marxism has remained a rigid, unchanging theory are quite incorrect. There has been considerable analysis by Marxists of changes in the economy and society—for instance on the modern rôle of the state in capitalism which is different now than when Marx wrote.

As for an entente between Marxism and the churches, the vast majority of Marxists would agree that Marxism and Christianity are quite incompatible. The basis of any attack on religion is found in Marx's early writings where he described religion as a form of alienation and as an illusory compensation for the miseries of capitalism, and as such promoted by the ruling class.

PATRICIA KNIGHT.

Marxism, like Christianity, does have a founder, but it is rather absurd of Philip Hinchliff to say that therefore *Capital* is a sacred book and Marxism is a myth. This sort of argument could equally be used to dismiss Darwinism and Freudianism.

Both Christ and Marx believed in the brotherhood of man but Philip Hinchliff overlooks the fact that their philosophies originate from completely different sources.

Christianity is Hegelian in outlook, believing that in the beginning was Mind, Spirit and God, who created the world of matter and Man. Marxists, on the other hand, believe that in the beginning was the world of matter, and that through the ages Man, and his brain and mind, evolved, and that Man, in his ignorance of the laws of nature, created the idea of gods and God in his mind.

You cannot blame Marx because today's so-called Marxists misinterpret him and call Russia and China socialist countries when they are really state capitalist. Modern science substantiates the laws of Marx's dialectical materialism while at the same time debunking Hegel's dialectical idealism. Historical developments are progressing much slower than Marx and Engels ever expected but they are proving Marx right in his basic conception of historical progress through socialism or else social suicide. Man has free will to choose.

R. STUART MONTAGUE.