

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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RECENTLY the present writer was discussing the population question in Scotland with the editor of an advanced political journal. I must confess to being somewhat startled when he remarked casually that probably by the end of the current century Scotland would again, as before the Reformation, be a Roman Catholic country. This, in the land of John Knox and the "Wee Frees"! Pursuing the theme, my friend, who lives in a working class area in Glasgow, quoted facts and figures in support of his prediction.

These were highly disconcerting. The Glasgow slums, still among the worst in Britain despite a traditionally Labour Council, are crowded with illiterate Irish Catholics who obey to the letter their priests' injunctions to "increase and multiply"—and they do! My informant has personal knowledge of women in their early thirties with eight or more children, while families running into their tens are not at all uncommon. Time was, it is true, when such patriarchal families were common also in Protestant lands like England, as in the pre-hygienic era generally. But Queen Anne, whose nineteen children all died at, or soon after, birth, has herself been dead quite a time! Nowadays modern medical progress, backed by "welfare" economics, has, it would appear, effectively ended the vicious circle in which a high mortality represented the inevitable reverse side of a high birthrate. The result, according to my informant, is that Catholics are breeding like rabbits, and it is only a matter of time before the countrymen of John Knox return to their former allegiance to the Vatican. Clerical strategy!

A World-Wide Problem

So much for Scotland. One can only hope that the above information refers exclusively to Glasgow, which is, due to its large Irish population, by no means a typical Scottish city. However, it is indisputable that the problem is actually world-wide and by no means confined to Scotland. The R.C. Church is a world-wide institution and wherever its influence spreads it imposes a rigorous ban on all forms of family planning and birth control. In fact, so fierce has been the clerical denunciation of family limitation in recent years that it appears to be a moot theological point whether birth control or the profession of Communism constitutes the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost in the eyes of the Catholic hierarchy. It would appear, moreover, that thanks to its systematic encouragement of large families, Rome is actually "cashing in" over a number of lands, of which Canada, and now Scotland, are relevant cases. A large R.C. minority appears to be at the point of becoming transformed into an effective majority as the result of this clerical ban on every form of sex knowledge and family planning. We submit that this aspect of an urgent contemporary problem is a very serious one for Freethinkers everywhere.

Rationalism and Birth Control

The problem, however, is not one confined to Christian lands. As is clear from articles in our intelligent contemporary, *Indian Rationalist*, the same problem also exists in India, as also in other lands in Asia and Africa, where, it is pertinent to recall, the actual majority of mankind live. One is not aware how far, if at all, what are traditionally described as the "great religions of the East"—Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism—actually condemn birth control. It seems clear from the observations of our contemporary that in any case ignorance prevents family planning quite as effectively in the East as the thunders of the Vatican

in the more industrially developed West. The Indian Rationalists, it is true, circulate literature on family limitation. But Rationalism is for Rationalists! Such people are in any case still in a small minority in the agrarian East.

In final analysis, what is going to happen when the enlightened minority regularly limit their families whilst the unenlightened majority habitually increase and multiply?

It hardly seems to be the road to an enlightened future. No doubt the Vatican recalls the Gospel axiom that "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light".

An Historical Warning

It has been stated, no doubt truly, that the one thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history! But that is hardly the fault of history, which is lavish in its warnings. As that great scholar McCabe pointed out long ago, Christianity triumphed in the Ancient World precisely because the cultured classes died out or were liquidated by the Civil Wars and barbarian invasions characteristic of that era of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire". Only the priest-ridden masses remained, and one sees what they did with, and to, human reason when they took over. Our great historian went on to point the moral that unless we educate *our* workers better than did Marcus Aurelius and his class we, too, may be submerged by the flood of illiterate superstition. The infallible Vatican is evidently of like mind—from its own angle! A worldly-wise institution!

Malthus and Social Progress

After a period of undeserved denigration at the hands of both his own countrymen and his own profession, the Rev. T. R. Malthus now appears to be at the point of becoming at least respectable. "We" are all Malthusians nowadays! One imagines that at least the great majority of Rationalists—in the mildest sense—may now be enrolled among the advocates of "family planning". The present writer would, however, issue a warning. We must never allow ourselves to *substitute* birth control for social progress, as certain Neo-Malthusian disciples have been prone to do.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Religion, Rationalism and Birth Control

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

"That way madness lies." To rely on birth control is no substitute for the education of the masses. All that such a policy can achieve is to play straight into the hands of Rome. If Rationalists limit their families while the irrational majority continue to increase, then the future is marked "Destination Rome!" In that case the conflict between religion and science will be decided, not in the field of reason, but in the statistics of maternity wards — and not in favour of science, it is feared.

A Note on the Above

By G. I. BENNETT

I HAVE READ the above article of Mr. Ridley's with interest. A differential birthrate as between — to use Mr. Ridley's words — an "enlightened minority" and an "unenlightened majority" has quite grave implications for the future. Robert Cook's book, *Human Fertility: the Modern Dilemma*, deals fully with the whole subject.

As a geneticist Cook saw the population problem not simply as a Neo-Malthusian — though no one could convincingly dispute the fact that "on a global scale the disaster foreseen by Thomas Malthus is at hand"; that "if populations continue to increase at present rates the day when catastrophe becomes inevitable might occur as soon as 1985... it could hardly be delayed beyond the year 2100". In studying the reproductive rates of different classes of western society he perceived an insidious trend of comparatively recent development. He noted that according as people climb the educational social ladder their reproductive rate tends to fall, and that there is an inverse ratio between education and intelligence on the one hand and fecundity on the other. His book is more than an underlining of Vogt's grave words about over-production of children; it points out how the differential birthrate in the western nations, where birth-control practices are well established, is adversely affecting the general level of intelligence. "Not only do gifted people tend to have fewer children, but they tend to move to cities to live. There they and their children, in turn, tend to reproduce at a dangerously low rate. 'He travels farthest who travels alone' — or relatively alone — is all too true of most successful men and women, taken as a group and on the average."

It is true, avers Mr. Cook, that environment and heredity both act upon human character and intelligence, but heredity plays the greater part. Genes — those ultra-microscopic determinants of intellect and personality — clinch at conception an individual's mental abilities and propensities. Education may do much to develop to the best advantage what intelligence a human being has inherited, but it cannot increase that intelligence (a matter that only Soviet scientists, inhibited by Marxist authoritarianism, feel constrained to dispute). What is apparently happening today, as a result of a selective birthrate, is that bearers of the most desirable genes — the clever, talented people — are reproducing themselves at below the replacement level, whereas the bearers of mediocre and low-grade intelligence genes are more than replacing themselves. This is causing a decline in national intelligence that may in a measurable period, in an age of increasingly complex social, economic, and industrial organisation demanding an ever higher plane of intelligence, bring about a disastrous breakdown of civilised life.

In his *Road to Survival*, written three years earlier, William Vogt was largely concerned with the menacing reality of soil erosion. The author of *Human Fertility* shows that what he calls "gene erosion" is no less serious. The remedy he offers is primarily economic. He would find

means of reducing the financial worries of struggling students and hard-pressed professional people, married or desirous of marrying, and provide attractive inducements in the form of grants and home-help services, for them to have children. In some such way, thinks Mr. Cook, may this genetic problem and long-term danger be overcome — a problem and danger undreamt of and very likely non-existent at the beginning of the turbulent twentieth century.

Imagination in Science

By J. GORDON

IN HIS INTERESTING letter of March 23rd Mr. Rex Clements suggests that to confine ourselves to understanding the "How" of events may lead to the atrophy of some of our mental powers and of the imagination in particular.

Let us consider one department of natural science which attempts to provide an explanation of the How of events: namely, theoretical physics. Anyone who studies the present-day methods as well as the history of this fascinating subject cannot fail to be impressed by the vital part played by the imaginative and creative power of the mind in the discovery of such major landmarks in science as Newton's Law of Gravitation and Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The latter in particular drives home the great lesson that the fundamental concepts and postulates of physics are not deduced from experience by logical means but are free inventions of the human mind. The structure of physics may be the work of reason; conclusions drawn from a given system of concepts may result from the application of logic; but the selection of the basic concepts in the first place is the work of the imagination, later to be tested against experience.

That this is so in any branch of science will be verified by anyone who has undertaken original research work. It is the inspired guess, tempered by reason and experience, which has led to revolutions in science, not the establishment of propositions arrived at by purely logical thinking.

The scientific creations of Einstein and others represent the fruit of man's mental powers in the fullest sense.

To forecast the atrophy of those powers unless we exercise them in a search for a "Why", is to make a prediction gratuitous and insupportable.

The last thing that can be said against science is that it is dogmatic. Science progresses by furnishing us with ever closer approximations to reality. Such approximations can never be final. The scientist does not necessarily go out of his way to deny the claims of the mystic. He merely sets them aside as irrelevant and scientifically useless. Science claims the whole of nature as its domain (not excluding the mystic himself and his "experiences").

The age-old questionings of man are not taboo: they are re-phrased in scientific language.

A problem cannot be tackled unless it is first stated in precise, unambiguous terms. When the mystics, unaided by any scientific method, are able to produce one thousandth part of our understanding of nature, then will it be time for scientists to examine their claims. Until then, scientists will continue to regard their mystical notions as the last remnants of primitive animism.

For Your Bookshelf

Bound Complete

THE FREETHINKER, 1955

Volume 75

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Man's Inhumanity

(A Review of *Against the Law* by Peter Wildeblood) By REV. J. L. BROOM, M.A.

(Concluded from page 131)

Wildeblood, as has been said, was eventually found guilty and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment. He describes graphically, and yet with much humour, the appalling conditions at Wormwood Scrubs, the filthy sanitary arrangements (two w.c.s shared between eighty men), the soul-destroying and useless work such as the incessant mailbag sewing, the freezing cells in the middle of winter and so on. There appears to be an almost complete lack of psychological treatment at Wormwood Scrubs, so that what should be the main purpose of any prison, the reformation of the offender, is seldom, if ever, effected. There is also no evidence that the subsidiary aim of deterrence is achieved. Indeed, in the case of homosexuals, particularly, prison may have the opposite result. The undesirable publicity surrounding a prosecution against homosexuality stimulates the desires of potential homosexuals, and both Wildeblood and Montagu were inundated after their first arrest by letters from such persons, including young boys.

Moreover, as Wildeblood says, "The laws under which homosexuals are prosecuted appear to them so flagrantly unjust that there is no question of their feeling any remorse or shame for what they have done". Prison conditions as they are today lead to a general attitude of contempt for all authority among prisoners. "It is easy to believe in justice," Wildeblood points out, "when you have not been caught up in its workings."

Early in 1955, following his release, Wildeblood attended a House of Lords debate on prison conditions. Lord Moynham pointed out that although this was a matter in which the Church might have interested itself, not a single Bishop stayed to the debate. He had heard of Borstal boys who had been asked "Are you a Christian?" and had replied "No, Church of England". Peer after peer condemned the prison environment, Lord Chorley maintaining that there are still in existence gaols which are not fit to house swine, let alone human beings. But few of the noble Lords bothered to stay, and of those who remained several were asleep. Lord Mancroft, replying for the Government, gave, according to Wildeblood, an account of the prison administration "so grossly ill-informed that I could scarcely prevent myself from unscrewing the nearest brass gargoyle and throwing it at his brilliant head".

Against the Law, however, is not wholly a depressing tale of man's inhumanity. Wildeblood made friends with many prisoners, and discovered in general that they revealed a far broader tolerance of his affliction than many on the outside. "I do not remember," he writes, "any conversations more absorbing than those I had in prison. Regarding prison reform, I heard more sensible suggestions from those criminals than I have heard from any penologist or politician since my release."

Prison had one good effect on Wildeblood: "I could never again be wholly selfish or consumed with pity for myself. Wherever I went I should be haunted by the faces, savage, resigned, or drained of hope, of those hundreds of men so much less fortunate than myself." A moving and heartening feature of Wildeblood's story is the total absence of hostility he encountered from his family, his friends and his one-time fellow journalists after his release. "Whenever I walked into a room I waited for the whisper, the snigger and the insult... but they never came. People had searched their hearts and discovered there a wealth of humanity and tolerance with which I would never have

credited them, and with which they might never have credited themselves."

In this enlightened land of ours, Wildeblood's book has been boycotted by several libraries (at Richmond a councillor walked out after the Committee had decided to purchase a copy) and is available only on demand at some bookshops. It is such criminal stupidity as this that accounts for the Puritanical barbarities disfiguring our law at so many points. Admittedly there is a touch of bitterness here and there in Wildeblood's narrative, as the hostile reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* went out of his way to emphasise. The astonishing fact is that it remains only a touch in view of all the indignities the author endured. There is even considerable humour in the book, albeit of a rather wry nature, and Wildeblood's journalistic flair results in many graphic descriptions, especially of the court and prison scenes.

This frightening document should make all men of good will determined to do everything in their power to ensure that the affliction from which the writer suffers shall no longer remain "against the law".

Review

SECULAR POEMS

WE HAVE before us a pleasant and instructive book of poems composed during a long and socially-useful life by one who has been called "A happy philosopher". This book is entitled *Fact and Fiction, Secular Poems*; it is published by the Strickland Press, Glasgow, at the modest price of 2s., and its philosophic author, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, is one who has taken an active part in many progressive causes. In his time Mr. Ratcliffe has played many parts: a London councillor, a secularist orator and leader, an editor and a school manager. A prolific writer of songs, he took a prominent part in the compilation of a book of Labour songs — *The Fellowship Song Book*. In his West Country retirement Mr. Ratcliffe is still writing, and publishing, his verses, which show the poet-philosopher still at his pleasant task of creation. May he long continue to do so, for his and our benefit.

What are his themes? The poet's title of this, his latest, publication provides readers with a most conclusive answer; freedom of thought and speech, co-operation, international friendship, for all of which THE FREETHINKER stands. But beneath all these outward beneficent activities must lie always a poet's guiding thought, in other words, his philosophy. This poet seeks always for Truth (*coûte qui coûte*); he believes that "Freewill" is a "pernicious fallacy" (this "determinism" runs through much of his verse); "man" is generally written, most significantly, "fellow-man"; and "Fate" is "purposeless". But this stout-hearted oldster still sings of man taking hold of events; fighting "man's inhumanity", and striving for World-Fraternity. Amen to this!

LESLIE HULL.
[This book can be obtained, post free, from THE FREETHINKER office, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, for 2/-.]

The impudent invasion of our right of free speech has engendered in us no spirit of submission. We feel not only a determination to defend our liberty, but a resolution to hurl at the enemy our defiance and scorn.—G. W. FOOTE.

This Believing World

Consternation and horror filled the Wee Frees and Non-conformists generally not only in the House of Commons but all over the country when the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced his Premium Bonds. The idea that this dreadful form of gambling, enabling a man to get some money for nothing, was at last introduced into a Christian country, was something no decent follower of Christ Jesus could consider for a moment. Would "our Lord" have had a little flutter if it had been introduced by the Jews in Palestine? Would he not have bitterly denounced the crying scandal?

★

We had a beatific vision of the Rev. Donald Soper on the TV, his pious soul literally rent in sorrow that such gambling could have been introduced by a Christian government; and nobody in England opposes such infamous sin more than this humble follower of Christ. He attacked the proposal with all the adjectives at his command — though it must be confessed that we were astonished he did not refer to his Master as the greatest anti-gambler that ever lived. Perhaps he will now do so. For ourselves, anything which will destroy the anti-card-playing, the anti-theatre, and the anti-beer-drinking Puritan in our midst has our heartiest and non-religious blessing.

★

The young fifteen-year-old lady, Renée Martz, who began to save people for Christ at the age of four, and who is still continuing God's work, is now in England and has been interviewed for *Picture Post*. Among her remarkable sayings, particularly on "relative religions" (as the interviewer calls them) is her girlish confession that she had never been to a Catholic service — though, thank God, she had preached in Rome. "Catholicism", she laughingly said, "is marvellous. . . It's thousands of years old as a religion, isn't it?" And then, with that brilliant knowledge only an evangelist like her (or Billy Graham) shows in this erring world, she added that Catholicism "was going centuries before Christ"; in fact, "before history began". That's the stuff to give ignorant and blatant infidels!

★

Another crammed-with-knowledge gentleman who is going to write a book on the Resurrection, a Mr. de Wohl, interviewed by Miss Jeanne Heal on TV the other day, has the sceptics beaten to a frazzle. He scathingly asks them to explain how Jesus, put to death on the cross, could have been seen for six weeks — note *six weeks* — alive and kicking afterwards. The Resurrection is the best attested event in the history of the world. With pain we say it, but even Miss Heal did not seem particularly impressed. Mr. de Wohl should have been interviewed by Miss Martz.

★

The Hindu "magician" who saws a girl in halves, and cuts off the tip of a "Yogi's" tongue nightly in a theatre gets almost half a page of most enthusiastic benediction in *Psychic News* — for if these things do not prove the absolute reality of the Spirit World and Summerland, what does? It is the cutting off of a bit of the Yogi's tongue which impressed *P.N.'s* correspondent, for the tongue is healed in the presence of a committee from the audience and even some doctors. Can this be done because of Yogi?

★

The late Harry Houdini just loved to invite members of the audience to see that everything was fair and above board, and he managed to bamboozle not only these

people but, quite easily, "scientific" investigators. What we should like to see is if the Yogi would allow any surgeon from a hospital to amputate his tongue — not the "magician". Does anybody in his senses believe that the tongue could be put back and heal before his very eyes?

The Rising Generation

IV — THE DATES OF CREATION

IF YOU LOOK at the first page of your Bible, you will find that the date of the creation of the world is given as 4004 B.C. By the word "Creation" here is meant that the universe was created — made — not merely our own planet. The opening words of the Bible are "In the beginning" — though nobody has ever been able to explain what these words mean. "In the beginning" of what? There was no "universe" to begin time with, and "God" is timeless; that is (so we are told by believers) God's existence is "infinite and eternal".

However, the date 4004 B.C., accepted by our "authorised" Bible, is based on the calculations of Archbishop Ussher who, in the 17th century, was the Primate of Ireland. He gave the date of Noah's "Flood" as 2348 B.C. — in fact, most of his dates are admitted in our English Bible.

The date 4004 B.C. is also the date given in the Hebrew Bible — but strangely enough, it is *not* the date given in the famous Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible known as the Septuagint. The date there is 5872 B.C. Now you must never forget that for many centuries the Septuagint was the Bible of the Christian Churches, and that the Latin translation, considered by the Roman Catholic Church as God's Holy (or Holiest) Word and always used by it, is a translation from the Greek Septuagint and *not* from the Hebrew — the "original" Bible. No one, not even the Roman Church, which is always infallible when dealing with the things of God — like the Bible — has ever been able to explain why God says one thing in Hebrew and another thing in Greek. Moreover, there is still another Bible, that of the Samaritans. In the Samaritan Pentateuch — Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch — the date of the Creation is 4700 B.C. Which of the three is right? God knows, for nobody else does.

In the work of the great Jewish historian, Josephus, will be found still another date. Josephus wrote, in the first century, an historical account of his race for the benefit of the Greeks and Romans of his day, and he gives the date of the Creation as 4658 B.C. Finally, disagreeing with them all, is that famous depository of Jewish learning — an enormous work in many volumes, known as the Talmud. It throws overboard all the others — for its date for the Creation is 5344 B.C.

But was the universe created some 6,000 or 7,000 years ago? It will be safe to say that outside the Churches and Fundamentalism, there is not a single authority who would not laugh to scorn the utter absurdity of any "creation" of the universe at any definite time. Nobody knows anything about it. But for your information, most men of science will agree that this planet of ours we call the Earth came into being — whatever is meant by that — at least 4,000 millions years ago.

—NEXT WEEK—

WELSH PIONEERS OF FREETHOUGHT

By DAVID SHIPPER

THE FREETHINKER

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Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 8s. (in U.S.A., \$4); half-year, 14s.; three months, 7s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World", or to our spoken propaganda.

S. C. MERRIFIELD.—Walter Mann wrote many years ago. Since then few figures regarding the relative numbers of Christians and Buddhists are reliable. Even Whitaker's Almanac does not give them.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
Orpington Humanist Group.—Bluebell and Primrose Ramble., Sunday, April 29th. Train leaves Victoria 10.4 a.m.; Charing Cross 10.4 a.m. Leader will meet at Orpington Station (town side). Everyone welcome.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Various speakers.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 6th, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Ibsen Fifty Years After".
Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, May 6th, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Notes and News

THE N.S.S. Conference Agenda promises a busy time for members on Whit Sunday. There is a complete absence of "pious" motions and there should be some profitable discussion on important practical matters. Alterations in the Society's rules are due for decision as well as the new Standing Orders. The possibility of sending travelling speakers and the preparation of single-sheet leaflets for free distribution are also the subjects of motions. Topics for discussion are the N.S.S. and Trade Unions, opened by F. A. Ridley; the N.S.S. and the Press, opened by G. H. Taylor; and the Disestablishment issue, opened by the Liverpool Vice-President, W. Parry, senr.

★

THE Conference Agenda and Society accounts have been sent to all Branch Secretaries. Copies of each will also be sent to any individual member on application to the General Secretary, N.S.S., 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

★

WE ARE PLEASED to note that freethought in South Africa has taken a step forward with the publication of *Rationalist*, a newsletter of the Rationalist Association of Johannesburg (24 Hill Road, Emmarentia Extension, Johannesburg). The newsletter contains interesting items of news, notes and quotations.

★

THE NEW Mexican freethought journal referred to in "Facts for Freethinkers" (April 20th) is *La Voz de Juarez*. It is militantly anti-clerical and adheres to the World Union of Freethinkers.

Special

THE FREETHINKER this month completes three quarters of a century of its existence.

To mark the occasion we plan to have a twelve-page issue on May 18th, containing several special articles and messages of goodwill. THE FREETHINKER began in 1881 as little more than a Bible-killer, the great need of those days in the Bradlaugh struggle. However, we trust we have moved on since then in keeping with the times.

Now is the time to remember with gratitude and pride the labours of our great predecessors in the fight for the emancipation of the mind from the shackles of superstition. We think, too, of all those unknown men and women who in less spectacular ways have made their immortal contribution to the Best of Causes, and without whom the Freethought Movement would have been impossible.

No addition to the price of THE FREETHINKER will be made for the special issue, but there is a much better way of helping. If readers will make it their special contribution to take at least one extra copy for distribution the extra cost of publication could be wiped out. The favour would be enhanced if they would let us know immediately their extra requirements.

The third week of May looks like being a red-letter week for freethought in 1956. First, the 75th birthday of THE FREETHINKER; next, the N.S.S. Annual Conference at Liverpool, which we anticipate will be the best attended since the war; and last, but by no means least, freethought history will be made when the N.S.S. gets its first chance on the BBC Television programme, only for a couple of minutes, it is true, but what an advance!

We were asked to provide a representative who would declare himself an atheist, in a programme recorded for May 22nd. In his capacity as General Secretary of the National Secular Society, Mr. Colin McCall has done the recording, declaring, in the time at his disposal, his atheism and the reasons for it. We shall try to keep readers informed of any change of time or date.

The signs are that an all-out effort now by readers and members may bring results beyond our expectations. We owe it to our leaders of the past, and to the cause of mental freedom.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE LIVERPOOL . WHITSUN 1956

RECEPTION AND SOCIAL
The N.S.S. Executive Committee
cordially invites delegates and friends
to the above, at the

STORK HOTEL, 1 QUEEN SQUARE, LIVERPOOL
at 7 p.m.

SATURDAY, MAY 19TH

THE CONFERENCE

will be held at the
STORK HOTEL on SUNDAY, MAY 20TH
at 10.30 — 12.30; 2.30 — 4.30. Lunch at 1 p.m.

OUTDOOR DEMONSTRATION

SUNDAY EVENING, 7 p.m. LIVERPOOL PIERHEAD
(If wet, in the Cooper's Hall, 12 Shaw Street)

AN OUTING

will be arranged for WHIT MONDAY

The Problem of Mutation

II

By G. H. TAYLOR

WE HAVE SEEN that mutations (radical variations in genetic structure) are brought about by physical conditioning, are mainly injured weaklings showing no sign of any Divine, or vitalistic, purpose, and can be effected in the laboratory under controlled experiment.

As a pointer to mutation in nature as a cause of evolution, however, laboratory experiments have so far been a rather expensive failure. The evening primrose of De Vries yields the same sports eternally and gets no farther. The same applies to the fruit-fly *Drosophila*.

Laboratory mutants are *not* an improvement of the animal, and the greater the divergence the greater the decline in vigour. E. B. Ford speaks of pathological departures from normality which could not survive in a state of nature, and continues: "It may, in short, be stated that no mutation has ever occurred in the progress of genetic work which is fully viable and behaves as a dominant to the wild-type condition. That any have given rise to changes which would be of survival value in nature appears to be highly doubtful." (*Mendelism and Evolution*.)

The most persistent researcher, H. J. Muller, has admitted that "most mutations are bad. In fact, good ones are so rare that we may consider them all as bad".

We must realise that a mutation does not *add* anything; it always takes away. Microscopic damage to the cell is *subtractive*, and frequently lethal. Mutations ordinarily *deprive* the animal of some part of its outfit. That is, its repertoire is decreased, not increased.

The problem therefore arises: if mutation in nature is a cause of evolutionary improvement, how can a loss of structure or function lead to a new variety with survival value? If mutation involves *loss*, how can new traits appear?

For example, an albino individual has suffered the loss of pigment-formation, but he is no better for it.

How can a *loss* represent an improvement? Well, it is not an impossibility, and the deer's antlers are the usual illustration. Long antlers, as compared with short antlers or no antlers at all, are neither better nor worse in themselves, but only so in relation to the environment. In the presence of wolves, survival will reward long antlers. If there are no wolves but there is a plentiful covering of snow on the ground between the animal and its food, medium antlers will suffice, and will do their job without getting in the way when the animal has to show its heels to a pursuer. If the antlers were not needed for any purpose, then a mutation removing them would be an advantage.

It is too early to maintain that all evolution is actually achieved by the lopping-off activity of mutation, and there are advances in other fields of biology which open up other possible sources of the appearance of new traits: Muntzing, for instance, has produced a new species under laboratory conditions by crossing. Sir Arthur Keith in his autobiography maintains that hormone action has played a great part in human evolution, and he has also sought to explain race differences by glands. Cunningham of London has spoken of the vital part played by hormones in the evolution of man, pointing particularly to the sex and pituitary hormones.

The phenomenon called neoteny, a particular type of mutation, is also well to the fore as a possible cause of radical alterations in the genetic structure, and explains the arrival of flightless birds such as the ostrich. In neoteny

the subtractive, or lopping-off, effects of mutation co-exist with sexual competence, giving, in the ostrich, a giant chick deprived of mature feathers and retaining its nestling down.

Similarly it has been conjectured that man is a product of neoteny, resembling a sort of overgrown ape *fetus* rather than the mature ape, in such characters as the relatively hairless and pale skin, shape of face, red lips and frail bones.

The theory that mutation (with neoteny, or foetalisation) is a prime cause of evolution is still very much favoured, but an immense amount of research would still be needed before it could finally be satisfactorily substantiated. Nor would it necessarily obviate such other possible causes of evolution as we have briefly mentioned.

THEATRE

Power without Glory

GRAHAM GREENE's novel, *The Power and the Glory*, has been adapted for the stage by Denis Cannan and Pierre Bast and well produced by Peter Brook, with most imaginative sets by Georges Wakhevitch, at the Phoenix Theatre, London.

Greene is, of course, a Catholic convert, and most of his serious works are, in effect, Catholic apologetics. Like many other religious apologists, he has the disarming habit of seemingly weighing the dice against himself right at the start. I say "seemingly" because this is only one deceptive move in a crooked game: the Catholic contestant has an invisible partner throughout, whose aid will prove decisive in the end. Even weighted dice are useless against an opponent who has God on his side; the deity may withhold his telling influence until the final throw, but that is merely an indication of his keen dramatic sense.

The Power and the Glory is set in an anti-clerical Mexican state around 1930, and the religious-secular struggle is personified in the two main characters: the priest, played by Paul Scofield, and the atheist Police Lieutenant, played by Harry H. Corbett. The former is a drunken, cringing, almost detestable character; the latter almost completely admirable. The qualification is necessary in each case. First because the priest's pathetic efforts to obtain the prohibited wine that he needs for communion are unselfish, though not altogether humble (he has a certain priestly pride which is gratified in administering the sacrament: "He [the Host] is with me", he says); secondly because the Lieutenant finds it necessary to shoot hostages when nobody in a village will reveal the identity of the priest who is known to be there (the priest, incidentally, allows them to be shot and doesn't give himself up). On the whole, there is no doubt in our minds — and no doubt in Greene's mind either — that the atheist is much the better *man*. The disturbing fact is that, in Greene's view, a man's worth is assessed, not in accordance with his words and deeds, but on the quite different basis of whether or not he is the vehicle of God. If he be such (a Catholic or, better still, a priest) he is better than a non-Catholic. He may be a cowardly sot, he may have broken his vows of celibacy, he may be — in a word — contemptible; he is still superior. This Catholic contention makes nonsense of morality; in lesser minds than Greene's it might well lead to immorality. Therein, as I see it, lies its harmfulness.

The play, nevertheless, is well worth seeing and is splendidly acted by the two principals. The power is unquestionably there but one will search in vain for the glory. The only decently human character is the atheist.

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The Passing Show

THE BBC audience research booklet *Religion on the Air*, published in March, gives some statistics that are a sad commentary on the religious state of the country, from the Christian viewpoint.

The belief in eternal life is either denied or doubted by more than 60% of those outside the churches and as many as 25% of regular churchgoers. Bible-reading statistics will shock any Christian. 35% of those who listen frequently to religious broadcasts and 70% of those who never do, for all practical purposes never open their Bibles at all.

This is perhaps the most unfortunate feature of this sordid tale. Any Secularist would, I am sure, recommend this book as informative and amusing.

★

On Sunday, March 18th, Mr. Richard Stokes, M.P., speaking at a "Christians in Industry" meeting in the City Hall, Sheffield (organised by the Sheffield Council of Catholic Action) said "that if 500,000,000 Catholics really carried out the Catholic faith and Christian teaching there would be no doubt as to which direction we should be taking instead of wobbling nobody knew where".

No doubt at all, Mr. Stokes! The direction would be Rome, and eventually all roads would lead to it.

★

From Colombia, South America, comes another choice example of Christian tolerance. Bishop Gallego of Barranquilla recently excommunicated a number of deluded Catholic parents who sent their children to the American College and other Protestant schools in Colombia. The college announced in November that it would not enrol Catholic students unless they registered as non-Catholics. In this way it sought to escape the law which makes Catholic religious instruction compulsory for Catholic pupils in all schools. "Registration under such conditions is equivalent to a veritable apostasy of the faith on the part of Catholic parents and students", said the indignant Bishop Gallego in his excommunication decree.

Last November a number of students left the American College, controlled by Presbyterians. Previous estimations were that 70% of pupils were Catholics. This news is a further illustration of the kindly nature of Catholic Bishops of the world over, following as it does close upon the heels of the news of the 48th Protestant Church to be burnt down (in Colombia). Of course, no Catholic could be accused of this pyromania, obviously due to a visitation of some good, old-fashioned "hell-fire".

Our heartfelt sympathies go out to all Colombian excommunicants and I should like to start a fund to provide asbestos suits for these poor unfortunates. Send contributions in envelopes marked "Purgatory", to D. SHIPPER.

Jesus at the Secular Hall

WHEN the Leicester Secular Hall was built, 75 years ago, Jesus was considered an historical character even by Free-thinkers. Why was Jesus considered worthy of a place outside the Secular Hall? Mr. F. J. Gould, who was for many years connected with the hall, says in his *History of the L.S.S.*: "It is not to be supposed that the five worthies commemorated in the series of busts are chosen as the supreme teachers of Secular doctrine. They stand in a general way for wholesome criticism, for revolt against priestly pretensions, and for endeavours after a happier environment. They are types of great moral and intellectual activities."

"Of course, the bracketing of Jesus with Freethinkers such as Voltaire, Paine and Owen, caused much heart-searching in the town. 'I was considerably shocked and surprised,' wrote an indignant correspondent to a local paper, 'to see the name of Jesus in such a position, and I am altogether at a loss to find how the Secularists can claim him as a teacher and expounder of their views of life.'

"Mr. Josiah Grimson defended the novel arrangement of the busts in a series of letters to the *Secular Review*, January 1882; his contention being that Jesus enjoined the performance of right actions towards our fellow men as our first duty, and that his gospel was moral rather than theological, and therefore Secularistic."

Such were the views of 1882.

Why do we still hang on to Jesus? Well, he doesn't worry us; we hardly notice he is there at all except when reminded by Messrs. Ridley and Cutner. Perhaps one day we may take him down and auction him off.

C. H. HAMMERSLEY, Leicester Secular Society.

Clerical Quotations

How man created the absurd God-in-General: "Always, from the most primitive times onward, man's worship has had an object. We find an elementary personification of natural objects. There are, too, the ever present forces of nature: thunder, lightning, wind, etc. Nobler than these is the soul, or the material of which the soul is made. Of this class are the ancestral spirits. More advanced than the half-divine, half-human spirits, the heroes are the 'gods' as they came to be called. We get the god of War, of Love, etc. From these, who are often local and tribal, we pass to 'high gods'. These are on a more exalted plane than the primitive spirits. They are somehow the sources of existence and values. They stand for good and evil, wisdom and folly, love and hatred, peace and strife, beauty and ugliness, truth and falsehood. The high gods tend to coalesce; an Egyptian god is recognised as being the counterpart of a Greek or Roman god. Thus they become universalised and come to have a common mind about those values. So at last there comes the splendid conception, realised by man, of one supreme God, superseding all the imperfect spirits in whom humanity had so far placed its trust. He is the Father of all; remote perhaps at first and less approachable than the smaller deities who still survived for a time."—F. Underhill, D.D., Dean of Rochester (*The Christian Faith*, pp. 262-264).

How the Jews civilised their god Yahweh, the Father of Jesus: "We see in the Old Testament the change from naive pictures of a tribal god, righteous indeed in some aspects, but also testy, irascible, vengeful, unaccountable, into that of the judge of all the earth, the maker and lover of mankind whom we meet in the writings of the later prophets and in the books influenced by them. This preparation leads us directly to the New Testament and to the main principles of specific Christian worship. The heart of Christianity is found in following Jesus Christ in His worship of the Father. The object of early Christian worship was God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and of all Christians. Worship was also very early offered to Christ as God."—F. Underhill, D.D., Dean of Rochester (*The Christian Faith*, pp. 265, 267, 269).

Compiled by GREGORY S. SMELTERS.

The Blasphemy Laws must be entirely swept away before the struggle is allowed to end, and Persecution for ever deprived of all power of attack.—G. W. FOOTE.

CORRESPONDENCE

SPACE TRAVEL

Mr. F. S. Houghton is incorrect in writing that a rocket is propelled by the thrust of its discharged gases against the atmosphere. Not only can a rocket work in a vacuum—it would be little use for interplanetary flight if it did not—but it works more efficiently in a vacuum than in air.

The principle of a rocket is similar to the principle of the recoil of a gun as a projectile is fired from it, or of a balloon which is blown along as air escapes from its open neck—it is the pressure of the internal forces which push the rocket forward at the same time as they expel the gases through the nozzle. Whereas a paddle-boat or other ship moves forward by pushing water backwards, a rocket does not need any atmosphere; it moves because it is expelling gases backwards.

Mr. Houghton began his letter by referring to statements by "leading astronomers" to support his distrust of space travel, but it should be realised that an astronomer is not necessarily an expert on the subject. If he has made a study of engineering problems involved in designing the ship, or its motors, or of the physiological difficulties of withstanding the journey, then he has some specialist knowledge, but it is not at all obvious that the "leading astronomers" referred to do have this knowledge.

J. FURLONG and E. CROUCH

(Theoretical Physics Division, A.E.R.E., Harwell, Berks.).

In reply to Mr. F. S. Houghton, a rocket is not "propelled by the forcible discharge of its gases against the substance of the atmosphere", but by the reaction, on the rocket, of the expelled gases, and reaches maximum efficiency in a perfect vacuum. A rocket ship could easily be steered by mounting small rockets perpendicular to the axis of the ship, and by using these to turn the ship end to end; it could be landed stern first, using the main rockets for deceleration.

I think only one leading astronomer has said that space flight is absurd and he did not give any detailed reasons. The time taken in travelling to any planet would depend on the amount of fuel you are willing to use in accelerating and decelerating. Most of the journey would probably be spent coasting along at constant speed.

F. FAWCETT.

[We have received similar letters from Mr. K. Lister and Mr. G. W. Clark.—Ed.]

COURAGE WITH ABILITY

Margaret Knight's fine arguments may have been wasted on her obsessed opponents but not on the public who now read the letters. We sorely need proponents for the Cause today, and here's one that the world will listen to with the respect due to courage-with-ability of the finest type. A real find for THE FREETHINKER.

J. F. KIRKHAM (Toronto).

RELIGION IN S. AFRICA

I was most interested in the letter (THE FREETHINKER, 16/3/56) from L. Martin (S. Africa). As a member of the Cardiff Africa Group (which has a strong theological backing) and also of the N.S.S., I am constantly pointing out to "good" Christians here the evils wrought by their fellow Christians in South Africa, to whom "Apartheid" or absolute domination of "Black" by "White" is as much a part of their religion as the dogmas of Calvin.

Can it be that many of these coloured Christians who turn Muslim do so mainly from a feeling of revulsion at the modern inquisition, not merely tolerated, but actively supported, by the Dutch Reformed Church and its adherents? In South Africa the coloured Christian has little left to "sacrifice to Islam".

It is also interesting to note the efforts made to convert Jews. Would the converted Jew escape the anti-Semitic strictures of Strydom, Malan and Co? It is worth noting that when recently the Union Government took over the schools formerly run by the churches the President of the Conference of the Methodist Church in South Africa commented on the legislation as follows in a BBC talk:

"As to Christian influences, this will depend on the churches themselves, who have been assured of free entry into the new State schools for the purposes of religious instruction." (The time set aside for religious instruction is, in fact, greater than in the old syllabus.)

Now in view of the fact that Christians here disown the Dutch Reformed Church, it is interesting to note that this Methodist leader, far from expressing concern at the future of Bantu education, is apparently quite satisfied as long as the right further to impair the mind of the native child by religious instruction is not interfered with.

D. SHIPPER.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND "THE FREETHINKER"

Would you please keep on stressing the importance of getting THE FREETHINKER installed in libraries. There are 37 of them in this city alone (Glasgow). Surely it is not asking too much of anyone to fill in an application form, stating name, address, date, branch and name of the publication suggested. It is not even necessary to submit a copy so long as it has been accepted in other Glasgow libraries. This fact was made known when the librarian at the Bridgeton branch returned the copy of THE FREETHINKER and accepted the application form, one day last week. As far as can be gathered, the librarians are on our side.

Partick and Mitchell Library are both being "attacked". Here's hoping that others will join in the fun. JAS. HUMPHREY.

MALTHUS

There is too much wealth on one hand and too much poverty on the other. Evidently wealth is divided unequally and thus the problem is how to distribute it more equably. It matters not that human beings may have caused this; the fact remains of vast wealth co-existent with dire poverty. I am not seeking human scapegoats. If humans are responsible for this unequal distribution, this is evidently a factor which Malthus failed to take into account.

Mr. Bennett also points out that at the time of the potato famine the population of Ireland was about eight millions. In a note to the *Wealth of Nations*, written about 1838, McCulloch says: "The wonderful density of population in Ireland is the immediate cause of the abject poverty and depressed condition of the people. It is not too much to say that there are at present more than double the persons in Ireland it is, with its existing means of production, able either fully to employ or maintain in a moderate state of comfort."

According to McCulloch, Ireland could probably afford to maintain in a moderate state of comfort some four million people. In 1727 the population of Ireland was two millions. It was reasonable to expect that two millions could live fairly comfortably. However, the condition of the people was such that Dean Swift wrote his "modest proposal", in which he ironically suggested relieving the surplus population by cultivating a taste for roasted Irish babies.

G. L. DICKINSON.

THE MONARCHY

May I say that I was amazed to see Mr. Ridley stepping into the gutter of conventional genuflection to the monarchy by writing "Her Majesty, we suggest, has a personal interest in the secular principle of the separation of Church and State". I would have thought it more proper for a Freethinker to write that abdication is the only course open to any human being who is not intent upon exploiting the traditional sycophancy which is generated by the institution of monarchy.

Anyhow we know very well that the present Queen has shown no signs whatever of realising that it is better to separate the Church and State—on the contrary!

No! I cannot see her taking the title "Elizabeth by the Grace of Allah", and still less can I see her becoming "Elizabeth by the Grace of Ridley".

E. G. MACFARLANE.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18TH.—Present: Messrs. Barker (acting Chairman), Arthur, Cleaver, Gordon, Hornbrook, Johnson, Shepherd (Mr. Taylor), Tiley, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. New members were admitted to the Birmingham, Central London, Kingston, West London and Park Branches. Correspondence and Branch reports were dealt with and the Committee noted with regret the resignation of Mr. Baldie as secretary of the Bradford Branch. Though now giving way to a younger man, Mr. Baldie, it was learned with pleasure, would continue on the Branch Committee. A debate was fixed for Cardiff May 22nd, with Mr. Ebury as the N.S.S. representative; a prospective debate is in view for Gloucester. Humanist Council and World Union of Freethinkers reports were given. Conference matters were attended to. A sub-committee was formed to consider a new leaflet on Sunday cinemas.

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