

The Freethinker

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Nowadays it is not at all respectable to describe oneself as an atheist or materialist. All the best people believe in "God" — or do they? Clerically influenced public opinion tends to regard materialism as something coarse and ignoble. Ideas, like nations, have their history, and the present disrespect in which materialism is held dates from about the end of the 17th century and reaches its zenith in the era named after that

pious, evangelical "Defender of the Faith," Queen Victoria. During the Victorian era it became "not the thing" to describe oneself as an atheist or materialist. Today only such "lesser breeds without the law" as the Russians call themselves materialists, but this has not

always been so. In the 17th century, the "heroic" age of English history, the precise era of the English bourgeois revolution, materialism could boast of some notable names in the advanced sects of the period, among whom were the germs of modern Socialism and Democracy, and very radical opinions were entertained with regard both to political and to religious orthodoxy. Richard Overton, who has actually been described as the first English materialist, founded the sect of "soul-sleepers" who denied immortality, while the Digger, Gerard Winstanley, accused the clergy of encouraging their dupes to look upwards to Heaven so that their pockets could be picked. Even the daring critic of the contemporary Jew Spinoza found many sympathisers in the England of Cromwell and of the later Stuarts.

Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury

Such men as Overton and Winstanley are but little remembered today; they linked their name and work too closely with pioneering movements—which were far ahead of their time—to meet with much success in it. The best people are rarely the best known in their own day! But one English materialist of this period still enjoys world fame and has even "gate-crashed" our highly respectable academic seats of learning: this was Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, longest lived and perhaps the most original of English thinkers. Born in 1588, he died at the advanced age of 91 in 1679 towards the end of the reign of Charles II, the Merry Monarch, popularly known for his amorous exploits but more permanently commemorated as the founder and patron of the Royal Society. During his exile in Paris he had studied mathematics under Hobbes and it is a further item to his credit that he protected the great champion of materialism against the intolerance of the Anglican clergy, who openly advocated the restoration of the death penalty for heresy — it is said for Hobbes's special benefit!

A Memorable Epoch

The long life of our English philosopher spanned one of the greatest periods in English, and in European, history. The plays of Shakespeare were written in his youth; the epoch-making labours of Descartes, Spinoza, Galileo and

Newton came later in his life. Hobbes himself had been Bacon's secretary and he was a correspondent of Descartes, Spinoza, Galileo and other eminent men of his period. He lived through, and brilliantly described for posterity, the hectic years of the English revolution and Civil War. Hobbes was something of an enigma to his contemporaries. In an era of thorough religious bigotry he was a thorough-

going sceptic and materialist, whose profound criticism reached to the very roots of orthodox religion and political orthodoxy. In an age in which absolute monarchy was going out of fashion Hobbes framed perhaps the most detailed and logical defence of what is nowadays termed the totali-

tarian state, that has ever been penned. The present writer has always considered Hobbes to have been the most powerful philosophical intellect ever to have appeared in this country; he has tended to be overshadowed by men much inferior to him both in literary and intellectual power, but whose political theories were more in line with the constitutional developments which came after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, than was Hobbes's uncompromising defence of an outmoded political absolutism.

Leviathan and Divine Right

His *magnum opus* is his *Leviathan* (1651), a classic in both political theory and in English literature, for in what is perhaps the greatest age in English prose Hobbes was one of the greatest writers as well as thinkers. *Leviathan* may, in one sense, be regarded as a conservative work, since it is the most complete defence of political absolutism to be found in English, but in a more fundamental sense it is a profoundly *revolutionary* work intellectually if not politically. In an age when all parties claimed to derive their political power from God — and this applied equally to Republicans as to Royalists — Hobbes divorced politics completely from religion. According to him the State, far from being ordained by God (the well-nigh universal belief of his day) originated in a social contract among primitive men, who voluntarily agreed to abandon their aboriginal liberties and to subordinate themselves to their own creation, the State, for purely utilitarian considerations in which religion played no part whatever. The State — the name *Leviathan* is actually taken from the Book of Job! — is thus a purely *human* creation. It is hardly surprising that both the supporters of Monarchy and of Democracy by Divine Right did not like Mr. Hobbes of Malmesbury!

"The Ghost of the Roman Empire"

One of the main purposes of *Leviathan* was to refute the claims then advanced by the Jesuits on behalf of the Papacy. Hobbes deals at length with the arguments of Cardinal Bellarmine, since canonised, a celebrated Jesuit, and the Inquisitor who signed the death warrant of Giordano Bruno. Replying to Bellarmine, Hobbes coined the classical definition of the Papacy: "The ghost of the

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

An English Materialist: Thomas Hobbes

By F. A. RIDLEY

Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof. For so did start up this great ecclesiastical power."

One would probably now describe this doughty defender of State supremacy as a Fascist, but his was an entirely secular conception of society with no room for God in political theory or for the Church in practical politics. This was an age when the Divine Right of Kings was almost the 40th article of the Church of England, and also when the radical sects themselves claimed a direct revelation from Heaven.

Hobbes's Critique of Revelation

Hobbes, however, did not stop at criticising the political pretensions of the clergy; he was a complete sceptic in matters of religion, who queried even the possibility of a *bona fide* religious revelation. On this point his trenchant

criticism has never been surpassed, and cuts at the very roots of the supernatural. He says:

"If any man say that God spake to him in a dream, what is this but to say that he dreamed that God spake to him?"

This pithy comment ranks with the dictum of his correspondent Spinoza; "God is the asylum of ignorance." Mr. Chapman Cohen once remarked that in his opinion the 17th century was the greatest, the most original, age in the evolution of modern philosophy. Of its great thinkers Thomas Hobbes was the greatest English atheist and perhaps the greatest English philosopher. He was fortunate in his time. A century earlier he would probably have been burned as a heretic, a fate he narrowly escaped as it was! Today I doubt if this eminent heretic and materialist would be so cordially received at the court of Elizabeth I as he was at the less respectable, but more intellectual, court of Charles II.

What is Man?

By H. CUTNER

IT IS ALWAYS — at least for me — a cheerless and thankless task adversely to review a book or a pamphlet which is obviously a work of sincerity. And I may have disregarded a little pamphlet *What is Man?* by Major Ripley Webb (price 1s., from 10 Greville Place, London, N.W.6) had he not asked for a review "on the understanding that you publish *all* reasonable points of view".

The difficulty here is, of course, that what he may call "reasonable" may seem most unreasonable to me; and in any case, he cannot very well expect a confirmed atheist and materialist to be very kind to any theistic exposition, however sincere. What we expect above all is clarity, an original outlook, and at least some evidence. And what do I find right at first? A host of pious *clichés* which convey no meaning whatever to me. I do not mean that because this is so that Major Webb must be wrong. What I do mean is that he uses words and phrases which are completely unintelligible even to himself — "I cannot offer you any proof of these truths," he sadly admits. Nor can he offer any proof of the existence of God. Why? Because the proof lies "in another dimension beyond our reach". And so on. We just have to accept everything he says whether incoherent or not.

But what can I say about the *clichés*? This pamphlet is crowded with them — God is Spirit; God is Love; God revealing himself; Spirit is universal; the Christ of Love; Christ is here, in our midst; Spirit is eternal; God's plan; Oneness with God; great civilisations rose and fell; humanity must be redeemed; and dozens more. They have all done duty in millions of sermons and Christian books and pamphlets, and I always hope that they will never again be resurrected. Vain hope!

Then he has — for me — so many completely unintelligible statements which he delivers just as if they were as easy to understand as if he said "baby is sucking an orange". Many of his most incoherent utterances he begs of you to accept without further question. "I am assuming," he piously pleads, "that you believe in God and God is Spirit, therefore Spirit itself is more than an attribute." Of course, if Major Webb "assumes" that I believe in God, etc., what does it matter what else he says, or asks us to believe? If you believe in one hopeless absurdity, the biggest of them all, "God", you can believe in Spirit or even in Spooks; and as for Miracles, and the Christ — of Love or not — you can "grasp" them as easily as kiss my hand. Once you thoroughly believe in God, there is an end to all reasoning. It just disappears.

Here are a few of Major Webb's "reasonable" utterances: Man is a spirit in reality; humanity is a Unity in reality; if we ask him, our Father will tell us; we all know that our Beloved Master, the Christ of Love, has promised that He will be present where people gather in his name; we may take it that spirits have existed since the universe was created; naturally I cannot give you chapter and verse for this; we know that we have free will; God does not want a race of puppets; the theory (of evolution) has lost its power; ethereal man left no remains when he passed from this life; death is an illusion to God; we may expect to see the body of man rise in vibration and refinement; a Heavenly Father who is Omnipotent, all-Wise, all-Love; the soul is an emanation of Spirit; imagine how God poured forth his creative energy; God cannot fail; and many more equally inane and futile words put together without a gleam of reasoning of any kind.

I hope Major Webb will not be too disappointed at this criticism. I don't know what Soul, Spirit, God or even "another dimension" means. And even if I did know, what good would all this useless lumber do for me? They belong to religion, and *all* religions are untrue. Belief in them has helped no doubt the ignorant, the stupid, the mystical, and naturally their priests. But not until man gave up some belief at least in the supernatural, in all Gods, and in Spirits, Angels, Devils, and Miracles, did civilisation make progress.

Finally, there is not a line in the pamphlet which answers the question — "What is Man?" It is just an incredible conglomeration of words and words.

DEEPLY FELT

The contemporary American revival of religion is really a self-congratulation of an ignorant, anti-intellectual middle-class: The civil religion of contemporary America, he thinks (Herberg, in his Protestant, Catholic, Jew: an essay in American Religious Sociology, New York, 1956) leads Americans to self-congratulation rather than to self-examination. No voices have been more sharply critical of the revival than those of America's theologians. — The Americans would like to possess some invisible securities, of a sort unlikely to lose value in a deflation of stock-market prices. — The American middle class is, after all, descended from the spiritually as well as the materially disinherited of Europe. It lacks that respect for learning and cultivation which historical accident has engrained even among philistines in Europe. — Public opinion polls show that atheism is almost as repugnant to Americans as Communism or Socialism. President Eisenhower expressed the current national attitude: "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith — and I don't care what it is." — The public dwells on its primitive formulæ. (Religion in America, by N. Birnbaum, The Listener, May 24th, 1956.)

Calvinism in South Africa

By LEONARD MARTIN (S. AFRICA)

OFTEN the pastor is the most influential man of his community, taking precedence even over the magistrate, the local judicial officer and tax collector combined. Taking them as a class, and not allowing for the inevitable exceptions, these pastors are burly, loud-voiced, good-humoured fellows. Many may have been rugby stars in their student days, and remain ardent football fans still. In style they are abrupt and self-important, more of a mundane materialistic bent — not philosophically so, of course, but in the other sense — rather than of a self-accusing, mystic, solitary, pondering type, such as Newman was. In brief, extroverts rather than introverts: South African theological Babbitts!

Bachelors are few and eagerly snapped up. The pastor has a fine house provided for him, of the latest construction, and another gift, no doubt, from a thankful congregation; and several children, who are sent to the best schools and universities.

In my previous article in THE FREETHINKER I gave a description of the origin and influence of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, not only religiously, but on the secular National Government; a Church self-admittedly Calvinistic, and therefore separatist; its rigid orthodoxy and 17th-century traditions, and the enviable place in rural communities held by its pastors, a place probably unique in Protestant lands.

Why the local rural Dutch pastor has such a power, envied, no doubt, by his poorer English opposite numbers, who, in any case, are few, is due largely to historical developments. There was a time, not so very long ago either, when the "predikant", as he is called, was probably the only well-educated man in the community, apart, perhaps, from the local doctor, attorney or headmaster — and a century ago even these three might not yet have settled there. So the local predikant had it all his own way. Often he still has, even today.

As it is, each aspirant to the ministry must possess a university degree, and then spend several years at the Church's own theological training school, now just under 100 years old, at a beautiful old-world town, with oak-lined streets, magnificent mountain scenery and a lovely climate, called Stellenbosch, which is about 30 miles from Cape Town, and is the second oldest town in South Africa, being nearly 280 years old, a great age in the Union, seeing that Johannesburg is only 70 this year.

So one will not find any converted carpenter sawing away in any D.R. pulpit. These graduate pastors are, in addition, consulted on almost every matter, whether secular or not. I know of one instance where the pastor acted as the honorary village dentist! If he had charged any fees he would have found himself in the police court, very soon, of course. Many are on local school and hospital boards.

In the old days pastors wore black frock coats, but not the clerical dog collar. They wore wing collars instead, with a small white bow tie — once the unmistakable trade mark of the "predikant". Today more and more are wearing the ordinary civilian clothes, and you cannot tell such a rev. gentleman on a weekday from John Citizen, or "Jan Burger", as he would be called in Dutch South Africa. Here, at any rate, they are anything but orthodox!

Now, this rather long introduction leads up to the assertion: that the Dutch Reformed Church is one of the great powers, if not *the* power, behind the throne, and that in everything that comes before Parliament its influence must

be duly taken into account. If, through its leaders, it says "No", no measure will ever become law. It reminds you of what takes place just across the Irish Channel; except that the D.R. hierarchy is far preferable to the Roman in that it does not go to such extremes; even if it is on the same path.

It is an historical fact that it itself began this *apartheid* business, a century or more ago. The unique circumstances of South Africa, then still a slave-owning country, had a good deal to do with it. At the outset, about 300 years ago, slaves worshipped in the same church, or with the whites. With the great growth of the coloured folk and the emancipation of the slaves in 1834, a feeling against continuing this practice grew to such an extent that the Cape Synod decided in favour of separating the whites from the non-whites in church, if not elsewhere. But in those days its secular power, if not negligible, was far less than it is in these days. This is due to the steady growth of the Afrikaner population, of course.

The non-white churches were, and still are, called "mission" churches. The coloured folk have their own building, often very neat and clean, which may once have been the white man's church before it became too small and unfashionable. Sometimes the coloured congregations do have a structure of their very own from the first, severely plain and modest, with the mission school (for the non-white children only) attached.

The standards do not go as high as those of the more fortunate white children, for, in the accepted opinion of most whites, the coloured must be taught "to keep their place" — just as the British workman a century or so ago had to do. An excellent way, in fact, to appreciate the problems of South Africa today is to remember what social conditions were like in Britain before the Reform Act; yet without the further almost insoluble complexities of different colours and civilisations being added. A European chorus girl of lowly origin may marry, and often has married, a duke.

You can't tell much difference in the descendants a generation or two after. But if a duke cohabits with a girl of colour, there is the indisputable evidence in the different shades of colour of the progeny. This is the whole colour problem in a nutshell, which is not appreciated as it should be in countries where the whole population is of one skin colour only. There are other aspects, of course, but colour is the most obvious, and as legislation has to be crude, it is this aspect which leads to the most recriminations, and is the one most dealt with.

Members of the D.R. Church have thus grown up with *apartheid*, and take it for granted. Accordingly, in general, they vote for the National Party, which is frankly out and out for State *apartheid*, both in practice and in theory, and not only in theory and part practice, as are most of the other political parties and Churches, however much they may publicly deny it. There is a tremendous amount of hypocrisy on the subject, let me assure you.

Recently the senior reverend professor at the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, a soft-spoken, elderly, scholarly gentleman, named Dr. D. B. Keet, made *news* when he published a carefully-prepared brochure which was somewhat critical of the present out-and-out political *apartheid* campaign, which, in its extremest aspects he dubbed a "pipe dream".

(concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Quite a number of persons are beginning to question the value of Sunday schools, so long one of the sheet anchors of Christianity; and it should prove instructive to note the opinion of one who has seen "countless children pass through a Sunday school." The results, says the Rev. F. Horsey, Vicar of All Saints', Forest Gate, "are appalling." He asks in his parish magazine, "Do you know of a single person who was converted to church membership simply and solely by Sunday school? I doubt it."

★

Most children are sent off on a Sunday afternoon because they are a nuisance at home, and for no other reason. Whether they are taught to believe in a good God or a bad Devil or both is, for most parents, just a matter of indifference. It requires courage to condemn Sunday schools as vigorously as does Mr. Horsey, and that is a quality not many parsons have. A quiet life is so much easier.

★

In the "Sunday Graphic" we are almost hysterically warned (August 19th, 1956) that "This Game is Deadly"—the game being some tomfoolery with a glass, a kind of variation of the old planchette so beloved of Spiritualists at one time. A Mr. J. Ralph warns us how dreadfully dangerous it is "dabbling" with the "supernatural" this way, and solemnly tells us that "a group of doctors" insist that it should be done only by "qualified researchers." If any group of doctors uttered this nonsense, they should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. There is no more harm in moving a glass about on a table than in playing shove ha'penny.

★

People are always being warned about something or other, and urged to leave it to "specialists." You must not touch a planchette unless you are a qualified "researcher." You mustn't query the awful balderdash regularly spouted by "qualified" mediums unless you are a devout seeker for Truth. And as for grabbing a "materialised spirit," why, it might well kill the poor, dear medium. The *Sunday Graphic's* deadly warning only proves that there are still people in the "animistic" stage of human development. They probably will never grow up.

★

The Miracles of Jesus and of Christianity pale into derisory insignificance before the world-shattering opinion of Prof. A. P. Elkin, one time professor of anthropology at Sidney University, who says that the average Australian aborigine can beat "Our Lord" into a frazzle in these things. They can pass through solid objects quite easily, fly into the air at 40 feet, walk through fire, produce materialisations at will—in fact do anything any medium can do including mental and spiritual healing.

★

All Australian aborigines are in addition "deeply religious" which, of course, accounts for their marvellous supernatural powers. Unlike the poor benighted whites, they can "pay regular visits to the other world" whereas an average medium has to get the spirits to come to us. If he or she once gets to "the other world", there's no coming back except as spirits. However, there is one thing an Australian aborigine cannot do. It is to compete with our Monroes or our Pecks in *glamour*. Still, one never knows. Possibly Prof. Elkin violently disagrees and has even an aborigine "pin-up" girl.

★

Referring again to the late Harry Price's priceless relic of spooks, Borley Rectory, a spiritualist journalist, Mr. P. Paul, who has championed both to the utmost, refused to

accept the devastating exposure recently published by the Society for Psychical Research. He has been "excavating" the district—no doubt expecting to come across tangible evidence of the spiritualist manifestations. Alas, he has discovered nothing—though he feels that "even the negative findings have been valuable." How shy spooks are to produce, when required, "positive" findings!

★

The Rev. S. Phipps has written a song recently sung by Cambridge University students in a revue with the alluring title of "Original Sin". Its first lines are, "Can anyone think of an original sin? Can anyone tell me where to begin?" Well, one way is to begin with the Virgin Mary, who, like everybody else, certainly had lots of it until the Pope, about 100 years ago, discovered she was "immaculately conceived." The Virgin herself capped that pontifical pronouncement by telling the famous Lourdes heroine, Bernadette, that she really was, "the Immaculate Conception". But as Mr. Phipps is bound to disagree with both the Pope and Mary, he will find plenty of "Original Sin" in her case. Or perhaps he won't.

FROM GERMANY

THE 160TH ANNIVERSARY of the foundation of the Freireligiösen Gemeinde Berlin (Free Religious Community, Berlin) and the 10th year of its re-establishment in West Berlin has just drawn towards its end. We could not, at first, reorganise in the same way as before and as we were small in proportion to previous numbers, this necessitated increased activity by our members to further our aims.

They influenced philosophy, culture and politics and fought bravely all attempts by the clergy to impose, or uphold, their dogmatic religion. Devoutness in the traditional religious sense helped to strengthen the political influence of the Christian parties, which, combined with the clergy, strengthened our endeavours to safeguard pure Freethought and spread knowledge to substantiate our philosophy of life, at the same time declining to bind ourselves to party politics.

KURT GANSWINDT.

Calvinism in South Africa — concluded from page 295

That this almost solitary but notable exception, or one of the very few, did make *news* only bears out my contention, I think, that the great majority of the Dutch-speaking people of South Africa, as well as a fair part of the English-speaking section, backs up the present National Ministry, who are *all* of Afrikaner, if not of English descent, in their *apartheid* campaign of social and legal separateness. They all speak English fluently, by the way.

South Africa today, 50 years or so after Britain technically won the second Boer War, "belongs", like the Glasgow of the variety theatre comedian, "to us", if by "us" is understood the present-day successors of the old Boer element of Paul Krüger and his times.

Religiously and socially, if not morally as well, that means: back to the 17th century; not that of a Shakespeare, but that of a Calvin. As I have shown, the D.R. Church, the real power hidden behind the secular throne, is Calvinist; in fact, it openly calls itself so; so there can be no dispute or question about it.

Who would have predicted it only 40 years ago? And that in a so-called "new and young country"? Always, in very truth, something new out of Africa, especially its southernmost extremity, or, more accurately, something old relished into a "new" stew. "Stew," by the by, seems pretty apt otherwise.

—NEXT WEEK—

1956 AND ALL THIS
By G. H. TAYLOR

THE FREETHINKER

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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.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, NEWTON and SHEPPARD.
Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston-on-Thames).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.45 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL.
Platt Fields, 3 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and others.
Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.
Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bristol Downs).—Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: DAVE SHIPPER.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and others.
West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Victoria Park).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: J. L. SHEPHERD and others.

INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1.) Sunday September 16th, 11 a.m. HECTOR HAWTON, "The Catholic Revival".

Notes and News

MANY readers will, we are sure, note the advertisement on the back page of this issue with interest. Mr. Avro Manhattan has made many friends with his devastating exposition of the machinations of the Vatican, and his *Catholic Church against the Twentieth Century* had a world-wide circulation of over 100,000 copies. In his new work will be found an unanswerable indictment of the R.C. Church in its relations with American diplomacy. In this fully documented work the author brings to light many startling facts about the Vatican as a great secret power.

★

THE Episcopate of Emilia, Northern Italy, warned Catholics that they would be sinning if they voted for Communists in the recent local elections. The archbishops and bishops explained their motives in giving this warning: they said they were acting "solely to defend the cause of God and the Church, and so prevent the de-christianising of our land." They would not have acted, they said, if material interests only were affected. "But today there are at stake, above all, spiritual interests—the liberty and prosperity of religious life in our towns and villages." No one, of course, would suspect them of trying to influence the result of the elections by using the "next world" as a bargaining lever!

HAITI in the sunny Caribbean is a Catholic Republic and the first Haitian Bishop was consecrated in the *Cathédral Catholique* in 1953. The Haiti Souvenir Guide informs us with pride that "almost every town and village has its own cockpit." and detailed cockfight programmes are given. What can be more satisfying to the true Catholic sportsman than to watch two spurred and gory cocks disembowelling each other?

★

THE United States Methodist Church, by a ruling given at its Congress in Minneapolis, has approved birth control if "practised in Christian conscience." That condition obtaining, birth control "may fulfil the will of God." Of course, it must only be practised by conscientious Christians! We shall next hear that God himself was the originator of family limitation when he sired himself to a virgin and begat both the three of Himself.

★

SHIROB GALTSO, chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association, speaking in the Chinese National People's Congress (one of the Houses of Parliament) said in a Peking session: "More attention should be paid to the customs of national minorities in the agricultural co-operatives. Tibetan Lamas do not traditionally engage in farm work, so an arrangement should be made whereby the co-operatives set aside money to permit the Lamas to continue their religious activities without having to work." Obviously in the best Western tradition! A case of Buddha, can you spare a dime?

★

IN Ambert (Central France) the inhabitants seem prepared to declare Holy War on the U.S.A. The reason? Previously Ambert had a virtual monopoly on the world production of rosaries, but now, the arch-villain Uncle Sam has instituted a heavy duty on them and started a rosary-making industry of his own. Worse still, the American rosaries have crosses containing Holy Water guaranteed to be genuinely imported from Lourdes.

★

THE EDUCATION of the Polish people away from Catholicism, assuming such to be the intention, would not appear to be making much headway if the following indications are relevant. In *Polish Facts and Figures*, issued by the Press Office of the Polish Embassy, London, under "St. Mary's Year Celebrations," we read: "Celebrations were held last Sunday at the Jasmagora Monastery in Czestochowa, Stalinogrod, to mark the conclusion of St. Mary's Year. The celebrations were attended by representatives of the Episcopate as well as many monks, lay clergymen and pilgrims from all parts of the country."

★

CRIME is on the increase in the Gold Coast, says *Ashanti Times*, and it quotes the Report on the Treatment of Offenders for the year 1954-55, when the number of prisoners was 3,661 as compared to 3,391 the previous year. Such figures may not be conclusive—more criminals may escape one year than another or judgements may be harsher etc. But there was also "one startling fact" in the Report. "As in the previous year, Christians are trying to outdo their pagan brethren in committing crimes. 4,523 of them went to prison as against 3,162 pagans, with the Mohammedans a close third." Without the full Report before us and the relative population percentages it is hard to assess the full significance of the statistics. "Pagans"—we assume—means followers of the old tribal religious beliefs, and there must still be many thousands of these. Muslims, too, are abundant in the Gold Coast. One fact emerges clearly, though; in the Gold Coast, as elsewhere, Christianity is not the moral force it is claimed to be.

World Union of Freethinkers

REPORT FROM GENEVA

ON THE RECENT occasion of the annual conference of the French Federation of Freethinkers at Bourg in south-east France, a double, or rather triple, event was celebrated. Following the Bourg congress a mass visit of the French freethinkers was arranged to Geneva, the famous Swiss city and international centre, where Voltaire, the greatest of the French — perhaps of all modern — freethinkers had resided for many years in the 18th century after his expulsion from France by clerical bigotry. The "Voltaire Reunion" organised by the French Federation and attended by advanced thinkers from other countries, was held at Geneva from August 18-23. This auspicious occasion was further utilised to hold a plenary session of the general committee of the World Union of Freethinkers, held under the chairmanship of the President of the World Union, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner. The present writer attended this meeting, the agenda of which included arrangements for the 1957 congress of the World Union at Paris.

The two most important fixtures in the routine of the Voltaire Reunion were the visit to Ferney, near Geneva, where Voltaire lived, and a visit to his Geneva house now preserved as a Voltaire Institute and containing many authentic relics of the great man, notably a life size figure of him sitting in his armchair holding the mighty pen which was ever raised on behalf of truth and toleration and which caused kings to tremble on their thrones and also checked the angry anathemas of outraged orthodoxy. One sees, also, portraits of Voltaire, sometimes alone and sometimes in company with men hardly less illustrious in the annals of literature and freethought, such as Diderot, Condorcet, Holbach. The *Institut Voltaire* is a living reminder of one of the most brilliant epochs in the mental emancipation of man, which certainly no freethinker should fail to visit. Unfortunately the impetuosity of our Gallic brethren caused these two highlights of the Voltaire Reunion to be held simultaneously. Instead of making a collective pilgrimage to Ferney on the Monday the French freethinkers hurried from their Bourg meeting on the Saturday straight to Ferney, where they listened to no doubt eloquent speeches from the W.U.F. president, Mr. Bonner and from those eminent pillars of French freethought Andre Lorulot (vice-president of the World Union) and Jean Cotereau, editor of *La Raison*, the opposite number of our *Freethinker*. Meanwhile the present writer, in sublime ignorance of what was transpiring a few miles away at Ferney, was assisting in carrying out the other part of the programme! In company with our enthusiastic British member, Mr. Bedane of the Channel Islands, Mr. Grenling of Luxemburg, a vice-president of the World Union, and others, I inspected with deep interest the invaluable and irreplaceable relics of one of the greatest fighters for human freedom that the world has known. Perhaps the most moving exhibit is an impressive picture of the Calas family receiving the royal pardon — through the unremitting efforts of Voltaire after the judicial murder of the Protestant Jean Calas by clerical bigotry. It was the mighty voice of Voltaire resounding through Europe which drew public attention to, and secured tardy redress for, this terrible act of medieval intolerance, to which the French Revolution was soon destined to put a final stop.

To vindicate the unrivalled devotion to duty of our eminent world president, Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, I ought to add that he hurried from Ferney to join us at the Institute. The rest of the week was devoted to the austere and strenuous sittings of the general committee held at a leading

Geneva café by the kindness of its proprietor, M. Ferrero, an ardent Genevan freethinker.

Geneva itself has played so notable a part in the mental and civic progress of Europe that some appreciation of its many-sided charms may not be without interest. Nestling by the shores of Lake Lemman, with Mont Blanc towering out of the clouds on the rare occasions when it is visible, Geneva, since the Reformation, has played a part in the political and religious history of modern Europe out of all proportion to its size. Rescued by the Reformation from obscurity, two of its three most famous citizens were born in France, while the other, both by the actual nature of his influence and by prolonged residence, belongs to the history of France, rather than of his native Switzerland. Apart from Voltaire, who was an exile, the names of Calvin and Rousseau are forever associated with Geneva. It was here that Calvin founded his iron theocracy, his "democratic dictatorship", the impact of which was to extend far beyond Geneva and even beyond the Atlantic. Here Calvin sat in judgment on the Unitarian heretic Servetus, and here was permitted that frightful crime when Servetus perished in prolonged agony in the flames, by slow roasting, at the instigation, if not at the direct command, of Calvin. The latter was a Frenchman by birth but it was rather incongruous that it was by the smiling shores of Lake Lemman that the grim Reformer penned perhaps the most terrible sentence ever written:

"Some He hath predestined to Eternal Salvation, and others to Eternal Damnation."

This was what he himself had to describe as "the horrible Divine Decree of Predestination." Despite his theological enormities Calvin was a great man; his impact on the Reformation was tremendous and in *this world* at least highly progressive: with Calvin the Middle Ages ended and political democracy — not yet religious toleration — began.

Even more revolutionary was the impact of Geneva's one great native citizen, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who emigrated to France while his lifelong rival Voltaire (1694-78) emigrated to Geneva! Rousseau was the 18th century equivalent of Karl Marx; the father of the French Revolution and perhaps the stepfather of democracy. Perhaps, like his predecessor Calvin, Rousseau was an iron logician who had no mercy for heretics. Though himself a Deist, he tolerated no more deviations from orthodoxy, of an extreme character at least. In the ideal commonwealth of his *Social Contract* atheists were to be put to death, a theory which Rousseau's own fanatical disciple Robespierre, also a fanatical Deist, was to translate into murderous fact during the "Reign of Terror", when atheism, equally with Royalism, was a sure passport to the scaffold. However, like Calvin, Rousseau was a great man in his way, and day. Geneva is inseparably associated with the name and fame of these two diverse reformers.

The Voltaire Reunion also included visits to the adjacent Lausanne and Chillon, both famous in English literature and of peculiar interest to English freethinkers. The castle of Chillon, where the priest-ridden Duke of Savoy incarcerated the heroic Genevan patriot Bonnivard, forms the theme of one of Lord Byron's finest poems. And it was on the heights of Lausanne, visited with pious devotion particularly by the present writer, that the great English historian Edward Gibbon wrote the concluding chapters of his immortal masterpiece, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the greatest, the most majestic, besides

being the most monumental, historical work in English, or probably any other language. No-one who has read the autobiography of our famous freethinking historian, who ascribed the decline and fall of the Roman Empire fundamentally to "the triumph of barbarism and religion", is ever likely to forget the sombre eloquence with which the great historian described how he wrote the last lines of his *magnum opus* on the heights of Lausanne with the moon shining over the placid waters of Lake Lemman. This corner of Switzerland is reminiscent of great men, and replete with great memories.

Our Voltaire Reunion is particularly relevant in an age which in so many respects resembles the age of political and religious tyranny against which the great satirist directed his mighty pen; "new foes arise threatening to bind our souls with secular chains." We could do with a Voltaire today but meanwhile have celebrated his memory at Geneva where so much of his adult life was spent. Next year at Paris (where, triumphant over bigotry, he returned to receive a royal welcome before his death) we can plan new and effective measures to carry forward the historic legacy that he has bequeathed to us.

F. A. RIDLEY.

Dr. Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956)

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE DEATH OF THE author of the famous Kinsey Reports on sexual behaviour is a loss to a branch of psychological science in which much more needs to be, and will be, done. Psychology itself as an objective study is as yet in its infancy, having had to throw off such religious preconceptions as "soul" and "spirit". And the particular line which interested Kinsey is still loaded with prejudice where only reason, based on research, should rightly operate. It was to Kinsey's credit that he brought a painstaking analytical mind to bear on a delicate subject. As distinct from the blind denunciation, the futile sermonising, of the orthodox Churchman, Kinsey preferred the role of fact collector. The result of this work makes for humanist understanding in place of Christian condemnation. He established that what are technically criminal practices are sufficiently widespread to indicate that only a tiny fraction are publicly detected.

Researches have, of course, been done in this field by such notable investigators as Havelock Ellis, Norman Haire, and A. M. Ludovici (all freethinkers, and at least two of the three could be called *militant* freethinkers and appeared on secularist platforms) but nothing so comprehensive and statistically complete as Kinsey's reports has yet been accomplished. The Rockefeller Foundation and the National Research Council gave substantial backing to Kinsey's work and he leaves behind the Institute for Sex Research.

Others will continue the work in future years, helped, no doubt, by Kinsey's methods and perhaps also by a recognition of their deficiencies. His researches were confined to America, and more particularly to American cities (he was Professor of Zoology in the University of Indiana). But Dr. Kinsey has set a fine example of unemotional, objective investigation in a largely unknown and slippery land.

The social dangers of homosexuality, for instance, have been vastly exaggerated. There is, of course, a limit — no doubt ascertainable mathematically — to the number of homosexuals society can carry and still survive. A more obvious danger is where juveniles are concerned. But there still exists a large section of the public, particularly in Britain and America, who are ready to condemn without understanding, and to brand the homosexual as "wicked"

or a "menace". It is precisely such an attitude which Kinsey's work is helping to kill: for as Chapman Cohen often said, when all Christian dogmas and doctrines have been discarded there still remains their black legacy, the "Christian type of mind."

It is not only the homosexual who needs treatment, but also the mentality which brands him "evil" without trying to understand him. That is equally in need of treatment. Let us, as Freethinkers, extend to the former the benefits of science, and to the latter the benefits of Freethought. And the first stage in the treatment of the homosexual, or of the sexually aberrated in any other way, is the removal of the feeling of guilt and of the misery with which it is accompanied. To that worthy end the work of Alfred Kinsey has been of the highest value.

A Report on China

A *Sydney Morning Herald* representative, Mr. Selswyn Speight, has spent two months in China recently, and his report is of some interest to the freethought cause.

At Peking he interviewed the head of the Bureau of Religious Instruction, Mr. Ho, who explained that there were about 700,000 Protestants in China split into "about seventy parties"—all clearly opposed to each other! Roman Catholics numbered about 300,000. At one time, he said, Catholics had used their Church as a means of aggression, and were still attempting "to destroy the Socialist State."

"In breaking the power of the Pope," declared Mr. Ho, "China was doing only what the English had done in the reign of Henry VIII." Quoting his official informant as saying that "foreign missionaries had come to China as spies . . . among the Catholics this was very general", Mr. Speight proceeds:

"Mr. Ho said that religion was merely a social phenomenon . . . It could not be extinguished by force." "Religion arose from national calamities, from things like floods and droughts. That was what made people believe in the supernatural. But sick people had to be taught that they should take medicine instead of praying to the Buddha"

Religion, concluded Mr. Ho, may continue for a long time, but eventually, with the advancement of science, it would disappear.

Here, then, we have some first hand information that the Chinese are realising the futility of prayer.

J.Y.A.

A FIT-THEM-IN QUIZ

- Fit the right authors to the right books: *The Prince*; *The Social Contract*; *Duties of Man*; *Candide*; *Leviathan*; *Essay on Man*. Hobbes Rousseau, Pope, Mazzini, Machiavelli, Voltaire.
- Fit the right dates to the right events: Authorised Version of the Bible; Jan Huss burned for heresy; Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve; Bruno burned for heresy; Swedenborg claims "revelation."
1733; 1572; 1600; 1415; 1611.
- Fit the right lines to the right poets:
 - Religion scowling downward from the skies
With hideous head and vigilant eyes of hate.
 - The church bells toll a melancholy sound.
 - The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip
To haud the wretch to order.
 - Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten,
Thy death is upon thee, O Lord!
Lucretius; Swinburne; Keats; Burns.

(Answers on page 300)

The Rising Generation

XI—THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

JUST AS NOBODY knows who collected the books of the Old Testament and made them "holy" and inspired by God, so nobody knows who first collected the books of the New Testament out of the large mass which had been written when somebody decided that Jesus Christ was the head of the Christian Church—or ought to be if he wasn't.

The four Gospels, as we have them, were unknown before, at the earliest, 150 A.D., and we would not be wrong if we made it 180 A.D. But the actual dates of the writing of any of the books in the New Testament are unknown—though the Church gives a number which are farcical and could never be substantiated. All that can be said is that at the end of the *second* century some books were "received" by the Church while others like the "Shepherd of Hermas" and the "Epistle of Barnabas" were also received but eventually rejected, on what grounds nobody knows. And when we say the "Church" did this or that, nobody really knows who composed the Church or what were their qualifications if they had any at all. It is claimed of course that the Canon of the New Testament was fixed by Scripture and tradition, but how either could do this is not shown anywhere. The first date of the Canon which may be accepted is about 494 A.D. by Pope Galasius. In other words, even Protestants have to admit that it was the Roman Church which fixed the Canon, and of such disputed books as Revelation and the Epistle to the Hebrews. They accept these though at the same time they reject the Roman Church's acceptance of Judith, Tobit, and other Apocryphal books of the Old Testament.

The Rev. S. Davidson in his authoritative *Canon of the Bible* found it extremely difficult to decide any question on the subject or settle any of the problems it bristles with. "The infancy of the canon", he sadly admits, "was cradled in an uncritical age, and rocked with traditional ease." There, in a sentence or two, we have the truth; and he adds, "Of the three Fathers who contributed most to its early growth, Irenaeus was credulous and blundering; Tertullian passionate and one-sided; and Clement of Alexandria was mainly occupied with ecclesiastical ethics." But they had by no means the last say. And all we need to remember is that the New Testament, as we have it to-day, comes to us with no more authority than that of a few credulous, superstitious, and mostly ignorant monks, priests, or hermits. That they have been able to bamboozle Western civilisation for at least 1500 years is one of the most astonishing facts in religious belief.

H.C.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. *The Prince* by Machiavelli, *The Social Contract* by Rousseau, *Duties of Man* by Mazzini, *Candide* by Voltaire, *Leviathan* by Hobbes, *Essay on Man* by Pope.
2. A.V., 1611; Huss, 1415; St. Bartholomew's, 1572; Bruno, 1600; Swedenborg, 1733.
3. (a) Lucretius, (b) Keats, (c) Burns, (d) Swinburne.

G.H.T.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE BIBLE BUSINESS

You may be interested to learn that Catholic Bibles—price £3 5s. each—are being sold on hire-purchase terms in the South Wales area, especially in Cardiff's Irish quarter.

The firm, whose headquarters are at Bristol, employ salesmen who obtain names and addresses from the local priest, and these salesmen then proceed to make individual calls upon the homes of the faithful, with, I understand, great success. After all, who would risk eternal torment for the sake of a mere £3 5s.!

However, several Catholics with whom I am acquainted, perhaps thinking that the price, even for "God's Holy Word," is exorbitant, have become defaulters and have received the usual "last notice before summons." It seems that the county court is going to be busy for a considerable time.

J. W. T. ANDERSON.

NIGERIAN PRACTICES

It is consoling to know that for every Mr. Anderson there is also a Mr. Lidaks, who also knows Nigeria. It is flattering to some 500 people to think of the African religions as crude juju superstitions while the crudest bundle of superstitions in England and Europe are whitewashed and cloaked under Christian Civilizing Missions and then labelled "for export" into Africa.

A. BEE

B.B.C. and ATHEISM

Though regretting the attitude of the BBC in excluding the Secretary's talk, perhaps the "two minutes' silence" will eventually be of even greater effectiveness than the talk would have been.

C. E. RATCLIFFE

THE EXPANDING UNIVERSE

In "The Expanding Universe", your issue August 31, G. H. Taylor discusses two theories of the origin of the universe. One is that it started from neutrons under the influence of compressed radiant energy; the other that in the beginning there was only a large number of atoms of hydrogen and that such atoms of hydrogen are still being continuously formed.

With both these theories there may be some mathematical justification, but neither deals with the fundamental question of how—in the first case—the neutrons, the compressed radiant energy, or the hydrogen atoms originated.

It is difficult, even for a materialist, to visualise matter and energy coming from "nothing", and I am sure it would be appreciated if Mr. Taylor could give some guidance in this connection.

J. C. FULLER

[The co-existence of two kinds of major process, fusion and fission, would mean that the one fed the other, the total amount of convertible substance remaining constant.

As to the existence of this substance as datum, this has probably nothing whatever to do with the astronomer or the physicist as such, but with the present limitations of human thinking in this field, 20th Century psychology and philosophy have made great strides, enough to show that such limitations are not permanent. Meanwhile, the religious (or even merely deistic) ideas of "creation" are ruled out. *Ex nihilo nihil fit.*—G.H.T.]

FAITH IN DECLINE?

"Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Princess Margaret, and Prince Charles—who are with the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh at Balmoral—all have slight colds, and were unable to attend the morning service at Crathie Church yesterday. The colds are not severe."—*Manchester Guardian*, 3rd September 1956.

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