

The Freethinker

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WAS DARWIN A GENIUS, or just a moderately clever man with "no great quickness of apprehension or wit," as he described himself? The term "Darwinism" is today, and has been for a century, almost synonymous with "evolution." Why is this so? Bernard Shaw in one of his prefaces pointed out how odd it was that the intellectual bastions of the Church withstood the attacks of Voltaire's biting criticism but came tumbling down because of the pronouncements of a certain pigeon fancier or beetle collector, called Darwin, who in any case was not interested in theology.

Darwin was by no means the first in modern times to propound the theory of evolution, or descent with modification as we may call it. His peculiar genius lay in his ability to do two things which none of his scientific associates at the time, with the exception of Wallace, was able to do. In the first place he was able to put forward irrefutable evidence, evidence overwhelming in quality and voluminous in quantity, that evolution had taken place. Secondly he was able to propound a theory, simple and plausible, which explained how evolution could have taken place. These two propositions—the proof of evolution and speculation regarding its method—are found curiously intertwined in all Darwin's writings on the subject. They were not confused in Darwin's own mind and they are not confused in the minds of modern professional biologists, but they are confused in the minds of many laymen, particularly perhaps where the latter are concerned—as some still are—to refute the fact of evolution.

Nature in the Raw

I should like to say a little about the lives of these two men, Darwin and Wallace, and how they came to contribute so significantly to biological fact and theory. They were both of them naturalists, or, in modern terms, field workers who went out and met plants and animals in the "raw." Darwin spent five years travelling round the world on the explorer ship "Beagle," visiting tropical forests and oceanic islands. Wallace similarly served a biological apprenticeship, first in Brazil and then in the East Indies. Both men were impressed by the tropical jungle with its teaming life and "nature red in tooth and claw," and its proofs of "the struggle for existence." Both also found something intriguing about the facts of animal distribution on tropical islands which could only be explained satisfactorily, they thought, by some theory of evolution.

But though they had the facts before them and were convinced of the truth of evolution, they both needed some additional stimulus to set them thinking on lines which led them both to formulate quite independently the theory of evolution by natural selection. They found this stimulus, this final catalyst, in a book, the same book. It was written by the English parson, T. R. Malthus, in 1798 and entitled *An Essay on the Principle of Population*.

The thought suddenly came to Wallace when he was lying ill with fever on the island of Ternate in the East Indies in February, 1858. In his semi-delirium something led him to think of the "positive checks" described by Malthus in his Essay. He wrote: "There suddenly flashed on me the idea of the survival of the fittest, and in the two hours that elapsed before my ague fit was over I had thought out the whole of the theory, and in the two successive evenings wrote it out in full, and sent it by the next post to Mr. Darwin."

Darwin of course had anticipated him; he had actually a manuscript containing essentially the same idea, written in 1844 and never published. By general agreement the two state-

ments, plus an additional one by Darwin (in the form of a letter written to Professor Asa Gray in 1857), were read to the Linnean Society at the famous meeting on July 1st, 1858.

Natural Selection

The theory of natural selection may be stated in the following propositions:—

1. Organisms produce a far greater number of reproductive cells than ever give rise to mature individuals.
2. The numbers of individuals in species remain more or less constant.
3. Therefore there must be a high rate of mortality.
4. The individuals in a species are not all identical, but show variation in all characters.
5. Therefore some variants will succeed better and others less well in the competition for survival, and the parents of the next generation will be naturally selected from among those members of the species that show variation in the direction of more effective adaptation to the conditions of their environment.
6. Hereditary resemblance between parent and offspring is a fact.
7. Therefore subsequent generations will by gradual change maintain and improve on the degree of adaptation realised by their parents.

These propositions can be accepted, with only very slight changes, as the basis of the modern or neo-Darwinian view. Difficulties arose from the fact that Darwin was ignorant of the exact nature of variation, something that was to be revealed later or had already been largely revealed by the work of Mendel in Darwin's own lifetime.

Religious Obstacles

The greatest psychological obstacle to an acceptance of the principle of evolution has been the theological view of the nature of the cosmos. This view finds purpose in every aspect of nature. During the first half of the 19th century few Western Europeans would have doubted that man was created by divine act in 4004 B.C., that the animals and plants were created for his sustenance, and the sun, moon and stars for the ordering of his life or for

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

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—By DR. EDWARD ROUX—

his entertainment. Less naive but just as unscientific was the view that intelligence in some form was at the back of every biological phenomenon, that there was a vital principle at work which was extrinsic and not intrinsic in all living things.

When the theologian finds intelligence he tries to explain it by assuming a higher intelligence which made it possible. When he finds something wonderful he assumes it must have been created by something more wonderful. What created the more wonderful he does not attempt to explain.

Ethics—A Secularist's Viewpoint

By G. I. BENNETT

PEOPLE like Mr. J. W. T. Anderson never fail to make me wonder. Be they ever so knowledgeable and intelligent, they have, it seems to me, a blind spot in their thinking that prevents them from perceiving what others have no difficulty in perceiving—that ethics have a sovereign validity dependent upon no metaphysical or ontological presumption or certitude. In support of his interesting apology for Vitalism (concerning which I forbear to make any observations here and now) Mr. Anderson says: "If this life is all and death is the end, ethics and so-called moral principles are meaningless."

Now I am one of those who believe that this life is indeed all and that death has a finality inexorable and absolute. But I am far from feeling that ethical or moral principles are meaningless. To me they appear hugely important and I can hardly conceive that a life lived in indifference to them can be a useful and worthy life. There are, I know, those who believe that this life is a spiritual battleground, a testing of the soul, a trial in moral perfectibility for another and higher life to come. Ethics for such people—and Mr. Anderson, I think, is one of them—are viewed in the light of that conception. But surely this envisaged higher life does not *alone* give ethics value and meaning? Changelessness and immortality are no necessary criterion of meaningfulness and worthwhileness. We close our eyes not to the world's evils and ugliness; but there is much of loveliness besides. And of the lovely things, how many are tragically fleeting, passing away before—or almost before—our gaze! Does their ephemerality detract from their loveliness? Is beautiful young womanhood any the less beautiful because it loses its bloom all so soon? Is a lovely deed any the less lovely because we witness it perhaps only once, and because the one who performs it is, like ourselves, mortal, destined to die and leave no trace except in the minds of those who have adored or revered him, or her? I am sufficiently idealistic to believe in moral nobility; and for me, more than intelligence, it distinguishes man from mere animal.

Socially and sociologically, there are good and obvious reasons why men should be moral. No community has ever endured for long in an atmosphere of moral nihilism. At least among its members, for the sake of social cohesion, certain basic standards of behaviour must be observed. Unhappily, we are not yet properly emerged from the old dual code, once supremely important as an evolutionary mechanism, of ethical conduct within any given racial group or community and unethical conduct towards those outside that group or community. When we do really get away from that ancient tribal tendency, and come to see with compelling acuteness that ethical behaviour is indivisible, we shall make some progress towards a world in harmony with itself. Again, perhaps I am idealistic, but I shall continue to hope that that day will dawn—though

Darwin got us out of this difficulty by showing how the more intelligent might have evolved by purely material processes from the less intelligent, and how the less intelligent might similarly have developed from beings which had no intelligence at all.

Bernard Shaw, following Samuel Butler, objected to this, declaring that Darwin had attempted to banish mind from the universe. I would counter this by asserting that, on the contrary, Darwin was the man who gave mind its rightful place in the universe.

I am afraid that I, in my short life-span, shall not live to see it.

But let us not overlook the substantive existence of moral sense, which has its beginning and source in suckling and rearing the young, and caring for hearth and home, and which embraces in ever-wider rings the world of people outside. Civilisation fails in its purpose if it does not encourage the expansion and maturation of that moral sense in every possible way. The highly civilised man, I would say, is pre-eminently moral. Fundamental decency is as much a part of man's character as is sociality; and, indeed, a person cannot be a social being without observing an unwritten code of virtue and honour in his relations with his fellows.

There have been moments, I admit, when I have wondered at the strangeness of our lot, yours and mine, in being cast capriciously upon the shores of life—mere creatures of biochemical, biological chance, doomed ensemble to an extinction as certain as that of the humble house fly that buzzes so indefatigably against my window panes today. But if we are mere creatures of chance, as cosmically insignificant as the myriad forms of life by which we are surrounded on this little planet of ours, that does not rob our living of its essential dignity and meaning for us.

While we live we have a game to play and—to put it in its lowest terms—it is only intelligent to play it well, whatever cards have been dealt to us. If we do not play it well, which means honorably observing its rules, then we have only ourselves to blame for any injury we bring upon ourselves; and we are, moreover, technically disqualified from participating in it at all, and are unworthy of life as civilised men have come increasingly to understand it. Marcus Aurelius knew that nearly eighteen centuries ago. He noted it down in various forms in one of the most precious books of moral memorabilia ever penned, and which it is the good fortune of posterity still to possess, and he, like the good Stoic he was, would have died by his own hand rather than have lived by deceit, dissimulation, and dishonour. In the last analysis, and in spite of the many anti-social, unscrupulous self-seekers about us, kindness and goodness are blessed qualities; virtue is in truth its own reward; the good life is its own salvation, and it is fundamentally wrong to look beyond it for a reason and a justification.

Now for me, the dead are eternal sleepers, and they do not speak. But they have a message. And if I chance to wander round a cemetery, and look upon the tombstones in their various stages of weather and wear, and feel pressed upon me their melancholy silence, I echo the thought that occurred to Richard Jefferies in similar circumstances, and I echo it with conviction. Let us strew life with flowers, he said. Yes, let us do so while we may.

Review

By H. CUTNER

(Concluded from page 219)

NO DOUBT that in his book, *A Challenge to Christianity*, Mr. J. B. Coates makes it sufficiently clear that he himself is quite an "unbeliever." Yet I could not help wondering whether he is not rather sorry that this is so. He mentions that "the attack by Wells on Christianity, like most of the Christian accusations against humanism, was made largely on pragmatic grounds." But Mr. Coates thinks that "a more fundamental consideration is the truth of Christianity." And he admits that "the educated classes find Christianity no longer credible."

Of course, from the seventeenth century onwards, there have always been movements to "civilise" the Christian Churches, or at least to give a "naturalistic" explanation of the story of Jesus. In fact,

Jesus was in general regarded as existing as a high-minded ethical teacher, with opinions like those of an enlightened modern humanist, though here and there a non-Christian thinker, von Hartmann, for example, gave an unfavourable portrait of him.

Schweitzer and other "liberal" Christians saw the absurdity of seeing in Jesus, even when regarded as an ethical teacher only, as someone outside his own times; but this did not prevent another "liberal" Christian, the late Dr. Barnes, "basing his faith on the divine beauty of the character of Jesus," while "Dr. Inge, a Platonist, interpreted Christian ethics in terms of the eternal values of goodness, truth, and beauty."

Does Mr. Coates follow these Christian teachers? I should say he does, for he says, "There seems little fundamental difference between humanism and a liberal Christianity so interpreted." Which can only mean what I have always contended, that a good deal in Humanism can be accepted by all "liberal" Christians, and by many of the more orthodox believers. This is so even when the orthodox contemptuously dismiss Humanism as being after all opposed to Christian beliefs.

Mr. Coates gives us some very interesting pages on the way Christianity has been, and is being, defended by its modern champions—Maritain, Kierkegaard, Barth, Overbach, Brunner, Heim, Niebuhr, and others; and I regret that the works of these writers are almost sealed books to me. From the extracts which have come to me, I can only say they are all *bored*. Supposing it is true, as Mr. Coates points out, that "Heim interprets God in scientific terminology through his doctrine of spaces," does this make the existence of God more probable? Does Mr. Coates really believe that Christians or "liberal" Christians or Humanists can read some of Heim's arguments without laughing? What about this?

The objective space of the spatio-temporal forms of perception and the non-objectivisable space of personal encounters can be considered as one single space, what Heim calls "the polar space" because it is governed by the law of polarity; relations between entities within the space being of such a character that the members of the relation are at one and the same time mutually dependent and mutually exclusive, while they are at one and the same time involved in an endless process that seems without meaning regarded in itself.

That is how Heim "interprets God in scientific terminology."

Mr. Coates tells us also that "another significant trend in contemporary Christian thought is expressed through the conception of demythologising." Modern Christians are not too keen on "miracles," it seems, and are anxious as well to separate "Christian doctrines" from "mythological elements," or to regard these as merely symbolical. One of

the "demythologisers" is Bultmann, who knows quite well that "the cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character." So are most of the other beliefs held by true Christians—as Bultmann says (through Mr. Coates), "We cannot today attach any meaning to such phrases in the Creed as 'descended into Hell' or 'Ascended into Heaven'; we cannot accept the Resurrection as an historical event," and so on. But it is wrong to throw away "the Christian message" just because there is so much mythology in Christianity; so "Bultmann believes," says Mr. Coates, "that he finds a doctrine virtually identical with what Paul taught in modern existentialist philosophy as expressed, for example, by Heidegger and Jaspers, and he raises the question whether theology was merely the precursor of existentialism." (Incidentally, Chambers gives Existentialism as meaning "A doctrine popularly understood to be that life is purposeless and man petty and miserable." Is that then the real meaning of Paul's theology?)

It may be true that the "mythological language of the Cross and the Resurrection is only a medium" for conveying a meaning "symbolically," but it still remains true that "in Bultmann's view" man is a rebel "who cannot save himself by his own efforts and needs the saving act of God." This is called "demythologising."

Another of these wonderful modern champions of Christianity is Niebuhr, who does not accept the Resurrection and rejects miracles, "but accepts all the traditional Christian doctrines while giving them a symbolical interpretation" just like the renowned Berdyaev. This Christian "thinker" believes in the conception of Godmanhood, of Christ as God-man (which some of us seem to have heard before) "so that through Christ we recognise that man is both human and divine." But I have an idea that most readers of this journal have had about enough of what these Christian bores think of their religion.

Mr. Coates himself, however, is certain that the dogmas of the Churches "have become increasingly untenable to men educated in the scientific climate of our time," and so, "the crucial question" is "what is the alternative to Christianity?" He plumps for Humanism which, by the way, he thinks is a synonym for Rationalism, and it is—in my opinion—a pity that the word was ever changed.

There are two valuable Appendices—the first on "A Humanist Manifesto," and the other on "Humanism and Sex." In both, Mr. Coates deals lengthily with their implications and he admits that "Christian sexual codes have been savagely repressive throughout the centuries." He is for a code almost the opposite of Christian, and I find it difficult to say which are the views of Humanism as such and which are his own personal views. He thinks adolescents should have free sexual relations if they want it, but for them, "pregnancies are undesirable," and science should forthwith "produce a reliable contraceptive." It should be "universally available." As for "sexual deviations," we should respect them, and if people prefer homosexuality, that is their own affair. Do all Humanists agree here? Do they agree that there should *not* be a taboo on incest, on extra-marital relations, and other "deviations"?

There is a valuable Bibliography and an Index; and for those of our readers who want a highly detailed discussion of the many problems confronting our modern society, I can recommend this, in many ways, excellent work.

This Believing World

The wonderful influence religion, and particularly Christianity, has in shaping a beautiful character is shown in the career of Martin Searby (the 18-year-old son of a distinguished air commodore), who gallantly held up a bank at the point of a revolver and got away with £2,274. Mr. Searby came under the heavenly influence of Billy Graham and, according to the *Daily Mail*, "was intensely interested in religion. He had once spoken of going into the Church. He was a Billy Graham convert and organised prayer circles." Alas, this deeply religious young Christian will never be acclaimed now by the divine Billy. He will never be included now in the enormous list of converts made in England when the American evangelist brought so many people to Christ. Instead, he was given five years hard, which no doubt will give him time to think of the Glories of Heaven he has missed.

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If Jesus is not yet acclaimed as the greatest Birth Controller that ever lived, he will no doubt be so in the near future. For here we have Dr. Ramsey, the Archbishop of York, admitting that one of the questions which is facing the Church and which "looms up as more vast and more formidable than ever before" is "the problem of population." And he added, "No one can say that the Christian Church ought not to be wrestling with" limitations of population—and he is right. But what a different attitude is this from that of the Christian Church, which did its best to persecute all the pioneers of birth control with lies, with outrageous fines, and wherever possible, with imprisonment. Why does not the Church apologise for its past misdeeds?

★

Charles Dickens wrote his "Sunday Under Three Heads" about 120 years ago—it was a scathing attack on our Sunday laws—so it is quite amusing to find the *London Evening News* the other week telling us that "the English Sunday can be a most depressing and saddening experience." And in its leader, it hits "the English Sunday" as hard as it can as if nobody had ever done it before. Haven't the clever young men—or even the "angry" ones—who write these leaders ever heard of Charles Dickens? In any case, are not the people most to blame those M.P.s who know perfectly well how antiquated are our Sunday laws, yet will move Heaven and Hell not to change them?

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Apart from the question of divorce and re-marriage, the Churches have to face the question of "mixed" marriages, and recently the *Star* got the Rt. Rev. Dr. I. Levy and Fr. J. Christie to give its readers their views. Both gentlemen were firm in their opposition to people of different faiths getting married, and though they did not say so, it was obvious that there is nothing like different religions to breed hate and disgust in marriage. Love thy neighbour—even if he is of a different religion or colour—is one thing; but to love your husband or wife of a different religion, that is quite impossible.

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The remedy is not more religion but to give it up altogether. A happy marriage can almost certainly follow if the two people (whatever was the religion in which they were brought up) were taught to give it up. It isn't needed, and the querulous disputes between priests and rabbis and parsons about it are laughable when looked at in their true perspective.

★

The "Daily Express" printed the other day a blistering cartoon on the Bishops and divorce, but at the same time

published an article by a Miss Hilda Coe—one of those Fundamentalist ladies who can out-top any other Fundamentalist. She argues that Jesus opposed once for all any divorce—he "spoke as explicitly as he spoke about anything, and his truth is perfect and eternal." And she quotes Mark. This is very clever, for there is a reason why she never quotes Matthew. That "publican" gentleman makes it quite clear that Jesus *did* allow divorce. Here are his words: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication . . ." (Matt. 5, 32).

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Nothing indeed could be clearer than that "fornication" could always be a righteous cause of divorce, and nothing indeed has caused bigger headaches in the Church when discussing Jesus (a bachelor, by the way) on marriage and divorce than this problem of "fornication." What a pity it is that Miss Coe (a spinster?) may not be allowed to enlarge a little again on Jesus and divorce from *Matthew's* point of view.

Laughing at Lambeth

By G. H. TAYLOR

AS THE LAMBETH DIGNITARIES solemnly meet to discuss the most tragi-comic subject under the sun, religion, two things have happened which expose yet again the claim that there has been a "revival" of religious faith.

One was the characteristically frank admission by Dr. Soper that there is no revival of religion because the Churches have completely failed to measure up to modern requirements, and the other was the brilliant Cummings cartoon seen by millions of people in the *Daily Express* of July 4th and referred to in our Notes on July 11th. The cartoon expresses the essence of what Dr. Soper said at Hinckley.

He told his hearers that, so far as any revival was concerned, "There is not the slightest evidence of this. You have only to go into the industrial part of a great city to see that very few people have any use for religion." Youngsters, he remarked, were more concerned with Rock 'n' Roll and the reason was: "We have not given them a big enough reason to be religious."

Not enough reason! Well, how's this? Hellfire awaits the unbelievers. Is that enough reason?

Of course, Soper's Hell is much cooler than that of the Bible. But at least it is an eternal judgment of some sort, not to be sneezed at. It is based somehow on the Rock of Ages and not on Rock 'n' Roll.

Not enough reason! The Fall of Man and the Atonement through Our Lord Jesus Christ, Him crucified as our blessed Redeemer. Not enough reason. Life beyond death, everlasting. Not enough reason. Christ the great Moral Exemplar. Not good enough.

None of it of sufficient importance to stand up to modern Rock, God Almighty unable to oust Frankie Vaughan and Johnny Ray.

Dr. Soper deplored that Christianity had failed to adapt itself to modern ideas and made the gloomy prediction that Africa could become Communist in twenty years.

The *Daily Express* has, perhaps unwittingly, been our ally on several occasions in the last few years (it was the *Express* that first put Margaret Knight on the map, so to speak) and its cartoon mercilessly shows the bishops exactly as they are, and doing exactly what they are doing. The adjoining column has an article which, while purporting to be against the cartoon, actually makes matters worse from the Christian standpoint, by admitting that the bishops are acting as the New Testament instructs them.

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Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

PASTOR KAYE.—If the moon is so useful why didn't your God make more of them? Why didn't He make one to prevent earthquakes?

Lecture Notices, Etc.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Birmingham Institute Cinema, Room 8, Ratcliffe Place, Paradise Street).—Sunday, July 20th, 7 p.m.: J. WHITBURN, "Some Ancient Superstitions."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, July 20th, 7 p.m.: R. PETERS, PH.D., "Ideals, Principles and Ideologies."

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY and CORINA.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. F. HAMILTON, E. MILLS and J. W. BARKER.

London, March Arch.—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS and WOOD.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.; every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Various speakers.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

Notes and News

VIEWS AND OPINIONS this week is fittingly devoted to an article on the Darwin-Wallace Centenary. Equally fittingly it is contributed by Dr. Edward Roux, of the Department of Botany, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, whose recent articles in this paper have been much appreciated. In his Chairman's address to the Rationalist Association of Johannesburg last year, Dr. Roux pointed out that "The vast majority of Afrikaners are still dominated by predikants and a form of fundamentalism which has hardly changed since the eighteenth century." At a conference of Transvaal High School Biology teachers, he said, the speakers had denounced evolution, and one headmaster had declared that if he discovered any member of his staff teaching evolution he would secure his immediate dismissal. In asking the Association to consider publishing a pamphlet on evolution in Afrikaans, Dr. Roux said: "Nothing of the kind has ever appeared in that language and it would be a unique event."

HIDE PARK favourite, W. J. ("Paddy") O'Neill is, unfortunately, no longer able to speak on the National Secular

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

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Society platform with his former regularity. His work takes him out of London a great deal. But he makes a point of meeting local Freethinkers as he travels about, and is always ready to take the platform. He has been in Manchester for the past two weeks, and the audiences there have been delighted by his incomparable style. In case any readers think we exaggerate, here are the Manchester Branch Secretary's own words: "He was up for well over an hour and the audience was mesmerised."

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WHEN the 1959 Annual Conference of the National Secular Society is held in Bristol, it will be followed by an open-air demonstration on the Downs. This fine speaking site is the place where Mr. Dave Shipper and Mr. Peter Jordan organise meetings regularly under the auspices of the Wales and Western Branch. Opposition is always vocal though not necessarily lucid, but it has been considerably tamed since the meetings began a few years ago. The Society's most experienced propagandist, Mr. Len Ebury, of London, has made a number of appearances there, and Mr. Martin Caines, President of Wales and Western Branch, is another welcome speaker from time to time. Mr. Caines's last visit was on Sunday, July 6th. An excellent meeting is reported.

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, is still unable to devote the time that he would like to lecturing because of the continued indisposition of his wife. How he manages to produce his varied and learned articles for this paper with such regularity is really quite remarkable. Now, Mr. Ridley tells us, a Freethinking friend is prepared to stay with Mrs. Ridley from time to time, so he has accepted a few lecturing engagements for the Autumn and Winter.

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WELCOME visitors to the offices during the last few weeks have included American readers, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Bergman and Mr. Roger Taylor. Both Mr. Bergman and Mr. Taylor are stationed with the American forces in Germany, but the latter is due to return home shortly. With him, to Illinois, he will take a large collection of Free-thought literature. When sending us some cuttings from U.S. religious papers, Mr. Bergman wrote: "It almost makes me sick to read them; you're old hands so maybe your stomach is coated against such religious rubbish." No. Mr. Bergman, our gorge still rises like yours; it is something we never shall be able to digest.

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A MOTION calling for an inquiry into the Sunday Observance Laws was recently tabled in the House of Commons by 91 M.P.s, the proposer being Mr. Denis Howell (Labour, of—curiously enough!—All Saints, Birmingham). The text of the motion is: "That this House, aware of the mounting public exasperation concerning the Sunday Observance Acts, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to establish a committee of inquiry to consider and report as to what changes, if any, are necessary in order to bring the law into line with present-day opinion." Readers should write to their local M.P.s immediately, asking them to support the motion. It may be taken for granted that the Lord's Day Observance Society will exert all the pressure that it can to defeat the motion. It is to be hoped that the M.P.s will be able to differentiate between the L.D.O.S. and "present-day opinion."

St. Patrick and Irish Catholicism

By F. A. RIDLEY

PROFESSOR J. B. BURY, successively of Dublin and Cambridge, was an eminent historian chiefly known to the academic world as the editor of the *Cambridge Modern History*. To the critically-minded public interested in religion, he is probably better known by his brilliant and widely-read book, *A History of Freedom of Thought*, a devastating exposure of religious intolerance chiefly in connection with Christianity.

Bury, however, was a scientific historian and the author of a number of specialised books, chiefly on his special subject, the Byzantine Empire of Constantinople. But he sometimes turned his attention to other historical subjects and periods, and he published (in 1905) an important study of St. Patrick, the now almost legendary patron saint of Ireland. So much hagiography has since been compiled about the saint that, by way of a not unnatural reaction, some critical scholars have even disputed his existence, considering the saint to be as mythical as the snakes which he is alleged to have banished from the land.

Did St. Patrick ever exist? Professor Bury answers this question quite definitely in the affirmative. Not only did he exist: it is still possible to trace the main outlines of his career, and not only give him a local habitation and a name, but even to calculate approximate dates for his birth and death. Later, Professor Bury admits, legend got to work on St. Patrick but this, he argues, does not affect the substantially accurate outline which can still be confirmed about Ireland's famous son—by adoption, that is, since all the narratives make it clear that, assuming his actual existence, St. Patrick was not an Irishman by birth.

Certainly the opinion of such a scholar is worthy of respect, not only on account of his specialised studies, but because Bury, if not an historian quite in the Gibbon class, was certainly a scientific one, and in no way prejudiced by considerations of ecclesiastical hagiography. Accordingly, I think it is safe to accept Bury's account; at any rate until an Irish Mythicist succeeds in refuting St. Patrick's historicity in an equally learned volume. In his biographer's opinion, St. Patrick was a Briton born probably in what is now Glamorgan, near the Severn Estuary, and that he was the son of a priest—celibacy not yet having become general in the Western Church. Born about 389 A.D., Patrick was kidnapped by a band of Irish pirates who were then ravaging the Western shores of the declining Roman Empire. After some years of slavery as a cowherd somewhere in the wilds of what is now Connaught, Patrick made his escape in little-known circumstances and reached Gaul. After some time as a monk in the famous monastery of Lerins, he returned to Britain. All these events are presumed to have occurred in the earlier years of the 5th century. Later, Patrick returned to Ireland due, needless to say, to a miraculous vision—and spent the rest of his long life there, except for a visit to Rome where he appears to have been consecrated Archbishop of Armagh. He died about 461 A.D., having succeeded in converting the greater part of Erin to the Christian religion and the Catholic Church. He appears to have been canonised soon after his death, and to have always been regarded as the Patron Saint of Ireland and the principal author of its conversion to Christianity. Bury, however, denies that he either introduced

Christianity into Ireland or that he succeeded in completely eliminating Irish Paganism and its Druidical cults during his lifetime.

Such is Patrick's authentic biography when reduced to its bare bones. Perhaps it is best to limit oneself to that since, as the Protestant historian, Froude remarked after concluding the biography of another contemporary Irish Saint, "Such is all, and rather more than all, that is known to men about the Blessed So-and-so, but not more than is known to the angels in Heaven". But while the details about St. Patrick are meagre, Professor Bury gives us copious information on Patrick's era and, in particular, on the Roman Empire and its relationship with Ireland. It is a matter of common knowledge that Ireland was not conquered by the Romans, though the Roman General, Agrippa, had suggested the invasion. However, Bury argues that trade and, in time, Christianity, reached the Western island long before Patrick's enforced visit at the end of the 4th century, and he makes the interesting suggestion that Britain was really the headquarters of the Druidic cult and that Patrick's success in eradicating this was only partial. It was not until well into the Dark Ages that Ireland became completely Christianised. All one can say of Patrick is that he seems to have been the most eminent and successful of the Christian missionaries who converted Ireland in the Fifth and subsequent centuries. However biographies of Dark Age Saints are probably not much more reliable than those of contemporary secular heroes like the fabulous King Arthur. Was Patrick really much more historical than Arthur? Here Professor Bury tends to be conservative; perhaps too much so?

Whatever the precise facts about the Saint himself, the later evolution of Irish Christianity can be traced with some proximity to certainty. At first in touch with Rome, it was cut off by intervening Barbarian kingdoms when the Roman Empire in the West was overrun by the Germans, a process completed by about 600 A.D. Irish Christianity then developed a strongly Celtic, monastic, and insular character, and Irish monks competed with missionaries from Rome in reconverting the Pagan German kingdoms of the Heptarchy. It was only at the Synod of Whitby (671) that the English finally opted for Roman, as against Irish, Christianity. And the latter remained outside the Roman orbit down to the 12th century, when the Norman kings of England—commissioned by the Pope—forcibly annexed Ireland to the English kingdom and the Roman Church. The medieval "Isle of Saints and Scholars" may have been a Catholic country, but it certainly was not a Roman Catholic one!

It may sound ironic, but Ireland owes its devotion to Rome, to England—perhaps we might dare to say, to Oliver Cromwell, who personified English rule at its most ruthless!—rather than to Patrick, real or fictitious. For, as in the very similar case of Poland *vis-a-vis* Russian rule, Catholicism in Ireland was bound up with the national revulsion against foreign rule and exploitation. Even as late as 1588, the Irish were so far from being pious Catholics that they stripped and murdered hundreds of shipwrecked Spanish crusaders with the Pope's flag flying at the Armada's masthead. And surviving

Spaniards described their Irish captors as filthy Pagan savages! But Cromwell changed all that: the "blood of the martyrs" became Irish "seed of the Church". Not only did three centuries of Protestant rule cement Ireland's devotion to Rome; the potato famine of the 19th century, caused by the heartless executors of English, Tory, and Protestant landlords, made Irish Catholicism an "article of export" and, in time, a world power. So much so that its nominal founder, St. Patrick, is now a household word. History has its own ironies, and the kidnapped Welsh cowherd Patrick is not the least of them.

Wilt Thou Have This Woman ?

By COLIN MCCALL

ACCORDING to its blurb, *Women in Bondage* is a book to make men squirm and women sit up. I am not sure if it made me squirm, but it certainly set me wondering what kind of person its author, V. M. Hughes, was. From the publishers, Torchstream Books, I ascertained that it had been written by a woman, Mrs. Hughes. But what kind of woman? Surely a very unusual one. A woman, I should have thought, more suited to convent life than marriage. Of course, Mrs. Hughes may declare that, when I say this, I am subject to the prejudices of the "man-made society" against which she fulminates so furiously; and she may be right. The reader must judge.

Mrs. Hughes is terribly bitter against nature—and men. Women, she is sure, suffer cruelty at the hands of both, and it is her aim to stop it. Laudable, no doubt, but there are, alas, times when it becomes laughable, too. I can sympathise with her—and with all women—in the way they are, to a greater or lesser extent, slaves to the reproductive processes. Menstruation, I quite appreciate, is a handicap and a nuisance. But one does get a wee bit tired of its continuous recurrence in Mrs. Hughes's pages. She almost outdoes nature!

It seems that the onset of menstruation shook Mrs. Hughes's "faith in the goodness of the universe," and that she did not regain that faith for over twenty years. I should like to have heard how she regained it, but we are not vouchsafed that information. Things could have been arranged better in this world, she says, and we must surely all agree. But why doesn't Mrs. Hughes take the matter up with the God in whom she apparently has regained her faith? For some reason known only to her, she absolves her God from blame for any of the misfortunes that beset womankind and with which this book is concerned. "Nature"—thinks Mrs. Hughes—*should* have done otherwise, but not God. And her language is often really very silly. Nature, in these pages, is continually "assuming" or "taking for granted." Why is nature not "indicted for designing the immature female to conceive?" she asks. Woman's body is "a gateway through which nature does not scruple to send *anything* . . ." The pituitary gland is "apparently the fundamental criminal in the woman's body." Nature "seems to want to punish women merely for being women." And so on.

When one's aim is to shock—"to make men squirm and women sit up"—emotive language may be necessary, but I, for one, kept hoping that Mrs. Hughes's might become a little more scientific. That there might be less use of "this is, in effect . . ." with its resultant inaccuracies; fewer outbursts of near-hysteria.

Reproduction, it is true, *has* failed to keep pace with human development; and I can join her in condemnation of Papal pronouncements upon it. But I cannot agree that the "child's view" should be taken as representing

that of "humanity." Nor can I share her extreme condemnation of women's dress and praise of men's. True, she does reluctantly admit that women's is more appropriate for the warm weather, but she regards men's as far superior otherwise and seems quite unaware of the disadvantages of trousers in heat or rain. She might also just temper her wrath sufficiently to realise that some laws favour women in this "man-made society."

We can agree on the desirability of legalising abortion. But surely it is rubbish to say that the male sex wants from woman "complete submission to sexuality and a child a year"? And is it true that the only happily married women are those with "a slave mentality"? I cannot believe it.

Mrs. Hughes interprets God's purpose for both man and woman as leaving the world better than they found it. She does not say how she reached this interpretation but, having done so, she considers that women should be furthering God's purpose rather than rearing children. I have already suggested that she might be at home in a convent; and the "imposition of female functioning on the nun," she describes as "most immoral." "Nature"—she says—"tries to make her [the nun's] holy vow a lie, assumes it was a lie," which seems to be getting things the wrong way round.

On what grounds, she asks, is it assumed that all women ought to be beautiful? "Women's duty, like men's, is, first, to serve God," she repeats. To which the obvious retort is: on what grounds does Mrs. Hughes assume this? And if, as she thinks, children occupy the place in women's lives where God ought to be, does she ever ask herself why her God allows this? Have things got out of His control?

If they have, Mrs. Hughes is bent on regaining it for Him, and she advocates some rather drastic methods. Women must be freed from the burden of reproduction. Science should unite the germ cells and the race could be reproduced "with none of the intimate horrors of the natural process." In fact, Mrs. Hughes's (to me—a male) curious goal is that woman should "make herself as lean and muscular as the male," apparently so that she may run faster, carry heavier loads—and serve God in some obscure way. Mrs. Hughes is even prepared for "the virtual disappearance of the female sex and its replacement by a neuter one" that "might be more in tune with God's purpose." At any rate she finds it impossible to believe that the existing situation is God's will. And so do I.

[*Women in Bondage* by V. M. Hughes. Torchstream Books, London, 1958. 9/6.]

From Italy

ASSOCIAZIONE Nazionace Del Libero Pensiero (National Association of Free-thinkers), popularly known as the "Giordano Bruno" Association, is an extremely busy society whose work (organised from their Rome headquarters—a stone's throw from the Vatican) radiates throughout Italy and the islands. The many branches are a great help in advising and instituting regional activity and propaganda.

With the increase of Roman Catholic power the work of the "Giordano Bruno" is gaining in impor-

—NEXT WEEK—

CONTROVERSY:
PRIEST AND EX-PRIEST
Fr. G. M. PARIS v. O. C. DREWITT

tance and they are constantly "fighting on many fronts".

The leader of the Association is Professor Andrea Finocchiaro-Aprile, an old and experienced politician, a jurist, historian and philosopher of repute, who is surrounded by free-thinkers dedicated to the propagation of secularism and the necessity of the independence of the State from the R.C. Church.

They assert the necessity for equality of freedom for all religions—and non-religious—and are engaged in a continual battle to restrict the Roman Catholic Church to its own field—"the spiritual", pointing out that the other religions do indeed refrain from attempts at interference in political matters and do not try to influence the Government.

The various branches hold regular meetings and these are always very crowded (particularly those in Rome). Free-thought is propagated and defended, religion is attacked, and the lectures are followed by animated periods of questions and discussion. The Association's journal (nominally a monthly) is *La Ragione* ("Reason"), a polemical paper with a high intellectual standard which contains articles dealing with political, social, religious and philosophical problems. Many eminent writers contribute to *La Ragione*.

The movement is fortunate in having a strong personality as President. Professor Finocchiaro-Aprile is a high-ranking mason, has been an M.P., and at the end of World War II led the Sicilian Independence Movement. He is chairman of the Italian League for Human Rights (Diritti Dell'uomo—Lega Internazionale), a former teacher of the history of law in the universities of Ferrara, Siera, and Bologna, and is a lawyer to the Supreme Court and judge for the Sicilian High Court. Even if unknown otherwise, he would be famous for his attack on De Gasperi and the Christian Democrats, made in the Constituent Assembly in 1947 (with the eloquence of the practised orator he roundly denounced De Gasperi & Co. for allowing clerical domination).

Under such capable leadership the "Giordano Bruno" should continue to flourish as fearless opponents of the Vatican and important members of the World Union of Freethinkers.

DAVE SHIPPER

CORRESPONDENCE

A REPLY TO MR. ANDERSON

Mr. J. W. T. Anderson appears to assume that all forms of vitalism and spiritualism are incompatible with determinism. He also assumes, I think, that determinism is incompatible with every concept of freedom.

If so, he is being philosophically naïve. Non-materialistic forms of determinism have been only too frequent in the history of religious philosophy itself, and it can be argued that even Catholic theology *De Deo Uno* with its omnipotent, omniscient God and "physical pre-motion," is a determinism of the worst kind—for it makes human freedom a puppet in the hands of a divine power who saves or damns the individual for his own glory. Conversely, Spinoza had a concept of freedom in the framework of a rigid determinism, and he was one of the most libertarian thinkers in the history of human thought. Spinozism, further, is quite reconcilable with modern mechanistic biology. Spinoza's *conatus* (the tendency of an organism to self-maintenance and pleasure necessarily pursued in accordance with the necessary laws of nature) had nothing to do with the "common sense" trivialities of "choosing between alternatives."

Freedom and necessity are not mutually exclusive, unless by "freedom" you mean the permission to say that, having gone out by the front door, you "could have jumped out of the window"—a statement which, even if it had any significance, could be of no conceivable advantage to anyone.

Regarding what Mr. Anderson says about design and intelligence in evolution, it is impossible to agree that "logic" compels him to admit "purpose" from the evidence of things like dande-

lion-clocks. The reasons are to be found in modern evolution theory, and not in the primitive ideas of Haeckel. Pre-adaptation—to which Mr. Anderson appears to allude—has been the last stronghold of the radical finalists, but can be completely explained in terms of the nuclear determinants, plasmagenes, crossing over and recombination, and the interplay of selection by and of the environment. I recommend C. D. Darlington's *Facts of Life* and G. S. Carter's *Animal Evolution*—particularly the section in the latter dealing with orthogenesis and evolutionary parallelism. Even Bergson's famous examples of the molluscan eye and insect behaviour are fully accounted for along these lines. More important, *no other account fits the facts*.

In psychical research, I continue to think—with Mrs. Margaret Knight and Professor H. J. Eysenck—that E.S.P. has been reasonably well established. I am equally sure that every established paranormal phenomenon has a biophysical explanation. Spiritu-ism does no good to its own cause, or to that of human freedom, by extrapolating beyond the facts and constructing a new religious mumbo-jumbo.

There appears to be some confusion over the word "matter." Mr. Anderson goes to the length of calling "an unknown substance" a "mere English noun," thus approaching the summit of nonsense. He is, however, right in saying we do not know what matter "is," and what we usually "mean" by it is the principle "disclosed in" (or possibly "inferred from") the verifiable-by-observation. "Materialism" merely rejects any other principle "along with" or "beyond" matter. It certainly does not entail a crude epiphenomenalism of mind, which is nothing but the "idea" of a particular phase of matter-in-motion. It is the dualism involved in vitalist theories, about immaterial "entelechies" that "withdraw at death," that is crude. That something *material* could "withdraw at death" is quite possible, but it is up to Mr. Anderson and the S.P.R. to prove it.

O. C. DREWITT.

OBITUARY

It is with deepest regret that we announce the death of our friend and member, Andrew Robinson Parker, who passed away peacefully at his home in Leicester on June 30th, at the age of 77 years.

Andrew was a kindly and courteous man, and a keen supporter of Leicester Secular Society's lectures and discussion group, to which he contributed with understanding and wit. He will be sadly missed. A secular funeral was conducted at the Gilroes crematorium, on Wednesday, July 2nd, by Mr. G. A. Kirk (President, L.S.S.).

C.H.H.

It is with regret that we learn of the death of John Bentley, of Myrtle Park, Bingley, Yorkshire, for some years a member of the Bradford Branch of the National Secular Society. Branch officials visited Mr. Bentley's home when they heard of his death, only to learn that his widow had arranged for a parson to conduct the cremation service. However, it is how Mr. Bentley lived that is important, and he was a keen Freethinker.

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