

The Freethinker

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ONE OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES in which sensational progress has been made in the present century is that of astronomy. Much water has flowed under the moon since that memorable date, 1609, when Galileo first turned his (still preserved) glasses on to celestial phenomena. In more recent centuries the power of the telescope has itself not only been magnified by thousands, but has been supplemented by ever more potent auxiliaries, the spectroscope,

and last but not necessarily least, our contemporary moon probes. Though still incompletely successful, these are now apparently on the threshold of success, with the proximate opportunity which space travel unfolds of establishing experimental and direct relationship with our nearest neighbours in space. All this adds up to a very different picture of the cosmos than was available to the ancient author of Genesis—or even to the great Galileo himself. Within the present century the classic conception of the Universe as identical with our old friend, the Milky Way, has given place to the awe-inspiring concept of an endless procession of galaxies—

island universes of which our universe is only one. Universes separated from each other by distances so inconceivable that they can only be computed by the special astronomical jargon of light years. We now possess giant telescopes, both radio and ocular, which can penetrate literally thousands of millions of light years into space. And still there appears to be no end to the sequence of succeeding galaxies.

Religion and Astronomy

Ever since the earliest cosmological speculations of the priestly astronomers of Egypt (at a date prior to the composition of Genesis) efforts have been made to explain the origins of the universe along religious lines, as the result of special creation by one or several gods. In the theological systems evolved by the monotheistic creeds, this supposition of a simple primeval creation in—or, more precisely, before—time and space, has been raised to a dogma, an article of faith, incumbent upon all true believers under pain of the mortal guilt of heresy. It so figures in the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish creeds, all ultimately derived from a common Semitic source expressed—regards creation—in the pre-Christian narrative of Genesis which begins with the categorical definition: "In the Beginning the gods created." What, and upon what "day" is then explained in the opening chapters, incidentally in such a manner as to make the entire universe ancillary to its central intention, the creation of man in the gods' image. At a later date, when the monotheistic cult of the "jealous" god, Jehovah, superseded the plural deities whom the original authors of Genesis adored—and to whom they ascribed the creation (Hebrew *Elohim*, dishonestly translated as "God" in our Bibles, is definitely plural!)—then the function of the unique creator was ascribed to Jehovah. He was promoted by Moses and the Prophets from his original role as the local god of Sinai, where the Jews appear to have first contacted him. The

role of God the creator is still definitely affirmed in the more sophisticated Christian creeds. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth"—so runs the brief formula in the Apostles' Creed. Whilst in the more elaborate Nicene Creed, formulated in the language, though certainly not in the spirit, of Greek philosophy, we are taught to believe in "God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible"; and also that his Son,

the Second Person of the Trinity, was "born before the worlds." Such, or something similar, is the dogma of creation as taught in Islam or Judaism, minus, of course, its Trinitarian aspect.

Modern Astronomy and Creation

As has often been noted, modern astronomy started its sensational career by coming into violent collision with the Church authorities. It is sufficient here to mention the *causes très célèbres* of the early Copernican, Bruno, and of Galileo, himself the founder of modern *experimental* astronomy. After the dire scandal caused by the tragic outcome of these events, the Churches have since shown more caution in dealing with the speculative results of the advances made in modern astronomy. For example, Rome has recently recognised the possibilities of "rational beings" inhabiting other planets, which is certainly not suggested in Genesis. Christian apologists have even hailed the ever-expanding "glories of the firmament" as fresh "evidences" for the creative power of God. Whilst for, perhaps, social rather than intellectual reasons, some modern astronomers have sought to reconcile contemporary astronomical theory with theology. Jeans and Edington are cases in point. Astronomers who openly draw conclusions from their science which are inimical to religious belief (as Fred Hoyle did on the radio a few years ago) are liable to be denounced and ostracised. Mr. Hoyle has never again appeared on the BBC, and it is possible that he never will again. Otherwise the Church tends discreetly to ignore the materialistic deductions which appear to follow from modern astronomical theory. And it must be noted that, again perhaps for professional rather than scientific reasons, the astronomers tend to reciprocate. The recent series of Reith Lectures by Professor A. C. B. Lovell on *The Individual and the Universe* represent an obvious example of this professional discretion. Clear and explicit when he touched on astronomical theory, the learned lecturer became ever more ambiguous as he approached the *theological* assertion of creation *ex nihilo*.

The Attributes of Deity

Assuming, as Prof. Lovell apparently did, that divine creation is still a possible (though he did admit, not certain) explanation of the universe (Lovell quoted a theory advanced by a French priest, Abbé Lemaître, of derivation from a primeval atom, we would like to suggest that we know enough to form a reasonably definite estimate of the character and interest of the Creator, in accordance with

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The God of the Astronomers

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

the sound scientific principle that one should argue from the known to the unknown, and not *vice versa*, as the theologians invariably do. What are the major characteristics of the universe disclosed by modern astronomy? The answer is surely obvious—space, emptiness and silence. These, then, presumably, are the attributes (or preferences?) of the Creator. The stars are scattered at inconceivable distances throughout space, and the vast majority of the “created” worlds appear to be dead, entirely unsuitable for the reception of any form of life. This, then, was the God who—according to our theological

astronomers—evolved the existing universe from the primitive atom, which they desiderate. Even assuming that such a Creator may exist, what moral or intellectual attributes can we ascribe to him? And why should any rational or moral being want to worship such a god, a being, surely, as primitive, as his alleged primitive atom?

[Footnote: If one wished to be flippant, one could add that all Christian Churches which preach the *post-mortem* “resurrection of the body,” and its subsequent dispatch to Heaven or Hell, must believe in a kind of *post-mortem* space travel.]

REVIEW

Live Without Tension

Live Without Tension, by F. A. Hornibrook; Souvenir Press Ltd., 94 Charlotte Street, London, W.1; 1958; 93 pages; 10s. 6d. net.

IN THE GATHERING GLOOM of a late Autumn evening I was on my way to Gray's Inn Road to keep an editorial appointment with Mr. F. A. Hornibrook when I noticed a sprightly figure trotting nimbly across the road to beat the traffic lights. Yet, it was our octogenarian friend himself, whose own physical and mental fitness is one of the best possible advertisements for his books on health.

It is some thirty-five years since his *Culture of the Abdomen* was published, and after taking eighteen editions it has now become a Penguin. Medical men and laymen alike have given their testimony, the latter including H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett—two expert critical minds whose bodies stood in need of help from the point of view of good health. Sir Arbuthnot Lane was one of a number of eminent medical scientists who recommended Mr. Hornibrook's methods.

It is the distinguishing feature of Mr. Hornibrook's work that he caters for busy people who cannot afford a lot of time for daily exercises. His patients are not in training for the Cup Final; they wish to lead normal healthy lives. Indeed, sport and athletics at the professional level can actually set serious health problems in later life unless guarded against.

Nor will our author have any dealings with asceticism. It is easy for any health quack to draw up a list of Don'ts and to prescribe activities which are most obviously associated with better health, such as walking. Mr. Hornibrook proceeds on the assumption that people want to live, not merely to exist. Many have vices, such as smoking and drinking, which they wish to indulge. On the principle of moderation in all things, our author would not cut these out but would aim rather at the integration of such beneficial general habits that their ill effects can be contained without great harm.

Those who have read Mr. Hornibrook's previous books will know that they make the pleasantest possible reading, enriched with the art and zest of the raconteur. The author would not have his readers digest a heavy treatise any more than a heavy meal.

The theme of the present book under review is the relief of tension, perhaps for many people a timely one in the space age! It should therefore have a wide and extensive sale. The taking of “tranquilliser” drugs is a post-war phenomenon, particularly in U.S.A. Even in this country, once the land of the phlegmatic and taciturn Anglo-Saxon, the amount of barbiturates prescribed is now approaching one tenth of all Health Service prescriptions. But this sort of thing merely removes the immediate effects of tension: the treatment is repetitive and therefore progressively less effective and increasingly dangerous. Good health cannot

be bought at the chemist's. What is for sale is a possibility of mitigating the effects of *bad* health. The possibility, aided by suggestion (advertisement propaganda) no doubt sometimes comes to fruition, but the ailment itself remains, ready to become manifest at any time. Indeed, the advertisement itself—perhaps our author would agree—may even work suggestion both ways, by first convincing the subject that he is ill, and then by convincing him that he has improved.

Mr. Hornibrook's methods of treatment aim not merely at cure but at prevention. His few simple exercises require no elaborate apparatus nor are they ostentatious: some can be performed in a crowded bus and none the wiser. But over and above this are the integrated habits that need no thinking about, no time to operate, no attention whatever; habits, for instance, connected with meals, with going to sleep, with standing, with clothes and with many other matters of everyday routine. In sixteen chapters a wide field is covered, and to those not yet acquainted with Mr. Hornibrook's methods, it will be like letting in the fresh air.

The famous cartoonist David Low has drawn an excellent and characteristic Hornibrook on the frontispiece, and some amusing text illustrations are by George A. Craig.

The work is dedicated to two of the author's freethinking friends; Joan Miller, the actress whose stage and TV performances will be well known to readers (and who is now appearing in *Hot Summer Night*) and her producer husband, Mr. Peter Cotes.

G. H. TAYLOR.

Ghana Rationalist Conference

THE GHANA RATIONALIST GROUP, which comprises people calling themselves Freethinkers, Secularists, Agnostics, Humanists, Rationalists, Ethicists and Unitarians, will be holding its Second Annual Conference in the Ghana Legion Hall, Koforidua, on Sunday, February 1st, 1959. The morning session will consist of reports, consideration of organisation and administration and a discussion on religious instruction in schools, which may possibly be increased in the near future.

In the afternoon a public meeting will be held, at which the speakers will be Lt. R. C. K. Hewlett, on “Humanism as a way of life”; Dr. G. Saunders, on “A Rationalist approach to morals”; Mr. John Senaya, on “Freethought in Ghana”; and Mr. K. Y. Attah, on “Secularism and the Press.”

Lt. Hewlett, Secretary of the Group, rightly calls this an important conference. Preparations are being made to combat the Christian Council's proposal to increase religion in the schools, but the Group knows that the fight will be a hard one. The National Secular Society is giving what support it can, and we know that FREETHINKER readers will wish their colleagues in Ghana every success. If anyone would like to send a special message it should be addressed to Lt. Hewlett at R.43 Huhunya Road, Koforidua, Ghana.

The Neglected Question

By G. I. BENNETT

MR. R. READER reminds us unfailingly of the penalties of unbridled fecundity, and in the first of his articles on *Aspects of Overpopulation* he re-focuses our attention upon this most serious of serious problems with which our age is beset. Mr. Reader has been gloomy in certain of his contributions—unwarrantably gloomy, some have thought—but for my part I doubt whether he has been more gloomy than the facts. Whither humanity? we may well ask as we read month by month of the world's ominously mounting human numbers. Unless something can be done to check this trend, we are surely moving in a deteriorating situation towards an ultimate explosion. Before that happens, life for ever more people is going to become increasingly harassing, increasingly uncomfortable, increasingly hard.

Those who read Mr. William Vogt's dramatic book, *Road to Survival*, published a decade ago, may remember a vivid expression of his that occurs therein. "The earth is not made of rubber," he said; "it cannot be stretched." But even if it were made of rubber (and there are some who, as if upon this assumption, imagine that with the aid of the new God, Science, it can be stretched and stretched again), the snapping-point would be reached eventually. Dare we assume that the problem is other than of utmost urgency? Every year, every month, every week that passes with nothing done, the situation becomes increasingly difficult to take in hand.

The Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus was well enough aware of the dire consequences of the pressure of an expanding population upon limited means of subsistence. He knew that man—no exception in the animal world—was, in a condition of natural unrestraint, a prolific breeder of his own kind. In the raw—and to us, brutal—state of nature, this wouldn't matter very much; all the innumerable hazards to which life, unprotected, is subject would keep human numbers trimmed and within manageable proportions. But civilised man, with his much cultivated capacity for preserving and prolonging the life of his kind, and his consequently much lower mortality rate, upset the balance; and our present position may not unexaggeratedly be summed up as: Less and less for more and more.

Of course, Malthus in his time had no conception of the degree of refinement we should one day attain in our baby-saving, disease-banishing, death-delaying, life-restoring, life-prolonging techniques. True, our greater control over our physical environment has enabled us to extract from the soil a good deal more than we once did; but this has blinded many people to the fact that the earth's potentialities for supporting life are nevertheless limited, whereas human beings' capacity to proliferate are virtually limitless. The upshot has been a phenomenal expansion in world population—particularly in the last hundred and fifty years or so since Thomas Malthus's time. And this has served to make manifest the unrealism of one aspect of that discerning clergyman's thinking: his highly respectable advocacy of late marriage and coital restraint in marriage as remedial measures to control the birthrate.

Among the general run of humanity (we are not concerned with the few individual exceptions), limitation of progeny *thus* is not possible. In nothing is man more blind to his obvious interests than in his love-relations. The paradox is that this urgent physical emotion, generative of moments of intense joy, is also productive of vast misery. And one of the tragic ironies of life is that for fleeting

periods of libidinous satisfaction human beings are prone to stake so much in terms of ultimate happiness, as the proceedings of the law courts abundantly attest. Here is one of the common irrationalities of our kind into which perhaps no one can be absolutely sure he will not stumble. Without proper restraint or regulation, sex indulgence, in the ecological sphere even more than in the personal sphere, leads to ruin.

Contraception, then, with all the facilities that modern discovery and technique place at our disposal, is a vital social and ecological necessity. But how the world at large is to be brought round to a compelling appreciation of that fact is a question to which I reluctantly confess I don't know the answer.

Mr. Reader points to the obstructive attitude of organised religion. He is right, of course. Those who have the idea that life in itself is sacred and issues directly from God, and that He cares for human beings as a dutiful father cares for his children, are rarely enthusiastic advocates of contraception; and there are Churches such as the Roman Catholic that condemn contraception outright as impious and wicked. But they are not its sole opponents. Especially when it comes to contraception as an ecological policy, there are the political dogmatists of East and West who refuse even to consider the possibility—let alone the reality—of an overpopulated world, preferring to ascribe the existence of hunger, poverty, and acute shortages to economic causes that administrative reform or political socialisation schemes can dispose of.

As matters are today, it seems to me that the neo-Malthusian movement for population control operates under very unfavourable circumstances with birth-control enthusiasts and family-planning organisations its only effective supporters. Few Churchmen will even think to tackle the question. The majority of politicians are only too glad to leave it alone. The men of the colleges and universities, absorbed in academic specialisms of their own, seem to take small interest in such down-to-earth matters. The directors of radio and television, not unnaturally, do not find any entertainment value in nor care to deal in plain matter-of-fact language with so delicate a subject. And the pontiffs of the Press, whatever evils and abuses, alleged or real, they are wont to thunder about, chose to maintain a tactful silence upon the consequences of overpopulation and its remedy.

What wonder, then, that, even here in this supposedly enlightened land of this supposedly enlightened West, the general public, for the most part apathetic enough to the threat of nuclear destruction, does not know any explosive danger exists in regard to the over-peopling of the earth. Thus restricted and hampered by what has the appearance of a conspiracy of silence, neo-Malthusians have no alternative but to persevere in the slow and laboured task of educating men and women to the realities of the situation. And time, alas, cannot be counted an ally!

—NEXT WEEK—

RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA
ON POSTAGE STAMPS

By DAVE SHIPPER

This Believing World

BBC's Christmas Day TV programme began, as we should expect, with "a Family Service for Christmas Morning," entitled—as it ought to be—"The Crib, the Cross, and the Crown." Needless to say, it followed all the traditional lines, particularly the Angels singing Hosannahs at the birth of Jesus. It finished with Harry Belafonte singing "Mary's Boy Child" (an expensive item), but the interesting thing about the rest of the programme was its completely unholy and secular outlook. Instead of Christmas Day being devoted to the Birth of the Babe of Bethlehem, we had a very fine programme of plays, films, and comedians at their best.

★

Much the same with ITV's Christmas Programme, part of which was devoted to that hilarious comedy "Alf's Button," and to that famous murder mystery, "The Maltese Falcon." And it would be safe to say that the vast majority of viewers were in full agreement with all these purely secular arrangements. One can have too much of even the Babe of Bethlehem.

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However, the unfortunate people who have no TV sets, and were obliged to listen to the radio programme, began the day with that depressing "Lift up your hearts," repeated twice—at 6.50 and 7.50—followed by a "Born this Joyful Morning"; and naturally, these were followed by a Christmas Service and a Christmas Journey in music through Europe. And for those who prefer a "light" programme, they were given at 7 a.m., "O Come all ye Faithful," and at 8.20 "Born this Joyful Morning," followed by a Christmas edition of "Silver Chords." The "sacred" part of Christmas was refreshingly absent from most of the other items.

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Though Mr. Hannen Swaffer is an out-and-out Socialist, he has a curious predilection for those members of our Royal Family who appear to show the slightest interest in Spiritualism. With almost a terrific whoop of joy, he asks, in a flaming headline in *Psychic News*, dare the Court "deny" that the Duchess of Kent went to a seance? Supposing she did go to one—does the presence of a Royal lady prove the truth of Spiritualism? We ourselves have been to dozens of seances, and have met mediums and spirit healers at their work, but we have seen nothing whatever to prove that dead people come back and talk with relatives. On the question of "spirits" Royalty is no more an authority than on religion.

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A Welsh play, described as a story "in a contemporary setting," entitled "A Quiet Man," was televised the other day, and we would not have noticed it except for the fact that it showed some people so extremely religious that the mother strongly objected to her daughter having a bath on a Sunday, as it was against all her religious instincts, and a son who had the temerity to want to read a novel on the Sabbath Day. The tone was set by one of the characters insisting everything might change, but Jesus Christ never. He was the same yesterday, today, and for ever and ever. It is very difficult to believe that even "in a contemporary setting" such idiots still exist.

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Among the Roman Catholics who hold big jobs in public life are Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, who is the head of ITA, Mr. H. Grisewood on the BBC senior staff, and Mr.

C. McGivern, the deputy-director of TV. Many of its producers are Catholics, like Mr. T. Arnold and Mr. T. L. Jackson, as well as Mr. Gilbert Harding, Eamonn Andrews, Ben Lyon, Ann Shelton, and lots of other famous performers. Among converts are Sir J. Rothenstein, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Edith Sitwell, and numerous others. It would prove most interesting how any of these would fare in a debate with a prominent Free-thinker.

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So finally Italy and the Vatican between them have sacked the late Pope's personal physician for having the impudence to write about Pius in some newspaper articles. The doctor cannot now even practise anywhere in the country. We think he is lucky. In more Christian times, he would probably have been hanged, drawn and quartered, in the name of "our Lord." But the incident is only one more proof of what might happen in a world thoroughly Catholic. But where are the non-Catholic defenders of the "Rights of Man" these days? Are our national newspapers entirely under the Catholic thumb?

The Value of a Paper

YOU WILL NOTICE that THE FREETHINKER Sustentation Fund starts afresh with this first 1959 issue. And we should like to thank all those who have contributed in the past to this Fund. We are sometimes asked how the money is used. The answer is simple: it goes towards the week-by-week running costs of THE FREETHINKER.

"Towards" is right because it nothing like covers the paper's expenses. And the Board of G. W. Foote and Co. Ltd., which owns THE FREETHINKER, is frankly worried. The times are far from propitious for a propagandist paper like ours. Many much more commercial periodicals are finding it hard to survive the mounting costs of production: many have had to close down. We don't want THE FREETHINKER to die. If present trends continue, it will. Not perhaps this year, but soon.

It is not that our expenses are extortionate. No high salaries are paid. Indeed, the G. W. Foote Board (Messrs. W. Griffiths, J. W. Barker, R. Johnson and B. Simmons) is entirely a voluntary body; so, too, is the Editorial Committee (Messrs. F. A. Hornibrook, Colin McCall and G. H. Taylor). Staff is needed, of course, to despatch the paper, to do the accounting, etc., but the wage bill is low. And our printers, Messrs. G. T. Wray Ltd., are very reasonable. It is simply that THE FREETHINKER is not a commercial proposition.

This is not a new situation; it has always been so. And if the value of a paper is to be judged by commercial standards only, THE FREETHINKER is a dead loss. But we don't think that is the correct standard of judgment. And we don't think you do either. To us, THE FREETHINKER'S value cannot be assessed. We remember the first time we came across it and how stimulating it was. And it has kept us continuously stimulated ever since. We know from the letters we receive that our experience is not unique. Our readership is not large, but it is devoted. And it is remarkably widespread throughout the world. The influence of THE FREETHINKER is, in fact, much greater than its circulation.

But money is essential if it is to continue doing its own very special, and surely, important, job. More money than the Sustentation Fund has been bringing in. We ask you to help us in every possible way, now and in the years ahead.

THE FREETHINKER

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

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

CORRECTION: On the 28th line of the article "Christmas Again" (December 26th) the date should be December 25th, not December 23rd.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

London (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER and C. E. WOOD.

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

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, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street).—Sunday, January 4th, 7 p.m.: A. VENABLES, "Fifty Years of Pharmacy—Changes affecting both Chemist and Public."

Central London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, January 4th, 7.15 p.m.: BONAR THOMPSON, "Faith, Hope, and Poverty."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 6th: R. PETERS, PH.D., "Moral Education."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 4th, 6.30 p.m.: Dr. J. R. S. FINCHAM, B.A., "100 Years of Evolution."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 4th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "New Perspectives for Man."

The Mid-Century Discussion Group (Leighton House, Holland Park Road, W.14).—Thursday, January 8th, 7.30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Sex and Sin."

Notes and News

VENETIANS in their thousands—we read in *The Universe* (5/12/58)—swarmed across a boat bridge to an island in the lagoon "to give thanks to Our Lady of Health who saved them from a plague 327 years ago." This report is a little misleading. Even Our Lady could hardly save present day Venetians from a plague 327 years ago! However, the procession has been held annually throughout that period. The plague struck Venice in 1630 and within 16 months more than 14,000 people died. But the Doge bribed the Virgin, offering to build a church in her name if she would deliver the city. She did; and he did—at least the story goes—hence the annual traipse. What beats us is why they both waited 16 months and let 14,000 die!

★
We cannot forgive ourselves for not telling you earlier of the Christmas bargains offered in the same issue of *The Universe*. It's too late, now, we know, but you might bear them in mind for 12 months hence. Religious jewellery—

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

A. J. Orchard, £1; H. Apling, 5s.; A. G. Cromwell, U.S.A., £1 15s.; A. George, 10s.; F. S. B. Lawes, 10s.; Mrs. N. Henson, £1; Anon, 5s.; A. W. Coleman, £2; A. J. Wood, 5s.; R.J.B., £1 10s.; Miss Brooks, 10s.—Total to January 2nd, 1959, £9 10s.

St. Christopher or the B.V.M. surrounded by marcasite; stations of the cross; "Holy Cross" or "Our Lady of Lourdes" neon lamps or Eau de Cologne made with "precious" Jordan water direct from the Holy Land" in miniature traditional urns. Or perhaps you prefer a "beautiful" musical shrine of "the Virgin Mary (or Our Lord, if preferred)"—note the order of precedence! One word of advice, though. Avoid everything described as "beautiful" or "artistic." It is sure to be ghastly.

★
HERE in Britain we may get a little tired of seeing the Queen's face on every stamp, and last week we quoted the Rev. Clifford Rhodes's view that the monarchy is the "core of contemporary English religion." Let us, however, be thankful for small mercies. At least we were spared a stamp like the Australian Christmas 1958 commemorative, which featured the Nativity.

★
THE 1959 official Year Book of the Church of England reveals that the days when brides insisted on being wed at the altar are fast passing. A hundred years ago 868 out of 1,000 were married in the Church of England, 30 in Roman Catholic churches, 63 in churches of other denominations, and 39 by civil ceremony. In 1952 the picture had changed considerably, only 496 in every 1,000 weddings taking place in the Church of England and, though Roman Catholic weddings had increased to 94 and other denominations to 104, civil ceremonies had risen to 306. This tendency towards civil marriage is steadily increasing.

★
FURTHER news of marriage comes from the Advent pastoral letter of Roman Catholic Bishop Dwyer of Leeds. "I must tell you," he writes, "that I am often seriously worried by the number of requests for dispensation that I receive." Last year more than half the marriages in his diocese were mixed and he wonders "how often the Catholic party has made any serious attempt to interest the non-Catholic in the Faith." "It is of the gravest importance today"—continues the Bishop—"when wrong ideas of marriage and of the use of marriage are so widespread even among Christians of the Protestant religion." We fully appreciate Bishop Dwyer's concern, but we think the boot is on the other foot. It is *his* Church that has the wrong ideas and more than half his newly-weds seem to have realised this. It may be hard for a celibate priest to understand that some people consider love more important than religion.

★
FREETHINKERS in the Midlands should make a note of two interesting January meetings. On Thursday, the 15th, at 2.30 p.m., at Loughborough College, the Literary and Debating Society has arranged a debate, "That this House will beware of the Papal Bull." Two Secularists, T. M. Mosley and Edmund Taylor, will propose the motion, and two Roman Catholic speakers will oppose it. Then, on Monday, the 19th, Mr. Mosley will present the views of the National Secular Society to the Ratcliffe-on-Trent Men's Fellowship at the Church Room, Vicarage Lane. The time of this meeting is not yet to hand, but it will be given in Lecture Notices later.

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A HAPPY NEW YEAR to all Freethinkers, wherever they may be. May 1959 be a good year for Freethought and humanity.

Free Speech in Slough

By JIM RADFORD

Slough, as most readers probably know, is a cosmopolitan town of 70,000 people, that straddles the Bath Road a few miles past London Airport. The pre-war plea of John Betjeman, "Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough; it isn't fit for humans now," was not granted, and post-war Slough became a boom town, which attracted, among other things, immigrant Roman Catholic workers, and Evangelical missionaries. Catholic schools and churches began to spring up, and Spiritualists, Mormons and hot gossellers nailed their placards on every vacant hut and hall.

Consequently, when in 1957, a handful of Freethinkers, including the writer, came together, at the instigation of Ernie Crosswell, to form the Slough Humanist Group, the prospects did not seem bright. As far as Slough was concerned, the "Feast of Unreason" had become a banquet!

However, it was not long before we began to make headway—and headlines. Our rejection of conventional values, and our uncompromising denunciation of Christian theory and practice, were news, and the two local papers, the *Slough Express* and the *Slough Observer*, showed courage and fairness in printing it.

We were extremely interested, therefore, when, on August 1st, these two papers reported a Council meeting at which two religious bodies had been granted permission to hold open-air meetings for three months in the parks. Mr. Peter Badder, leader of a group of non-denominational Evangelists who normally hold street corner meetings, wished to speak where the grass was greener; and the Reverend Richards, of the "Four Square" Gospel Tabernacle, also wished to utilise the heavenly backdrop. Although one or two Councillors opposed the idea of a "Hyde Park Corner" in the local parks, most of the speakers were in favour of it. Alderman James Manning, in welcoming the idea, pointed out that it had always been the practice to allow organised bodies the use of the parks. The Roman Catholic Councillor Sheehy is reported to have said, "I am all for Hyde Park Corners, so long as they give equal opportunity for the exposition of all shades of opinion," and the attempt to refer the decision back to the Parks Committee was lost by a substantial majority.

A few weeks later I wrote to Mrs. Scott Picton, Chairman of the Parks Committee, referring to this decision and requesting the same facilities for the Slough Humanist Group, of which I am the secretary. I asked to be allowed to speak at the same time as, and not too far away from the Christian speakers, and concluded my letter by saying that "in our opinion this would add to, rather than detract from the amenities, in that it would give the citizens of Slough an opportunity to exercise their critical faculties by listening to two rather different points of view."

In due course this request was refused, and we had to wait until the end of October before the Borough Council could discuss the matter. On September 13th, however, in a remarkable interview with a *Slough Observer* reporter, Mrs. Scott Picton, who had previously taken great pains to disclaim either Atheism or Agnosticism, indicated that a speakers' corner was not likely to find favour at the Town Hall. As a "Speakers' Corner" had been created and enthusiastically welcomed at the last Council meeting, it seems obvious that the good lady meant a Humanist

speaker would not find favour! And she was proved to be right.

On Monday, October 27th, the Parks Committee's decision was upheld by the Borough Council, but not before an extremely interesting debate. Several Councillors shamefacedly referred to the precedent they had recently established, but no one attempted to explain what difference in circumstances was responsible for the Parks Committee's changed decision. Mrs. Scott Picton put forward the view that verbal battles might develop into physical ones, and Councillor Sheehy revealed that his previous insistence upon "equal facilities for the exposition of all shades of opinion" was not meant to include Humanists, by saying that although he had previously recommended free speech, he now thought that the Committee had good reason for its decision. He did not, however, say what these reasons were, and it was not reported whether or not he stood on his head to make this *volte face*.

This might have been the end of the matter had not the local press come out magnificently in support of free speech. Both the weekly papers gave full reports of the debate and devoted their editorials to the Council's inconsistency. The *Express* asked for a site to be set aside for the free expression of opinion and the *Observer* pointed out that there was no evidence to suggest that Christians and Humanists might come to blows and that if they did the remedy was at hand. The following week brought several published letters in support of free speech. My own letter, which appeared in both papers, drew attention to the verbal somersaults performed by Councillor Sheehy, and I also wrote, "The suggestion that violence might ensue reveals a strange lack of faith in Christian tolerance or is it imagined that the brutal Humanists might set upon their Christian audience?"

Al Goodson, another active group member, also wrote in both papers, pointing out that the Council's decision "had clearly demonstrated that free speech is only to be tolerated when it does not challenge the views of the Establishment." The *Observer's* controversial columnist "Sweep," called on the Council to reverse their "disgraceful decision" and expressed his indignation that Councillors should go through the motions of supporting "free speech" and then at the end put up their hands to ban it from the Parks. After fiercely denouncing several Councillors by name he wrote, "They need to be told that free speech has no value as a political slogan, and no significance when the audience is the bathroom mirror, it can only stir to vigorous life in the market place... it needs lots of fresh air to survive, confined to the deodorised air of the council chamber and newspaper columns, it will become a sickly thing." The following week brought letters from group members Harold Walker and Rose Dumont demanding equal rights for the Atheist minority, and I have no doubt there were others unpublished.

We may not have gained a rostrum in Slough, but we have forcibly demonstrated that Christian intolerance and discrimination is still a constant evil, and that Freethinkers can gain valuable publicity and support, simply by presenting their claim for equal rights at the correct moment. And in a rather ironical way, we actually achieved equal treatment. The Council has decided to refuse all future applications now that the Christians' three-month permit has expired.

Floodlight on the Vatican

By DR. J. V. DUHIG

IN RECENT YEARS we are coming to learn more about what makes the Vatican tick. Down to the time of Pio Nono, the Papacy was an absolute monarchy and was saved from complete annihilation at the hands of Garibaldi and the liberals of the day only by help from outside religious adherents who, obviously, had no knowledge of social and economic conditions in the Papal States. Since then there has been a slow but certain weakening of Papal power. Today, in spite of Demochristian political parties in Germany, Italy, Belgium and France, and Catholic dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and South America, the number of genuine adherents of Catholicism in Europe and South America has, proportionately to the increase of population, greatly declined. And now it is easy to see why. Recently I have read Roger Peyrefitte's *Keys of Saint Peter*, obviously based on a very wide factual knowledge, though much of the book is embroidered gossip with more than a few grains of truth, and Bernard Wall's *Report on the Vatican*, strictly factual and unpartisan, well written, sumptuously illustrated, and worth the money. A book which merits serious attention is Thornton Wilder's best book, far and away, *The Cabala*, which first, at least to me, revealed the wealthy playboy attitude of Cardinals and higher celibate functionaries of the Catholic H.Q. in Rome, both to life and to our Holy Faith. A human and lighthearted and, I would say, a truthful book. Now I have just read in *Encounter* an article in the November number by one Robert Neville, "Vatican Report." At the risk of boosting *Encounter* sales, I recommend this article, in which Neville, consciously or not, reveals all the fundamental weaknesses of a gigantic enterprise which nobody but God knows how to run, and nobody knows but the same gentleman how it ever gets run. This is the only proof of the existence of God I have ever come across worthy of more than a few moments' thought. If the Department of Inland Revenue or the Income Tax Commissioner suddenly asked the Pope for an audited statement of his affairs he couldn't give it and, of course, neither he nor his agents all over the world, including Australia, need worry, as they do not pay income tax. And the late Pius XII saw to it that one of his nephews was given diplomatic status to evade Italian income tax. The whole institution is ramshackle and I wish to refer only to a few points mentioned by Neville.

The number of audiences given by the late Pope, according to Neville, was about 6,000 a year which, allowing for exclusively professional work on Sundays and holy days, works out at three per hour without any other activity of any kind whatever. Six and half hours a day, six days a week, a herculean job of public relations. Difficult to believe, of course, but that's what it says.

In the later days of his reign I thought Pius was getting terribly unstable. He claimed to have seen the sun dancing in the Vatican gardens and to have had a private visit from Christ. Either he was lying or was having hallucinations. I incline to the former since, reading between Peyrefitte's lines, he wanted to be canonised and took precautions not to meet almost hopeless bottle-necks about miracles like those he struck in trying to canonise the old peasant Pius X. Neville mentions these episodes and the consternation of the Jesuit lawyers, who pointed out "it is for Popes to judge the validity of other men's visions, not to have them themselves." The very irreverent Romans made funny jokes out of all this twaddle about visions and

miracles and saw through the old boy's transparent intention to ascend the altars of God one day.

The richest episode of the lot is that connected with what Neville calls papal subtlety. According to Neville, this is shown by "a casual sentence in a letter, an unexpected appointment to a minor post . . . a casual sentence dropped in a papal speech . . . are the kind of gentle ways to make Vatican policy known." As an example, the nomination of Stritch of Chicago to a H.Q. post. "This appointment . . . was the Pope's *subtle* manner of ending the long-established primacy among American prelates of . . . Spellman. It also turned out to be the Pope's way of ameliorating, if not resolving, a serious quarrel . . . between Spellman and . . . Fulton-Sheen." Now this kind of subtlety reminds me irresistibly of the angry bull-elephant which wrecked my doting aunt's precious china cabinet and of the mean, paltry and treacherous, typically Italian treatment of a senior public servant or business executive who first learns of his dismissal in the morning papers. Not that I have the remotest sympathy for the arrogant loutish Spellman, who incurred the contempt of the civilised world in his public debate with the dignified, shrewd Eleanor Roosevelt over State subsidies to religious schools, which is, of course, contrary to the U.S. Constitution. Spellman's public behaviour on that occasion was loutish, and from that day he withered on the stem. In his arrogance he went too far and he knew it. He took the count.

This is a system founded on two flagrant lies, the existence of the Christian God and on the divinity of that arrogant, intolerant, cruel original Billy Graham, Jesus, obsessed to the point of insanity with a spurious sense of a divine mission. Out of all this has grown the cruellest and the wickedest system and the greediest racket for priests the world has even known. Gentlemen, a toast: To the Vatican and its early destruction!

Review

The Rationalist Annual 1959. Watts and Co. Cloth, 7s. 6d.; paper, 5s.

THE APPEARANCE of the *Rationalist Annual* is always a welcome event. Regular readers have come to expect a well-balanced selection of well-written articles on all sorts of subjects of interest to thinking people everywhere. This year's edition is quite up to expectations. Starting the ball rolling is our old friend Prof. J. B. S. Haldane, who contributes an essay entitled "The Bishops and the Sputniks." The theme of this essay is the growing unbalance between science and technology in the Soviet Union and their equivalents in Britain and the Western nations generally. Why are we lagging behind in scientific and technological education? Professor Haldane sees the answer in the fact that our educational system is weighted down with the incubus of religion on the one hand and on the other, the existence of faulty cultural patterns which blind us to the real significance of the impact of science on society. His conclusion is that the West will lose the Cold War—thanks to the Bishops and their friends.

An excellent attempt to clarify the issues involved in A.I.D. is made by Ronald W. Hepburn. Surveying the subject from the standpoint of a secular morality, Mr. Hepburn succeeds in compressing within the limits of an

article an admirable presentation of the arguments both for and against A.I.D. The author appeals for more observation and more facts upon which to base conclusions and deplors the too hasty rejection of A.I.D. in human society on specious moral and religious grounds.

Another writer, Miss Kathleen Nott, well known to Rationalists in the field of literary criticism, makes some pertinent remarks on the current vogue enjoyed by religious novelists like Evelyn Waugh. To the reviewer it has always appeared strange that in an age of science, one finds so much respect accorded that active group of writers who dress up their ideas in the discredited thought forms of Christian theology. Maybe, as Chapman Cohen used to say, we have tailed minds as well as tailed bodies!

Prof. Anthony Flew writes on "Hume and 'The Religious Hypothesis,'" an essay which will appeal to all students of the Scottish philosopher. And, in this Darwin Centenary year, Dr. W. E. Swinton pays a fitting tribute to the work of the greatest of naturalists, who has made such an impact upon the thought of the present century. N. W. Pirie contributes an interesting discussion on the importance of selection and the avoidance of useless facts and assumptions in scientific research.

Those who appreciate a piece of sustained argument will enjoy Paul Edwards' article, "The Cosmological Argument." It may come as a surprise to some to discover that the old idea of a First Cause is still championed by religious apologists in this day and age. Yet it is so, and Mr. Edwards takes us on a "Cook's tour" of the intellectual backwoodsmen of the Catholic Church to whose arguments we listen with a mixture of wonder and incredulity. Mr. Edwards obligingly translates their arguments into modern meaningful English—then quietly and effectively annihilates them.

The great but rather neglected French Rationalist scholar, Joseph Turmel, is the subject of Mr. A. D. Howell Smith's essay. Mr. Howell Smith is well fitted to deal with the importance of Turmel's life work, the great *Histoire des Dogmes*, which itself could provide enough material for a book of essays. Finally, R. J. Mostyn contributes a semi-humorous article on what the great Charles Darwin called "the damnable doctrine" of Hell. There is nothing amusing about Hell itself but the lengths to which some still go to justify it—even to explain it—merit only ridicule and contempt. If Hell exists, it would be the perfect dump-ground for those who believe in it. JACK GORDON.

CORRESPONDENCE

A PROTESTANT COUNTRY?

Well may Mr. F. A. Ridley ask "Is England still a Protestant country?" I have asked the same question—in view of the obvious progress made in many ways—notably the infiltration into the Protestant Churches by so-called Protestant clergy who practise Popery. R. G. Foster says "Don't worry," but that is happening. In today's press it is announced that more money will be devoted to "Church" schools, presumably to both R.C. and C. of E. Surely all Secularists must protest against this. No doubt there are quite a number of R.C. Members of Parliament and some holding high office and it would be interesting to know who they are and why they are allowed to represent a Protestant country. F. BURGESS.

A ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW

I have just read a few copies of THE FREETHINKER for the first time and my impression is that the R.C. Church is your greatest and most feared enemy. Of course, I realise that the Roman Church is the controlling power in the Christian world, but I cannot help feeling that you show little, if any, antagonism to other Christian factions—and other God religions. Why condemn everything about Papacy and yet almost "support" other religious set-ups? Is it your policy to cause as much ill-feeling and disunity within the Christian faiths as possible—even to the extent of almost abetting non-Roman Catholic religions?

I thought Freethinkers were anti-Christian regardless of factions, so why discriminate against Papacy all the time? What about the Church of England, the Scottish Presbytery, Calvinism, Lutheranism and Quakerism? What about a dissertation on Mohammedanism, Hinduism and Buddhism?

Now, surely Freethinkers must have some sort of religion? The human body (*inter alia*) just did not happen in this world—surely there must be a great controlling influence somewhere? Tell me, do Freethinkers believe in the "Platonic doctrine of Reminiscence"—or the "Categorical Imperative"? Let us have some views on what Freethinkers really think.

By the way, I am an R.C. . . . I think. MICHAEL MCCHAFFERTY.
P.S.: Publish this letter if you wish—but I dare you!

PURPOSE

As Mr. Bennett only implies "Purpose" to "Fauna," we agree, thus disagreeing with Theists, Deists, Pantheists, and others who contend that there is "purpose" in all cosmic phenomena, be it "Life" in vegetable, mineral, or what not. Thanks for explanatory and informative letter. C. E. RATCLIFFE.

P.S.: Thanks for "resurrecting" me.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17TH.—Present: Messrs. Ridley (Chair), Alexander, Barker, Corstorphine, Ebury, Hornbrook, Johnson, Moore, Taylor, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Mr. Gordon and Mrs. Trask. Four new individual members were admitted. N.E. area representative was deferred pending opinion of Sheffield Branch. Slough Humanist Group's efforts to gain permission to hold outdoor meetings and Leicester Secular Society's to get cinemas open at 2 p.m. on Sunday were noted and discussed. Requests for speakers from Birmingham Branch and Manchester University were approved. The Secretary reported his debate at Nottingham University on December 9th. Further correspondence from Ghana Rationalist Group was read and Lt. R. C. K. Hewlett's offer to act as N.S.S. representative in the area was gratefully accepted. Annual Dinner arrangements were considered. The venue would be the Pavour's Arms, Page Street, Westminster, on March 28th. Mr. Moore was asked to follow up his own suggestion for gaining information about influential R.C. families. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, January 21st, 1959.

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