

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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To UNDERSTAND the present situation in this country (and note that I am speaking of England and not Great Britain, conditions in Scotland and Wales, although similar, are not identical), it must be known that State schooling did not become statutory till 1870 owing to the inability of the Church of England and the

Dissenting sects to arrive at an agreement. For over 60 years Bill after Bill for the establishment of universal elementary education was voted out in Parliament by the partisans of religion, either in the Commons by Nonconformists or in the

Lords by the Bishops. In the meantime schools of clerical foundation were added to those of medieval, Tudor or later establishment. In all, the main aim was inculcation of 4 Rs: Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic and *Religion*.

Finally a compromise was attained ninety years ago and universal state primary education was launched, in the curriculum of which religious instruction appeared, with the proviso that it must have no sectarian bias. If this could mean anything at all, it required that the Bible should be taught without any interpretation or explanation other than factual (if fact there was). Either the children sorted out the farrago of contradictions to their own satisfaction, or according to doctrines taught them outside the school, or they swallowed it whole, contradictions and all, or they turned away from the Bible and from theology in bored incomprehension. Mostly it was the last.

Half a century ago state secondary schools were established. By some oversight, Religious Instruction was not made obligatory and hence was not inspected; but as these new schools were shaped in the mould of the old endowed schools such as Eton and Harrow, but with more science teaching than classics, it was customary to open the school day with a religious assembly and to devote one or more lessons a week to the study of the scriptures, again without sectarian bias.

The 1870 Act

The 1870 Law permitted sectarian organisations to establish their own schools so that their own peculiar religious doctrine could be taught to the children of their partisans. The State paid the teachers and also the non-teaching staff; the founding body was responsible for the maintenance of the building and for the appointment of the teachers. It became similarly possible for secondary schools to be established with a religious bias; the founding body being responsible for the provision and maintenance of the building, and the State paying all other outgoings. The Anglican Church has profited by this to establish a large number of primary schools; and the Roman Catholic has provided primary schools wherever there is a sufficient local Catholic population; and it has also greatly increased the number of convent and Marist secondary schools wherever suitable buildings have been available; so also, on a much smaller scale, have the Jews.

One body which has made no attempt to take advantage of the law has been the Freethinkers, who, it may be noted, led the way a century ago in evening classes for adults, especially in science and mathematics.

In all schools wholly or partly supported by the State, pupils can be, at the request of the parents, withdrawn from attendance at religious assemblies and at Bible lessons. Similarly teachers in purely State schools cannot legally be required to declare their religious opinions or to give Bible lessons against their will.

Three-quarters of a century of swift and vast expansion of scientific knowledge, and of undenominational Religious Instruction in the Schools

have undermined any interest that might have existed in two-thirds of the population; they have lost interest to such a point that they are not even prepared to criticise. The Bible lessons were becoming more and more perfunctory, and by 1940 the Church schools were too frequently shockingly out of date and often in deplorable condition.

The 1944 Act

In fact, before the outbreak of the last war it was becoming felt that the whole educational machinery of the country needed an overhaul. The Ministry published in 1943 a report which contained a scathing section on the Church schools, indicating that the Ministry would be ready to take over all these schools to put them in proper order as a full responsibility. Parliament in its wisdom enacted the law of 1944, which left the "dual system," *i.e.* of Church schools and State schools, much as it had been, save that the State was to provide more and more public money to bring the Church schools up-to-date and to maintain them according to modern requirements. This law also made religious instruction obligatory in all schools and therefore to be inspected by the Ministry's inspectors.

This gives us the general picture; though we must not overlook the great influence of the old endowed schools on the organisation, curriculum and methods of the new. To what extent, we must now ask, under these conditions are children encouraged to think for themselves? A century ago liberal educationists imagined that with the spread of scientific knowledge there would spread equally the scientific spirit; just as they hoped that with the ability to read would develop an interest in solid knowledge. In both they have been disappointed to such an extent that a leading scientist can declare pessimistically that in a world of 2,600,000,000 inhabitants there are not 5,000 who can think scientifically. A cynic might comment that not that number were of his opinion.

It must be admitted that it is difficult to think with scientific detachment all the time. The irrational, the traditional, persist in thrusting themselves forward despite our intentions and our vigilance.

In dealing with children we must note that scientific thinking is rarely natural and seldom welcomed; that the child tends to accept the dicta and slogans of its milieu as

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Freedom of Thinking in English Schools

— By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER —

sacred fact. And, in the words of the poet, "The child is father of the man"; few adults grow up mentally, and the natural tendency is to accept with little criticism the standards of the herd in which one finds oneself. The ordinary teacher is human. Hence he takes the easiest path in life, which is to be on the side of authority. Authority rarely encourages independent thinking.

Nevertheless there is in our schools something more than mere lip service to the scientific spirit. Experiment is often encouraged by liberal inspectors. The London County Council, which cares for half a million children, strikes a fine note in its *Welcome to London Schools*: "Nearly 2,500 years ago Socrates discovered that education is not teaching; it is the unfolding of the human spirit through knowledge and creative skills, and a clearing of the mists of prejudice and second-hand opinions from its vision."

"The mists of prejudice and second-hand opinions"—it must have been a freethinker who penned these words.

And yet . . .

Since the 1944 Act extended non-sectarian Bible teaching to all types of school under university standard—*i.e.* for children up to the age of 19—it may be interesting to see how this aim of clearing the mists may be interpreted in these lessons.

The texts commonly employed are shortened forms of the two testaments, candidly expurgated, and a syllabus drawn up by theologians and teachers of different sects is expected to be followed. The syllabus varies according to the region, for each region is more or less autonomous. To be carried out adequately the syllabus requires careful study and some historical knowledge; in fact, I have heard it described as needing a licentiate in Divinity to teach it. It aims, on the one hand, at avoiding difficulties, and, on the other, at presenting to the child a connected and uniform story, easily assimilable and stressing the moral values in vogue today, yet avoiding any expression of whatever could be regarded as sectarian doctrine or interpretation.

In spite of the pressure which has been brought to bear on students training for the profession to obtain certificates in Religious Knowledge, there remains, particularly in the secondary schools, a shortage of teachers willing and adequately equipped to undertake the teaching of religion, to which one lesson a week is allotted. Hence frequently this lesson may be in the hands of a teacher perfunctorily indifferent to it, or for whom it may even be distasteful. I have even met with cases of these lessons being taken by a Roman Catholic, a Jew and an Atheist respectively.

(To be concluded)

The Thomas Paine Memorial Meeting

THE THOMAS PAINE MEMORIAL MEETING was held in the Conway Hall, London, on Sunday, June 7th, the day before the 150th anniversary of Paine's death. The attendance was gratifyingly good, and the varied, distinguished speakers were listened to with interest and warmly applauded.

Mr. Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, President of the World Union of Freethinkers, took the chair, and referred to his "family association" with Paine, his mother having edited Moncure Conway's *Life of Thomas Paine*, as well as works by Paine himself. He then called on Dr. Carl Bode, Cultural Attaché to the U.S. Embassy, to speak on "Paine and the American 'No'." Too much attention had lately been given to conformity in America, said Dr. Bode. True, the tendency was strong, but there was also a strong tradition of dissent. This was the tradition he dealt with: it was the American "No," and Thomas Paine was a great figure in it. There was much to learn from Paine today, above all his firm belief in the brotherhood of man.

Mr. Dennis Phombeah, Joint Secretary of the Committee of African Associations, followed and took up the theme of Paine's relevance today, especially among the emergent peoples of Africa and Asia. Paine had stood firmly against slavery and the exploitation of man by man; Africans today were fighting for what Paine fought for two centuries ago. "For us," said Mr. Phombeah, "his is a living philosophy" and we were not just celebrating an anniversary, we were dedicating or rededicating ourselves to his great principles.

Mr. Michael Foot, Editor of *Tribune*, said that the Humanist Council and the World Union of Freethinkers deserved great credit for organising the meeting. Paine, in Mr. Foot's view, was the greatest Englishman of the 18th century and one of the greatest Englishmen who ever lived. He had helped to write an earlier French Constitution which was a good deal better than the present one. As for *The Rights of Man*, it was "the greatest manifesto of democracy ever written" and it was difficult to know which to marvel at most—its immediate effect or its per-

sistence over the years. There was hardly any great democratic figure in England or the U.S.A. who didn't owe a great debt to Paine and Mr. Foot doubted if any other figure had played such a big and beneficent part in the development of America, France and England. It was right, then, to meet here in the Conway Hall and make amends for past slanders. Mr. Foot concluded by reading passages from *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*.

Dr. Ronald Fletcher, of Bedford College, University of London, dealt illuminatingly with the latter work. At a time when there was much irrationality and, indeed, something of a deliberate "flight from reason," the message of *The Age of Reason* was very relevant. It was an excellent presentation of Paine's Deism and one of the most powerful criticisms of the Bible and Christianity, rejecting revelation, miracle, mystery and prophecy and pursuing Biblical studies with brilliance and imagination. It had vigour, colour, directness of style, it was irreverent, and made very good reading. Dr. Fletcher illustrated his points with a number of passages from the book and praised Paine for upholding the splendid principles he stood for.

Mr. Bonner then called upon Mr. F. A. Ridley, President of the National Secular Society, and Mr. Christopher Brunel, to propose and second a vote of thanks to the speakers. Mr. Ridley wittily congratulated the four men and the Chairman, mentioning that, if Paine's suggestion on the abolition of slavery had been incorporated in the American Declaration of Independence, the terrible Civil War would have been avoided. Mr. Brunel likewise thanked the speakers and presented them with "Broad-sides" prepared by his father bearing quotations from Paine's works.

C.M.C.C.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE FOUNDER OF THE RED CROSS

By F. A. RIDLEY

Billy Graham in New Zealand

By ARTHUR O'HALLORAN

A SEASON OF HOT-GOSPEL EVANGELISM has just concluded in New Zealand. Billy Graham and his team of soul-savers have been here and I doubt if any other show ever received so much publicity from the press. The whole business was certainly organised very thoroughly. Just about everything that would draw the crowd was employed. Big hoardings with Billy immaculately dressed, editorial plaudits, tremendous choirs, all dressed in white, special buses, newspaper advertisements, combined organisational meetings from Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and other Churches, and, to get the Lord's special interest, a great deal of pre-campaign praying. So that people in distant parts of the country could hear the addresses, special landwires were laid, with the co-operation of the postal or broadcasting authorities. A present day Barnum, arriving with lions, tiger, circus riders and all, would never have succeeded in focussing so great attention, even in the event of one or two of his lions escaping and getting away to the New Zealand bush. The press certainly did a great job for Billy—excepting one weekly, which ran an article, "Why the bosses love Billy."

From the press reports of the meetings and interviews I have selected the following statements made by either Graham or one of his Mission associates (Dr. Wilson). The dominant features, it will be seen, were crude fundamentalism, emotionalism, and the old fear theme: Accept Christ, or—an eternity in hell.

Let us look at some of Dr. Wilson's remarks first. This man (an old friend of Billy Graham) addressed New Zealand gatherings first, before the chief evangelist arrived in the country. On the opening night of the Mission, at Carlaw Park, Auckland, Wilson said:

"You might draw your last breath tonight, or at high noon tomorrow. Are you ready to die? Are you ready to meet God; are your sins covered by the blood of Jesus Christ? Don't stand in the way of your children finding Christ. Religion is a dangerous, even damnable thing unless it is the religion of Jesus. The God of the Old Testament and the New Testament is the same God. His spirit is moving round the world." However, Dr. Wilson were merely a preliminary artist. The big turn was the arrival, a few nights later, of Dr. Billy Graham himself. He spoke to an audience reputed to number 60,000. He took an End of the World theme and the "Day of Judgment." Next morning the N.Z. *Herald* gave him six feet of news coverage in addition to photos. Here is some of the message delivered by this "giant of evangelism."

"The spirit of the Sovereign is blowing across New Zealand." (So also within a few days was a storm and flood which did tremendous damage.) "Let's all smile at the policeman. Let's write letters to people all over the world and tell them what God has done. The Bible is the only book in the world which predicts accurately what is going to happen. . . . Get ready to meet God. All that Noah had was faith. Noah was terrified. I am asking you to come as Noah came. . . . Don't come on a deathbed repentance. You had better come whilst you have the chance. Let's pack the churches tomorrow. I [Billy] have more than Noah had. I've got not only the Bible but the leaders of the world to back up what I say." An Anglican Assistant Bishop gave Benediction at the end of the meeting.

Nothing that Billy Graham said, either in his sermons or interviews, contained anything which could—or did, offend Big Business, either in his own "Land of the

Dollar," or in New Zealand. Or the politicians. There was no criticism of the Armaments Rings—the Merchants of Death. There was no call for abolition of the death penalty. The frightful perils of nuclear war were dismissed as things secondary to sin. Racialism was touched on but only in terms of defending his own Deep South in the United States, or at least in passing it off as a record they need feel no sense of shame about.

Fifty years ago, Samuel Butler, in writing about religion, put this on record: "We must first learn to distinguish between this [religion] and vested interest." A great many people, it seems, have yet to do a bit of thinking on this subject. When they do, Billy Graham Missions are likely to flop, financially and otherwise, despite help from the press, a welcome at Government House and the approbation of vested interest.

Here is a welcome sign. People are beginning to query the use and value of such missions and to ask such questions as: Are the newspapers going to charge less for their advertisements or the business profiteers who supported the Mission going to reduce their prices? I can answer the questions and say most confidently—No. They will not. The Lord's work and Big Business march together, blatantly and unashamed.

AN OPEN LETTER

TO REV. MOTHER, M. CELESTE, O.P., PH.D., BOSTON.

IN THE FREETHINKER of 3/4/59, a reviewer of your recently published revised edition of a Biology text quotes you as saying. "Up to the present, no scientist has been able to produce proof either through speculation and observation of variation in form or through similarity of structure that one plant or animal species has evolved into another plant or animal species." This is not true: every virologist knows that there is no doubt about demonstrable mutation and variation in viruses. In Australia, Dr. Fenner, of Canberra, has proved that Australian wild rabbits show in a few years mutation in respect of reaction to myxomatosis. I myself have noted features of permanent variation possibly mutation in the same animals in comparison with their English ancestors all in a matter of less than 150 years. The marked differences in my view make a new sub-species.

Then you say, "It is a revealed truth that all human beings now on earth are descendants of Adam and Eve, the first parents of the human race". If this is true has it not struck you that the third generation after Adam and Eve must have been born as a result of incest? and the fourth generation as the result of incest or first cousin-marriage or both? Incest is not only a crime, it is a mortal sin, while cousinhood is an absolute bar to marriage (in your Church) unless sanctioned by a bishop or priest and as there were, happily, none of these gentlemen around 40 or 50 years after the "Creation" the begetting of two generations was the occasion of mortal sin.

Can you reconcile all this sinning with your "creation" theory? Or, if the incest and cousin-marriage was lawful then, why not now? I would like finally to comment on the word "revealed" above. This is the first time I have ever come across the use of such a term in my 50 years in science; it sounds so queer, I should like to know in what precise sense it is used.

J. V. DUHIG.

This Believing World

A girl of fifteen appeared on TV recently because she complained that so much of a modern church service was quite out of date, and she proffered her own version, written for modern young people. The result was, she gave it in a Birmingham church, and attracted more than 250 teenagers. One of these thought the new service was "a bit long-winded," but he was coming to the next all the same. Did the talented young lady, however, query anything in her religion? Nothing whatever. She was an out-and-out believer, and when she was interviewed on the TV joyously affirmed her complete faith in everything. And she had no idea that re-writing the silly archaisms in Christianity into more modern language left that religion just as silly.

★

On a commission from the "Sunday Express," that stout religious paper, "an author and historian" named Geoffrey Ashe has been visiting "scenes of the Gospels" and, as one would expect, everything in the Gospels can now be seen to be true. Mr. Ashe even credits Prof. Gilbert Murray, "that great agnostic scholar," as having "turned toward Christianity at the end of his life." Thus are lies at first born, and then perpetuated by Christian journals and "historians." It was well said that once you give a Christian lie a good start nobody can ever catch up with it.

★

That very popular movie actor, Mr. Gary Cooper, must have surprised many of his friends by getting converted to Roman Catholicism. Both his wife and daughter were Catholics but, as Mr. Cooper told *News Chronicle* the other day, he himself was "not a religious man." That being the case, we really should not be surprised that he promptly got converted. No question was necessary about trying to find the truth; only, as he said, "religion is a sort of check-up on yourself." It is a wonderful argument to account for falling for the ignorance, superstition, and credulity which so well distinguishes the Roman faith.

★

How strong indeed is the hold of the Roman Church can be seen in the decision of the Duke of Rutland, a Protestant, to bring up his newly-born son as a Catholic. The Duchess is a Catholic, and no doubt it prevents family rows to give in to her wish. The child in these matters is, of course, never consulted. We wonder whether any of our "aristocracy"—apart from Bertrand Russell, who is an Earl—even know that there is such a thing as Freethought in the world, let alone read anything about it? But no doubt, even in this, "the old order changeth."

★

In any case, some disgruntled Catholic has written to the *Daily Express* to tell us, as the Duchess was married in a register office, she is not really married "according to the Roman Church." But, of course, the only legal marriage in this country is not a religious one but a civil one no matter what the Church of Rome thinks. It is not Rome which governs this country, but the laws of the land. And there are few things which can disrupt these laws as much as religion.

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A 22-year-old labourer who had had eight previous convictions (two for assaulting little girls) murdered one at last and was given life imprisonment. We notice this particular crime because the clever detective who caught him remarked that he had "a white prayer book" like one some children had seen a man reading shortly before the crime was committed. No doubt, the murderer was, in spite of everything, a good Christian—though we doubt

whether he is the kind of advertisement for Christ which could ever be popular with Christians.

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No one need be surprised to learn that in Bournemouth a few doctors are co-operating with Mr. H. Edwards in cases "of incurable ailments." After all, most doctors are Christians, and therefore they believe in the "miracles" of healing by Jesus who, in reality, has cured and is still curing the hundreds of thousands of "spirit" cures performed so easily by Mr. Edwards. If Jesus cures incurable ailments through an unqualified practitioner like him, how much more likely will he cure through properly qualified medical men. All we are now waiting to see as a start is how many complete cures of children born blind will result from the co-operation, as well as properly authenticated cases of cancer. And what about a deaf and dumb and blind child being literally restored to normality?

God and the Drought

"THE BIBLE or the power of human will—which put a full-stop to the unwelcome drought that afflicted the land for some twenty-eight unblest days? Thus was sparked off a very academic debate on the recent water crisis that hit almost all Ghana. Voters for the power of human will carried the day."

I paused when I read the above opening remarks of an article written by Joe Panford in the March issue of *The Ghanaian*. I remembered the efforts of countless missionaries and the millions of pounds wasted on converting the "heathen" in darkest Africa. Has it all been in vain? Dreadful thought! Scepticism stands out strongly here. Ghana has been in the grip of a severe water shortage—no light matter in that tropical clime. The "heathens" were forced to forego their morning baths, and what little water there was was drastically rationed. Some areas had no water at all and the people here had to queue as early as 3 a.m. to get their quota. Unhappily, as in our own "Christian" country, there were those only too ready to cash in on the situation. "Dig your own wells, we have the materials," said an advert. And, in Mr. Panford's words, soft drinks were "upped in price," while water sold at 6d.—and sometimes 9d.—a bucket.

"Then," the writer goes on, "the Bible stepped in. The Reverend Father Arthur Howarth led his congregation in prayer for rain. Two or three days afterwards there was a fair amount of drizzle. It rained afterwards. Thus far and no farther for the Bible."

But the drought continued. And to make matters worse, what little water there was could not be evenly distributed because of the varying levels of the ground. "As if to add insult to injury, leakages resulting from mechanical failures occurred."

At this point, Dr. Nkrumah returned to the country. Nominal Christian he may be, but he wasted no time praying. He simply got cracking and set 400 National Builders' Brigade hands digging up old wells. The water from these wells could easily be tested for deposits and the Government said that other chemical analysis would be done before the wells would be opened for public use. Not only this, but work was completed on a pipeline for conducting water from the Volta. Static water tanks were brought into use, and mobile tankers went about the streets supplying water to the householders.

And so we reach Mr. Panford's closing remarks—still, I regret to say, breathing scepticism: "In Sekondi and other places also afflicted by water shortage, similar moves engendered by the power of the human will, were initiated. And who said Will Power could not win?"

E.C.T.

THE FREETHINKER

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Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

S. HAYNES WILLIAMS.—We saw the reports of the new Messiah. We wait and tremble.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (rear of Morley Street Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. CORINA and DAY.

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

London (Finsbury Square, E.C.2).—Every Wednesday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and C. MCCALL.

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

London (Tower Hill).—Every 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).—Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 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, 6.30 p.m.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street).—Sunday, June 21st, 6.45 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Fairies, Spooks, and Flying Saucers."

Dagenham Branch N.S.S. (214 Fitzstephen Road, Dagenham).—Friday, June 19th, 7.45 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Thomas Paine and Secularism."

Kingston Technical College Catholic Group (Fassett Road, Kingston).—Friday, June 26th, 5.30 p.m.: Debate—"Man Made God." For, HECTOR HAWTON; against, Father J. CHRISTIE, S.J.

Leeds Humanist Group (Guildford Hotel, Headrow, Leeds).—Thursday, June 25th, 7.30 p.m.: A Meeting. Further details from N. Pennington, 33 Primley Park Crescent, Leeds, 17.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 21st, 7 p.m.: W. E. SWINTON, PH.D., "Crossing the Atlantic."

Notes and News

AT the time of going to press the printing trades dispute has not been settled. Every effort will be made to keep THE FREETHINKER published and despatched. But we ask our readers to make allowances should there be any extension of this dispute with all its attendant difficulties.

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Mr. W. CRONAN, Honorary Secretary of Edinburgh Branch of the National Secular Society, reports another successful visit of Mr. W. J. ("Paddy") O'Neill to the outdoor speaking place on the Mound. Mr. O'Neill was advertised (in the local Press) to speak on a Sunday evening in May, but—as Mr. Cronan says—"owing to the fact that he created quite a stir during his last visit here... a

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £228 5s.; A. Rosen (U.S.A.), 12s. 8d.; S. Rosenthal, 5s.; W. A. Morrison, 15s.; T. C. Owen, 2s. 6d.; Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Parnall, 10s.; W. H. Franklin, 1s. 6d.; A. Allman, 2s. 6d.; Anon, 1s.—Total to date, June 12th, 1959, £230 15s. 2d.

great number of people had gathered round our platform in the afternoon and I was compelled to ask him to address the afternoon meeting too." In the evening, continues Mr. Cronan, "he had a still greater audience, and the following Sunday likewise." And the Edinburgh Branch would like to say how indebted it is to Mr. O'Neill for his splendid help during his sojourn in the Scottish capital.

★

ACCORDING to *The Official Catholic Directory*, just out (and quoted by *Time*, May 25th, 1959), the number of Roman Catholics in the United States has risen by 47.8% since 1949. The present total, 39,505,475, shows an increase of 3,481,498 during 1958 and the number of ordained priests, 52,689, is up 1,876; nuns and sisters 164,922 (up 347), and brothers, 9,709 (up 15). For the 13th consecutive year, the Roman Church claims more than 100,000 adult converts—140,411 to be precise. There is no mention (in *Time*) of any losses, of course, and the thirty-nine and a half million is certainly much too high. Still, there is no question that the influence of the Church has grown in America and a Catholic President is now by no means an impossibility.

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WE agree with the Minister of Works' decision not to allow the placing of a crib in Trafalgar Square at Christmas, as requested by the Vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Like the Ministry official who wrote to the Vicar (May 25th), we sympathise with the object of attracting funds for World Refugee Year, but there is no need whatever—nor any special significance—in a Christian crib in this connection. (Many of the millions of refugees are Chinese or Arabs.) We cannot prevent the placing of cribs in Woolworth's and other shop windows, but we should do all we can to prevent the use of public places for displaying them. And we are sorry to see *Reynolds News* contrasting use of the Square for the crib as an "innocent symbol of Christian love" with Mosley and other agitators preaching race hatred. This is emotional rubbish and we hope the Minister will resist it. A refugee fund collection in the Square, if you like, and a crib in St. Martin's, if the Vicar likes, but no crib in the Square.

★

WE read in the *Scottish Daily Express* (25/5/59) that Mr. Donald Stewart, provost of the little Perthshire burgh of Doune, stayed away from the Kirkin' of the Council this year. "I have never attended a kirkin' since I went on the council," he said, and "I have not gone to church for years and I am no longer a member." But ex-provost John Rentoul was a little taken aback. He had been on the council for 20 years and this was the first time a provost had been absent from the kirkin'. "I think the provost ought to attend," he said. Presumably, this means whether the provost is a Christian or not. In other words, it is appearance that counts, no matter how hypocritical.

PAPAL INFALLIBILITY?

All men are subject to error.

All popes are men.

Ergo, no pope is infallible.

T. T. PLUS.

Laughter Forbidden

By COLIN McCALL

THE FREETHINKER has never been—or pretended to be—a genteel paper. It has no use for the theory that opinions should be treated with deference, no matter how absurd they might be. If an idea is silly, it believes in saying so, and if this means we must forgo recognition in the best quarters, that may or may not be unfortunate, but it cannot be helped. When G. W. Foote ridiculed the Bible with words and drawings, he did so simply because he considered it deserved ridicule. The thought of treating an absurdity with respect, let alone with solemnity, was foreign to Foote's nature: it was repugnant to Chapman Cohen too, and so it remains to THE FREETHINKER today. I hope it will ever be so.

It is well, though, to recognise that our attitude will cause us much exasperation, precisely because it isn't shared by society as a whole. Even many who share our irreligion do not share our belief in the therapeutic effects of laughter: not, at any rate, in the realm of ideas. It isn't done to laugh at Dr. Joseph Banks Rhine with his card-turning, dice-throwing and telepathic horses. After all he is Professor of Parapsychology at Duke University, North Carolina, and although the late Joseph F. Rinn pointed out some years ago (*Searchlight on Psychical Research*) that Rhine's claims "have become so preposterous as to be unworthy of any level-headed person's serious consideration," they are still treated with considerable seriousness. I wish I could confirm Dr. Edward Roux's statement that this isn't the case (THE FREETHINKER, 24/4/59), but I can't. Two years ago at Hampstead, Dr. D. J. West—severe though regretful critic of Lourdes—was appalled that I should dare question the validity of Rhine's ESP claims (at a "Death and Survival" discussion in the Rosslyn Hall, April 26th, 1957). Four years before that, a Humanist, Professor Antony Flew, had treated them with a good deal more respect than they deserved in *A New Approach to Psychical Research* ["so important that it deserves individual mention . . . is . . . the work inspired by Dr. J. B. Rhine"; "the great landmark," etc.]. Even Mr. Martin Gardner in his splendid *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* thought it justifiable to say that "Rhine is clearly not a pseudo-scientist to a degree even remotely comparable to that of most of the men discussed in this book," when that is precisely what Rhine is: a fact which becomes clear on any critical reading of his work. (He has a Doctorate and a Professorship, of course, but these, alas, are no guarantee of a scientific outlook.) And I have little doubt that the Rhine-inspired prayers for plants "experiments" at the Religious Research Foundation in Los Angeles will in turn inspire perfectly serious imitations on both sides of the Atlantic. After all, are they sillier than, say, the dice-tests, and can't both be shown to involve astronomic mathematical probability factors?

It may be exasperating, but I'm afraid we shall have to endure it for a long time to come. I fear there will be a good many more flying saucer stories and television interviews with the story-tellers. On the BBC recently we had the now widely-known Adamski and, on May 21st, we were introduced (in "Lifeline") to one of his English equivalents, Mr. George King. This character claimed, not only to have met visitors from Mars, Venus and Saturn (and possibly other planets, too, for all I know), but to be able to speak (in the most theatrical of BBC accents)

as Aetherios the Venusian, at will it seems, in a trance—complete with sun glasses, of course. And he favoured us with a tape-recorded report by his mother of a trip she had taken in a flying saucer.

Fair enough, you may say, as an amusing interlude, but amusement was the one thing the BBC would not permit its audience to get from the programme if it could help it. Astronomer Dr. Dewhirst might be tactless enough to show the absurdity of Mr. King's claims, but the presence of two psychiatrists (and one a Jungian!) ensured the proper audience-reaction. No laughter here! However foolish Mr. King's stories might be, they should not be ridiculed: they deserve solemn consideration as expressions of the fears of our time. Etc., etc., blah, blah!

Likewise we must stifle our impatience at interviews with "scientific" ghost-hunters and poltergeist-detectors. But we must be forgiven for wondering what is going to come next.

It mustn't be thought, though, that the BBC is the only offender. The Press, for the most part, is quite as bad. And an example is at hand. Dr. Rhine's English counterpart, Dr. S. G. Soal, has been in the news again, having just published a new book, *The Mind Readers* (in conjunction with Mr. H. T. Bowden and published by the ever-faithful Faber and Faber). I should say right away that I haven't yet obtained the book through my library and am loath to spend 30 shillings on it, so I cannot give a personal assessment. But for the present that is unnecessary: I am concerned with newspaper criticism—or lack of it!

Perhaps it was unsurprising that Mr. Richard Findlater in the *Sunday Dispatch* (29/3/59) should call it "a remarkable report" and say that the Jones boy cousins "have proved the existence of telepathy by record-breaking results in card-guessing." That the "evidence for telepathy" should now seem "overwhelming" to Mr. Raymond Mortimer (*The Sunday Times*, 19/4/59) might not be unexpected, either. (He fears, though, that it will be some time before Oxford or Cambridge follow "the bold example of Duke in the United States"—praise be for small mercies!) But I confess I was rather shaken when Mr. Philip Robinson wrote (in the *New Statesman*, 16/5/59): "As such tests are bound to be monotonous for the guinea-pigs, graded cash rewards were offered as an incentive, and it is not surprising that this led at one stage to a brief attempt at cheating. The 'code' was immediately detected, however, and as the many independent observers comment, this episode only tends to reinforce the credibility of the rest of the trials." What have we come to? How perversely can we argue?

Fortunately, I also read *The Manchester Guardian*, for here, at last, was genuine criticism—April 24th, 1959. In Mr. C. E. M. Hansel's view, the book presented "no evidence to support the hypothesis of telepathy" because "In every one of the 'successful' experiments it was possible for Glyn [Jones] to receive information either from Ieuan or from an intermediary," and "In every case where these possibilities were not present, or when they were removed, the score remained at the chance level." Which other review mentioned that the boys obtained high scores when in different rooms *provided the door was open and they were in line with each other through the open door?* Where else were Dr. Soal's own words quoted: "It soon

became apparent that Glyn (or Ieuan) was suffering from a psychological inhibition with regard to closed doors and shifting out of alignment"? I saw them only in Mr. Hansel's review. And Mr. Hansel indicated some ways in which trickery could have occurred. Furthermore, he ended on an all-too-rare irreverent note. Glyn and Ieuan Jones will not, he said, "like being described as 'inexperienced and bungling schoolboys' [in *The Mind Readers*] who 'could never hope to deceive us [Soal and Bowden] for more than a few minutes'." "Not after what they've done!" exclaimed Mr. Hansel.

We need a good deal more of such irreverence. It should be clear to everybody that Soal—like Rhine—is essentially a pseudo-scientist. Telepathy—he once said (*The Sunday Times*, 23/5/54)—"is important because it challenges the universality of certain limiting principles of modern science." Letting himself go a little more, he wrote (*Evening Standard*, 27/11/57) about man having "a transcendental self that exists in an eternal present" (whatever that may mean!) and told us we must think of the soul "as a thing immaterial and outside space and time. And as such . . . probably immortal."

Vulgar or not, I say humbug!

The Humanist Council

Background

The Humanist Council which held its first meeting on May 12th is successor to both the Humanist Association and the old Humanist Council formed in 1950 to link the Rationalist Press Association, the Ethical Union, and South Place Ethical Society, which was not at that time affiliated to the Ethical Union. This former Humanist Council included from 1953 representation of the National Secular Society. In 1955 the Ethical Union and the RPA formed a Joint Development Committee, mainly to promote new groups and to co-ordinate policy in extending the movement. Later, the idea of a merger of the RPA and the EU was canvassed, and when this appeared not to be immediately practicable, the Humanist Association was formed in 1957 to supersede the Joint Development Committee and to serve as an interim organ of collaboration between the two associations, in view of the Second Congress of the International Humanist and Ethical Union which took place in London in July, 1957. This was understood to be an interim arrangement, and in 1958 the Ethical Union invited the RPA and the NSS to nominate representatives to consult with theirs and "make proposals for a permanent organ to represent all the elements of the humanist movement in Britain and to facilitate their close co-operation and common action." The Report of this Joint Committee was accepted by all three bodies, and brought into existence the new Humanist Council which met for the first time on May 12th.

Constitution and Purpose

The Council is constituted of three representatives of each of the bodies, and has power to co-opt in a consultative capacity representatives of humanist groups not represented through any of the three bodies. Its work will be financed by equal contributions from the three associations. Mr. Joseph Reeves, M.P. (RPA) has been elected chairman, Mr. Colin McCall (NSS) treasurer, Mr. H. Blackham (EU) secretary.

Each association will remain autonomous, but the Council exists to promote maximum co-operation, and also to represent the movement in public relations on questions of common concern. In particular, the Humanist Council will have two nominees to represent it on the Humanist

Consultative Council which has just been set up to represent humanist interests in dealing with the BBC and the ITA. This Consultative Council, a body of distinguished Humanists who have undertaken to represent humanist opinion in this way, will be autonomous, but will work closely with the Humanist Council.

There are certain other questions on which it should be possible to pursue a common policy through the Humanist Council, for example, on the relations of Church and State, on religion in schools, and, when occasion serves, on certain law reforms (abortion, divorce, euthanasia, blasphemy).

Thus the Humanist Council has now the basis for long-term work of a modest but necessary kind; and its members hope that their collaboration at headquarters level will be repeated throughout the country at local level.

Minutes of all meetings of the Council will be circulated to all members of each of the governing bodies. The present office address is 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8. Telephone: Western 2341.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE DEATH PENALTY

It very rarely happens that I disagree with Mr. Ridley, but on the question of capital punishment I do. My first reaction to his leading article on the Marwood case was: *May a Rationalist think with his heart?*

Why all this striking sympathy with the murderer? The agonies of his victim until death came and those of his relatives are hardly mentioned or quickly forgotten. Man cannot be conceived of as outside society; hence the question boils down to this: Is it a gain or a loss to society if we get rid of murderers? Who was the better asset to society, he or his victim? My verdict in the Marwood case simply was: Whoever carries weapons and uses them on other human beings has put himself outside civilised society.

I do not for a moment believe that the death penalty is a deterrent; of course, it is not. People who in cold blood commit crimes against mankind are not normal and lack the moral inhibitions of normal persons, whether or not they risk the death penalty. As they cannot be deterred, with or without capital punishment, this question does not arise; the point in question is self-protection. If it be a crime to kill a human fiend who by his deeds has proved to be a social risk all his life, why is it less criminal to call youngsters up and send them into battle to be killed by others? Or, for that matter, to poison our atmosphere with deadly strontium and maintain that the catastrophic point is not yet reached—though nobody really knows when it is.

If you want healthy plants, you must weed your garden. Equally, we feel entitled to kill off ferocious and harmful beasts and pests, but when it comes to protect ourselves against human misfits and demoniacal freaks, we feel scruples. Ask the mother of a murdered child whether she were prepared to pay for the maintenance of the murderer, together with the wardens to keep a useless life behind lock and key. Prisons have never improved any character, rather the reverse. And when the fiend, whose life has been saved, comes out, everybody is in constant danger.

Some people struck the glorious idea: Let them work for the benefit of their victims and relations. But can you make a man work? There are instances where prisoners have allowed themselves to be beaten to death rather than work. No, society has a right to rid itself of its deadly enemies, after a proper legal procedure has established the guilt; and even if it can be argued that judicial errors do occur, they are far too infinitesimal in relation to just verdicts to allow social risks to be incurred.

In the thirties, when democratic countries of the West gave shelter to Nazi victims, I wrote to the Soviet Union asking why she did not do her share and grant asylum to persecuted German Jews. The reply was: There are quite a few Jews who are but frustrated Nazis and could easily have been induced to work for Hitler abroad. Lenin once said: If in a group of twelve one of them must be a traitor, it is better to shoot all the twelve comrades rather than to endanger the Party.

P. G. ROY.

FREETHINKER?

The letter from K. Underhill, *THE FREETHINKER*, May 22nd, illustrates clearly and simply why many convinced and outspoken secularists prefer to unite under the banner of Humanism.

Mr. Underhill claims to be "a Freethinker in the truest sense of the word," and he may be right! However, in his case free thought has led him to right wing racialism. Must we accept the aid of such allies in our fight against religion? I think not, but let us make it clear to friend and foe alike, that we stand for something more than secularism; that we believe in the brotherhood of man; and wish to achieve a society without class or racial distinctions, as well as without superstition.

The term Humanist seems to imply this regard for our fellow humans more than does *Freethinker*. Therefore, although I am a member of the N.S.S. and would welcome an injection of its militancy into the more timid R.P.A. and E.U., I shall continue to recruit for Humanism sooner than secularism.

JIM RADFORD,

Secretary, Slough Humanist Group.

[We refer Mr. Radford to Mr. Underhill's own words: "I could not, therefore, uphold all the aims of the National Secular Society." No doubt there are some self-styled "Humanists" that Mr. Radford would also want to disown.—Ed.]

K. Underhill stated that he shares THE FREETHINKER'S views on religion, but disagrees strongly as regards politics. As THE FREETHINKER has no Party politics, being neither Tory, Liberal or Labour, how can K.U. "disagree most strongly as regards politics"? K. Underhill appears to be labouring under a misapprehension.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

National Labour Party member K. Underhill (the N.L.P. "is pledged to keep *Britain for the British*") may be anti-church—but is he a Freethinker? If he is then it is equally certain that Hitler and many of his Nazis were also Freethinkers. Let me assume he is single and ask him if he falls in love with a foreign girl who, like himself, belongs to a similar organisation (say, the Swedish National Labour Party—if one such exists), where are they going to get married and settle down?

ERNIE CROSSWELL.

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

Mr. Peter Moore's article, on the much maligned Machiavelli, was very welcome and goes some way towards a better understanding of this great thinker and civil servant of his day, and if modern thought is at last, after four and a half centuries, swinging in Machiavelli's favour, perhaps the following extract of a letter, purporting to have been written by Machiavelli to his great friend Guicciardini when he was being attacked in his own day for having written *The Prince*, may help still further to a better understanding of this great man:—

"I come now to the last branch of my charge: That I teach Princes villainy, and how to enslave . . . If any man will read over my book . . . with impartiality and ordinary charity, he will perceive that it is not my intention to recommend that government, or those men there described to the world, much less to teach men how to trample upon good men, and all that is sacred and venerable upon earth, laws, religion, honesty and what not.

"If I have been a little too punctual in describing these monsters in all their lineaments and colours, I hope mankind will know them, the better to avoid them, my treatise being both a satire against them, and a true character of them."

It is likely that future scholars of the life of Machiavelli will reveal that not only was he a great civil servant of Florence, organiser of its Home Guard against the roving bands of condottieri, a trusted diplomat, necessitating long absences from his wife, towards whom he was a good husband, and a man fully comprehending the glories of the Renaissance period in which he lived, but also its savageries.

A. R. ANDERSON.

SHAW'S LIFE FORCE

In your answers to Correspondents of the 8th inst., you state: "As Bernard Shaw was a stranger to laboratory experiments at the scientific level, his 'Life Force' carries no authority whatever."

If you take the trouble to read Shaw's works, particularly his masterly exposure and break down of the pretensions of most "scientists," you will find that Shaw knew more about "laboratory experiments at the scientific level" than scientists themselves.

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Like doctors and theologians—and, I may add, Freethinkers—scientists differ among themselves and have as many schools of thought as there are sciences.

Shaw needs no "authority" for his postulation of a "Life Force," and Creative Evolution. He is his own "authority" as I am, or you are, in accepting or rejecting it.

You scorn the use of "authority" when Roman Catholics use it in defence of their creed, but use it yourself to defend your standpoint. May I ask you, therefore, upon whose, or what, "authority" you base your statement that, as far as "laboratory experiments at scientific level" are concerned, Shaw "carries no authority whatever"?

WALTER RIDLEY.

A NOTE ON THE ABOVE

Shaw dramatised science like he dramatised life. Evolution became a drama with the Life Force as its Hero. But it is in fact no more than a poetic synonym for the actual fertility of matter. As a separate entity acting on its own initiative, the scientist can do nothing with it. The law of parsimony cuts it out completely. In any case, what is it? What is its point of contact with matter and what are the controls for detecting its presence?

The difference between scientific authority and religious authority is the difference between verifiable evidence and non-verifiable dogma.—G.H.T.

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