

The Freethinker

Volume LXXX—No. 4

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

[An address given to the 33rd International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers held at Brussels University, September, 1959]

Professor de Brouckère, daughter of the Belgian Liberal Statesman Louis de Brouckère, went to school in England and speaks our language perfectly. She is a Professor of Chemistry at Brussels University, and was attending an International Conference of Chemists at Munich until the Saturday of the Freethought Congress for which she travelled back specially.

IN ORDER NOT TO BE MIS-UNDERSTOOD by those who would wish to misunderstand anything said here, it must first be made clear that we do not defend any out-of-date science; that, if we can demonstrate scientifically that the Virgin Mary cannot mount to heaven as

a creature of flesh and blood, and that the god made in man's form whom we encounter in Green Pastures is purely mythical, yet the existence of a god can neither be affirmed nor denied since it is a word without precise meaning. Anyhow that is not our problem. Freethought is not, as some make out, pure negation; and we hold that it is not enough to declare oneself an unbeliever. To be one of us, to be a true Freethinker, is a positive act; it is to be a seeker after truth in the sole light of human resources, of reason and experience. This has been the definition of a Freethinker, at least since 1904 when it was set out at a Congress similar to this one [at Romel]. It is, moreover, a definition which pleases me, since it indicates that Freethought is not something we must demand as a right, nor anything we can acquire from without; it is, on the other hand, a duty; something which we must conquer for ourselves. This ideal of personal liberty of the mind is modern; it did not exist in antiquity, where we find the heroes of the Iliad toys of the gods, who constantly interfere in human affairs; the seeds of that crushing theology according to which man acts as God directs.

The Freethinker endeavours to free his mind of just that, the intervention of the extraneous god, and to regard himself as responsible for his own acts and judgment, finding in himself the formation of his destiny.

Science

Science is defined by Littré merely as the totality of systems of knowledge of a material nature. Pascal said of Science that "all systems which are subject to experience and investigation and reasoning must expand in the search for perfection; our forbears found them in a rudimentary state and we leave them to those who come after us a little more advanced than we received them."

The scientist, even as the Freethinker, must examine the facts, co-ordinate them and interpret them as a theory which will be constantly under review in the light of new facts. We note here the complete identity in method of the Scientist and the Freethinker.

Every research scientist, be he nominally Atheist, Catholic, Buddhist, Protestant or what you will, applies in his work, in his laboratory, the methods of the Rationalist. We must recognise that, save in rare exceptions perhaps,

religion is today no longer a hindrance to scientific advance. Yet we must emphasise that there is between us and "the others" a profound difference. They — those others — keep their science for the laboratory, an attribute of a privileged caste, whereas we, the Freethinkers, proclaim publicly that this method which unquestionably gives correct results in science and technology, is of value to all, working man, business man, housewife, no matter whom, and

should be applied to the whole conduct of life.

Courage

Moreover, as we, the "dull" materialists, attach greater importance than do those others to "spiritual values," we wish to see man in his true dignity. We do not adopt one attitude on

weekdays for the laboratory, and another on Sundays in church or on election days at the ballot box. In every domain of life we wish to see men upright and right-doing, admitting nothing as truth which has not been tested and confirmed scientifically. This application of science to daily ordinary life offers great difficulty: it requires high moral courage; something more than that physical bravery which makes us die for our convictions; the moral courage which makes us live to advance and defend them.

It was of this courage that Jaurès said, "It is to accept the new . . . to welcome and explore the infinite complexity of detail and meanwhile to throw light on the vast and confused reality, to see how it is organised and to note the marvellous beauty of its forms and rhythms; courage overcomes its own errors from which it may suffer, but without losing heart and abandoning the way; courage is the love of life and the tranquil view of death; it is the search of the ideal joined with the understanding of the real; it is self-sacrifice for a great cause without consideration of the result or reward; it is to seek for truth and declare it aloud; it is never to submit to the domination of a triumphant lie, nor to join in unthinking applause or fanatical abuse."

Few are those today, ladies and gentlemen, who show such courage. Are we inferior to our fathers? I do not think so. Life has become perhaps more complicated today. We feel that we must trust others for the solution of problems we have not the time to study ourselves. But let us be sure of these whom we trust.

Freedom of Thought

Do not deceive yourselves. Freedom of thought is now attacked from all sides. We are told that action is now urgent, and that there is no room for choice; thinking will hinder action. What foolishness! fruitful action must be based on deep fruitful thought.

And freedom of thought is nothing without freedom of expression. This has been recognised in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. It is a right which we claim and strive for. Nevertheless, more and more as the days pass, it is denied to us. When Frédéric Offet sought a publisher for his book *L'Equivoque Catholique*, he was told: "We are not free; we shall lose many of our authors if we pub-

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Science and Freethought

By PROFESSOR LUCIA de BROUCKERE

lish your book." In many countries, not only the Press, but books are censored without, apparently, a single voice being raised in protest.

The great adversary is the institution, god-worshipping or godless, which requires submission and unity from its members. This freedom of expression, which men seem so ready to sacrifice in many lands in order to win the power that comes from all saying simultaneously "Yes" or voting "No," whichever is commanded, is, believe me, the most powerful agent for progress. Those systems built on liberty, respectful of the liberty of the individual, are alone noble and worthwhile.

Where can freedom be best fought for? I say, as many have said before me, that it is in the schools.

Struggle for the Schools

My country, Belgium, is — and I use the present tense — the field of an unceasing "cold war," the struggle for the schools. It is commonly agreed that the parents of a child have the right to choose for their children the education which they judge best. It seems to me, however, that

there is a greater right; the right of the child to be brought up free to choose when of adult age, free from indoctrination and deformation of the mind; free to choose, I claim, the ideals which are to be the lodestar of its life.

A few days ago, weary somewhat of chemistry, I sought at Munich a book to while away an hour; and I came across a work written some 50 years ago in English; a work which had, I understand, much success at the time, though it was new to me: *Father and Son* by Sir Edmund Gosse, in which the author describes in unforgettable terms, the struggle which lasted throughout his childhood and adolescence, to free himself from the tyranny of his father, a puritan of the most severe type. I feel, ladies and gentlemen, that it is our duty to see that children should never have to go through such an experience. That they should be led on the way to Free Enquiry and not be taught dogmas from which they must set themselves free before they can exercise their own judgment with prejudice.

This, then, is my conclusion. Freedom of Thinking must begin with the children; they have their rights. See, my friends, that they get them!

"The Rationalist Annual"

By JACK GORDON

I MUST CONFESS to a slight feeling of disappointment with this year's *Rationalist Annual*; not that the writing is bad — far from it. All the well-known names make their reappearance this year — Professors Haldane and Flew, Lord Chorley and others. The trouble is, I feel, in the balance of the book: too many essays with abstract themes and too few like P. M. Jackson's brilliant and provocative "The Religion of Advertising." But perhaps I judge on too high a standard. If so, it is a standard that the *Annual* itself has set.

Mr. Jackson's essay is a satire on modern methods of commercial advertising and also, to some extent, a criticism of advertising generally as practised in the Western World. One must agree with him that much of present-day advertising is banal in the extreme. The detergent ads., the soaps guaranteed to make you beautiful, the health-protecting filter tips on cigarettes — these are but a few of the many crazes debunked in amusing fashion by Mr. Jackson. Some interesting data is quoted on the manner in which advertisers slant their ideas so as to appeal to the potential consumer. Ads with status appeal are commonplace. Others appeal to the average person's dread of non-conformity. Appetite hunger is created by irrational appeals to our emotions — never to our reason! Presumably modern advertising will cease to pay when the public becomes sufficiently educated in the real values of life to withstand such exploitation. One cannot do justice to Mr. Jackson's essay in a short review; it has to be read, and once read, it will make you think!

Professor J. B. S. Haldane has some interesting things to say about thinking — but in a different context. Here we enter the scientific field. Haldane's essay, "On Expecting the Unexpected" attempts to show the importance of training the observing powers to notice the seemingly unimportant results of experiments, the discrepancies which are so easily dismissed as determination errors and so on. The ability to challenge fundamental assumptions, to bring a radically new approach to problems, while it cannot be taught, can at least be encouraged — or discouraged! The yardstick of our progress in the future may well be the extent to which our scientific educational system encourages men to look for the unexpected result rather than the expected one.

Dr. Glanville Williams shows how our legal system needs

bringing into line with modern thought on such questions as euthanasia, abortion law reform, homosexuality, bigamy and divorce. The title, "Crime and Moral Wrongdoing," indicates the important distinction Dr. Williams seeks to establish.

Professor Anthony Flew discusses Pascal's Wager and, with some neat argumentation, demolishes the Catholic argument that the only "safe" bet is to bet on God. And, for those who revel in philosophical disputation (alas, I am not one of them), Dr. E. H. Hutten discusses the perennial mind-body problem. A good prerequisite for those entering the philosophic arena is a sound training in General Semantics. Dr. Hutten appears to be in agreement with me here, for he ascribes the failure to solve the mind-body problem to a faulty philosophical tradition based upon the ancient Greek view of man as consisting of two separate entities — body and mind. Thus, if we continue to split verbally things which may not be split in fact, we can hardly be surprised if our answers fail to make sense.

"Advances in Psychiatry" by Dr. Clifford Allen, is a brief survey of progress in the treatment of mental diseases, culminating in the insulin shock cure and the surgical operation on the brain known as prefrontal leucotomy. Some mention might have been made of more recent advances, such as the possibilities opened up by stereotaxic surgery, and the research now going on into the apparently elusive tie-up between schizophrenia and blood chemistry. It is an interesting conjecture that chemical compounds may succeed in curing certain mental states which have hitherto proved quite impervious to purely psychological appeals.

I have space only to notice the remainder.

Dr. J. Bronowski pin-points the true values of science, while F. H. George outlines a possible philosophy for the common man in the light of modern scientific thought. Lord Chorley's "The Humanist Approach to Social Problems" is a fine comparison of the humanist and religious approach to social problems like divorce, homosexuality and the like.

S. Chandrasekhar asks "Is India a Nation?" and the whole is rounded off by D. J. Johnston with a discussion of "Education in the U.S.S.R."

[*The Rationalist Annual*, 1960, Watts & Co., London. Cloth 7s. 6d., paper 5s.]

Aid to Roman Catholic Schools in France

By DENIS JOSEPH

"THE SECULAR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM is about to suffer the most furious attack that has ever been made on it," wrote André Lorulot, doyen of French Freethinkers, in his article, "The Fruits of May 13th," printed in THE FREETHINKER (23/1/59). "It is freedom of thought that is in danger and the neutrality of the State in religious questions."

Now, after 18 months of one-man rule by de Gaulle, M. Lorulot's gloomy forecast has been fulfilled in a series of events, culminating in the recent vote of the French National Assembly, which increased the yearly subsidy to Roman Catholic Schools from about £4,400,000 to about £14,700,000. This event, though barely noted in the British popular Press, was preceded by passionate public controversies and demonstrations all over France. An issue which has bedevilled French politics for 75 years was once more brought to the point of crisis.

Ever since 1850, French law has recognised freedom of instruction, permitting private schools to receive financial aid from the various local authorities, or the State, provided that their teaching is not offensive to morality, the Constitution or French Law. In addition, the State provides its own educational system.

As long as France was a rich country, all sorts of schools flourished.

There was, however, a crisis in 1905. In the strong wave of anti-clericalism which followed the exposure of the Church's criminal role in the Dreyfus affair, the Minister of Public Instruction, "little Father Combes," (so-called because he had been a student for the priesthood), forbade the religious orders to teach in France. Another major crisis occurred in 1945. The Roman Catholic private schools had flourished under the Vichy régime, but after the defeat of the Germans, the old rural families and Catholic bourgeoisie were no longer rich, and the private schools found themselves in acute financial difficulties.

In 1951, the controversial Marie-Berangé laws were passed, providing 1,300 francs (about 25/- at that time) per quarter for each child attending school, public or private. These laws satisfied neither side.

The defenders of the public schools pointed out that French education at all levels was progressively declining. There were less than 300,000 with bachelors' degrees taking part in the economic life of the nation, and 7 out of 10 children were abandoning their studies at the age of 14. The reason was that insufficient money was allocated by the Budget for education, and the quality of teaching was consequently declining. The money provided by the Berangé laws were meant for the maintenance of buildings, and for supplying materials for games and sports.

The League of Teaching (Secular) asked why the State provided aid for private schools when it could not provide adequately for its own. After pointing out that the confessional schools had been centres of anti-republicanism, the League continued: "If they want to receive money from the nation, they must accept the common lot, that is to say, State control over the quality of their teachers and the education given in their schools. We do not seek to prevent Catholics from building a school system parallel to that of the secular schools, but let them finance it themselves."

The Secretariat of Studies for Freedom of Teaching, a Catholic pressure group, countered "Private education today renders a public service. If people wish the institution to exist they must supply it with the means of existence. The grants under the Berangé Law are only palliative, at

most enough to keep private schools from immediate extinction." A measure of their financial desperation was the salaries paid to their teachers ranging from 28,000 francs per month (about £22) for a young teacher, to 40,000 francs (about £30) after 23 years' experience, which in Paris, is a bare subsistence wage. The quality of the education provided by the ill-paid teachers and ill-qualified members of the religious orders has been, at best, second-rate.

"Recently," to quote the American Roman Catholic *Commonweal*, "General de Gaulle had a meeting with Cardinal Feltin and other prelates of the Church in France. The General wanted this acrimonious debate brought to a close, for it distracts energies from the real problems of France and renders the political climate unhealthy."

The sequel was described by the American magazine *Newsweek* (4/1/60).

The "explosion" of "one of the oldest, bitterest debates in French politics" came when the Bill to increase State aid to Catholic schools was laid before the National Assembly. Before the Bill was made public, bitter arguments had occurred in the Cabinet, the Education Minister, M. André Bouloche opposing further aid to Catholic schools unless they submitted to his Ministry's control of their curriculum.

From all sides of the Assembly, says *Newsweek*, came complaints "from Protestants, freemasons, socialists, freethinkers, the Communists; even from anti-Clerical—though nominally Catholic — deputies." In towns and villages, anti-clerical teachers led pupils in singing the old anti-clerical song: —

Honour and glory to the secular school,
Where we have learned to think freely,
To defend and cherish the republic.

Hard-pressed in the Assembly, the Prime Minister, M. Michel Debré, countered the anti-clericals with the argument that more State aid would be accompanied by Government inspection, which would bring the Catholic schools up to the national standard. Under direct pressure from de Gaulle, however, Debré was forced to accept a Catholic amendment assuring the Church schools of "freedom of instruction" or in other words, no State supervision. This was too much for Education Minister Bouloche, who immediately resigned.

The debate dragged on until after 4 a.m., but, to quote *Newsweek* again "when the time came to vote, every deputy present had heard the corridor whisper: President de Gaulle was so set on passage of his Bill that he was threatening to 'reform' the constitution if it should be voted down. The Bill was passed overwhelmingly: 427 to 71."

When the result was announced, ex-Premier Guy Mollet, the first Socialist of importance to join de Gaulle, addressed Premier Debré: "When great tasks — the Franco-African community, Algeria, international affairs — require the greatest national unity, you choose at that very moment to introduce the most terrible element of discord. You triumph, but I do not envy you" (*Time*, 4/1/60).

The same view is expressed by *Newsweek* which concludes: —

"For France's Catholic schools it was the notable victory of the twentieth century. Yet in pressing through his Bill, de Gaulle had undoubtedly reopened a bitter national fight that might 'drag on' for years."

STARTING NEXT WEEK

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN, Poet and Pioneer

By ADRIAN PIGOTT

This Believing World

One of the priests who believes that "there's room in Christian life for enjoyment" (according to *The Star*) is Father Beaumont who not only loves smoking a briar pipe, but enjoys juke boxes, rock-'n-roll, and similar "music," and going round pubs with his "Gospel." But he also believes much more than these purely *secular* adjuncts to happiness. For example, speaking to a *Star* reporter in a Tin Pan Alley club, he assured his interviewer that, "I am quite certain Christ is in this room . . ." Of course, if Christ is God, and God is everywhere, naturally Christ "is in this room." He is also in THE FREETHINKER office, but nobody could say for what purpose. What hopeless nonsense these priests can churn out in the name of Christ!

★

For all parsons and priests, "Christ still lives" in Heaven, and this fact therefore is the surest proof of "immortality." In an article in the *Sunday Express*, the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead recently aired his views on the problem, and came to the conclusion that "Spiritualism" (his own quotes) proves that we now know "that the living have communicated with the so-called dead." And if extra proof were needed, it is that "Christ . . . does not argue. He does something . . . more convincing. He *assumes* a life after death." So between them — Spiritualism, Christ, and Dr. Weatherhead, they have proved that we live after death.

★

This "immortality" urge has been with man ever since he started to think about his existence, and it has always been fostered by religion — Buddhism, Hinduism, Theosophy, Muhammedanism, Christian Science, etc. There is not a scrap of evidence for it — only wishful thinking. And Jesus who, according to Dr. Weatherhead, "stands above them all," was quite as ignorant of immortality as are Dr. Weatherhead and his fellow believers. But we can say one thing — if living for ever in Heaven with Jesus and, let us say, Dr. Weatherhead is a fact, we can hardly imagine a worse fate. Surely poor humanity deserves something better?

★

Like all the great ones on earth, the Pope — as did his predecessors — lets himself go on the question of birth control now and then, and his objection (as was theirs) is that there are "erroneous doctrines" about it. He wants to see that "earthly goods" are better distributed. The operative word here is "earthly," for the Pope can distribute "Heavenly" goods indefinitely without his own "earthly" goods shrinking in the least. In any case, he has declared that birth control "was not the solution to the world's food problems." Possibly not the *only* solution, but it would go a long way.

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And talking about the Pope brings us to the Vatican where Cardinal Tisserant gave an interview to a writer for the *Irish Independent*. From this we gather — as if we didn't know it from such a source — that the worst "specific sickness" in the world today is Communism, and the greatest "ill" is the "absolute lack of spirituality," by which the Cardinal meant "the incredible absorption of minds with high-quality motor cars and spending." He was even more angry with the United States because of their "complete lack of leadership and technique" compared with the Soviet Union. This meant that war was inevitable. But where did Jesus come in here? How is it that an "atheist" country like Russia can beat such a Christian country like the USA? How is it that Jesus does not bring forth his mighty legions of Angels to stop any future war? — Alas, even a Cardinal, like a Pope, can pour out pious nonsense.

Our Welfare State has brought to light perhaps more illness in the country than at any point in its history judging from the amount of money spent on medicine and hospitals. And if there was any truth whatever in "spiritual" healing, whether by Jesus or spirits, most of this illness all over the country, could be cured in a few weeks. If this is incredible, read the ten books advertised in *Psychic News* under the general title of "The Ministry of Healing."

★

As one example, one of these books, *Behold Your God*, by Agnes Sandford, gives us "a profound guide to Christian beliefs and practices" which will enable "all" — no reservation here — "all to help the sick and troubled." It shows you how to "contact God" and is a work "with a tonic force." It is also "a Spiritual Power House." And all this for a mere 13/-! We wonder whether the Spiritualists can always beat Christians in credulity.

Mr. Meulen Replies

In reply to Mr. Binns, I did not say that both Determinism and Free Will are wrong, but that they cannot be proved, because they are statements of the "Why" of events, whereas observation gives us only the sequence, the "How" of events.

Both Mr. Binns and Mr. Jones insist that it is possible to lead a normal life while believing in Determinism. I think that it is possible for a man to call himself a Determinist whilst acting as though he believed in Free Will. I think that every normal man believes that by taking thought he can alter the shape of future events. All such thought involves worry and effort, and if a man really believes that the future is determined by a vast machine in which he is only a cog, he must be tempted to relax, since he believes that his act of relaxing is equally part of the machine. Do not tell me that he is equally compelled to worry; there is a great difference between the energy used by a man who feels that he can alter the future, and one who is convinced that it is the machine that is making him worry. When I am faced with a problem, I bend, turn and twist my mind until I remember an experience that may apply. This memory seems to tag on by association, as the word "blue" may remind me of the sea. Sometimes the memory rises easily; at other times it involves much effort. In ordinary language we call this effort "will," and I feel that by making this effort I can alter future events.

It is on this ground that I prefer the hypothesis of Free Will. This hypothesis cannot be proved, but I have already given a few facts to support its probability, and one of these is that no two events are exactly alike. In chemical reactions the differences are so small that science is able to predict with sufficient accuracy for ordinary purposes. But as we ascend the scale of evolution, the variations become more discernible until we reach the relative unpredictability of man's reactions. Mr. Binns asks me to give examples of spontaneous desires. I reply that some, or all of these variations *may* be spontaneous.

Of course, my position involves a denial of the "law" that every event has a mechanical cause. Every event *may* have a mechanical cause; but some events may not. Many Rationalist philosophers, J. M. Robertson for instance, have stressed the danger of statements about the totality of things. The statement that every event has a mechanical cause is as meaningless as the statement that the universe is blue; all assertions must be based on comparison.

Christians believe that God guides everything, although he grants free will to man. Determinists replace God by Heredity and Environment (HE for short). HE is a more implacable God since he compels our every thought and action from the cradle to the grave. Now HE either has a conscious purpose or he has not. When we consider the millions of daily inventions and contrivings of all life, the frequent mutual frustration of these efforts, and the cosmic cataclysms, the notion that HE has a purpose is improbable. Has HE then no purpose? When a scientist experiments, or the inventor adds bolts, springs and cams to his machine (all actions held to be inflexibly compelled by HE), are we to suppose that the results are due to the blind chance blunderings of HE? The notion is again improbable. The most probable theory is that life, although influenced by HE, has free will, and that variations arise through the restless surge of will.

Your correspondents will forgive me if I have not answered every question. I am mindful of the editor's poised pencil. And I remember that my old friend George Bedborough, when acting as chairman at a public meeting, sought to pacify a questioner who declared indignantly that the lecturer had not answered his question: "My dear sir, no lecturer ever answers a question."

HENRY MEULEN.

THE FREETHINKER

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All articles and correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 15s.; half-year, 17s. 6d.; three months, 8s. 9d. (In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.00; half-year, \$2.50; three months, \$1.25.)

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

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.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, CORSAIR, SMITH, etc. Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH, etc.

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD and D. TRIBE.

INDOOR

Central London Branch N.S.S. ("The City of Hereford" Blandford Place, W.1) Sunday, January 24th, 7.15 p.m.: Debate: C. VARNEY (Christian) v. S. L. SALTER, "That the Teachings of Jesus offer the only answer to the World's Problems Today."

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Tuesday, January 26th, 7.15 p.m.: D. TRIBE, "Ethics and Education."

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate.) Sunday, January 24th, 6.30 p.m.: C. SHUTTLEWOOD, "The Planet Mars."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Education Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, January 24th, 2.30 p.m.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, January 24th, 11 a.m.: V. V. ALEXANDER, B.A., "Conflict of Ideas and Ideals in S. India and Ceylon."

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (formerly West London Branch) Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, off Edgware Road, (3 mins. Marble Arch Station) Sunday, January 24th, 7.30 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Freethought 1960".

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, The Green, E.11.) Thursday, January 28th, 7.45 p.m.: P. TURNER, "The Creation Story — Fact or Fiction."

Notes and News

ONE MAY AGREE OR DISAGREE with the Bishop of Stockwood, but one cannot help admiring his forthrightness. And it so happens that we agree with him when he says (*Evening News*, 2/1/60) that if people do not believe in God, it is humbug to go through a wedding service in church. "I cannot imagine why young couples should want a church wedding if they have no interest in religion," he added. The reasons for this, of course, can be many, family or social pressure among them; but the main one surely concerns the "trimmings": bridal gown, train, procession, and so forth. And the pity is that so many register offices are dull and unattractive, some even forbidding.

AT THE SAME TIME, many young people might jib at the Church of England marriage service — if they read it. Not to be "taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PROOBERLY ACKNOWLEDGED: £39 5s. 5d.; Mrs. N. Henson, £1; R. Cooper, 10s. 6d.; F. Fawcett, 2s. 6d.; Slough Humanist, 10s.; W. Scarlett, 10s.; H. Beck, 5s.; R. Stewart, 11s.; D. Davies, £1. Total to date, January 15th, 1960: £43 14s. 5d.

that have no understanding"; "ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication"; and so on. And there is another small item in the service that is worth noting: "For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful." Is this the basis of the myth that "unless you're married in church, you're not really married at all"?

FREETHINKER READER, Mrs. C. N. Tole of Tonbridge, wrote to Mr. C. A. Joyce of the BBC's "Silver Lining" programme, which brings a "message of comfort and cheer for all 'in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity'," asking how he reconciled suffering with an omnipotent God of love and mercy. "Do tell me," she said. Mr. Joyce replied over the radio on December 29th in typical fashion. The question would take a long time to answer, he said, but he did not believe that God wanted suffering at all. Without suffering, however, there could be no repentance.

IT WOULD BE SUPERFLUOUS to comment on that, and it is equally superfluous to comment on this, from the *Daily Express* (1/1/60): "The Rev. Stanley Horsey, vicar of St. James's Edgbaston, yesterday sprinkled holy water in the tiny bedroom of the YWCA hostel where Stephanie Baird was beheaded."

MR. ADRIAN PIGOTT, author of *Freedom's Foe: the Vatican* (which we are glad to say continues to sell very well) has been trying unsuccessfully, of course, to pierce the iron curtain of prison religious statistics. But, through his local M.P., he was able to elicit the following reply from the Home Office: "It is true that if an offender is sentenced to some form of detention his religious persuasion, or what he chooses to state as his religious persuasion, will be known for administrative purposes, but this information is regarded as confidential and no comprehensive figures are kept showing the religious persuasion of all those sent to some form of detention. There are no religious figures at all about the religious persuasion of offenders dealt with otherwise than by detention. The view has long been held that it would not be in the public interest to collect and make public the figures which Mr. Pigott wants and we are not therefore in a position to help him . . . the figures of the religious persuasion which prisoners declare for the purpose of prison administration would be highly misleading as a basis for any conclusions about the relation between delinquency and religious belief." We suggest that "Roman Catholic interest" should be substituted for "public interest" in the third sentence quoted.

FROM THE *Kettering Evening Telegraph* (9/1/60) we learn that Corby (Lincolnshire) church attendances throughout the "Universal Week of Prayer" were "appalling." Numbers at the six meeting places, churches and other places of worship "averaged about 25 per day, and the total number for the whole week has barely been the equivalent of the congregation of one church," while the largest number at one place at one time was between 45 and 50 at the Methodist church on Wednesday, January 6th. The reader who supplied this cutting reminds us that Corby is a "go-ahead steel town."

The Gods Form a United Front

By F. A. RIDLEY

WHATEVER VIEWS ONE MAY HOLD with regard to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and to the political and economic creed of Communism which it sponsored, one fact appears to be indisputable: Russian-inspired Communism represents the first avowedly non-theistic political cult to hold sway over human society, at least on any significant scale. There had, of course, been earlier revolutions in the annals of the Western World which had been in opposition to the established religions of their respective epochs. But none of these went so far as to deny altogether the reality and power of the supernatural in relation to human affairs. Even what might now be termed the extreme left of Protestantism, did not deny the basic religious dogmas of God and human immortality. And while it would probably be true to state that the French Revolution prepared the way for Atheism, most of the leaders of that Revolution did not go beyond affirming a semi-rationalistic Deism, such as may still be found in Paine's *Age of Reason*, which had no more use for Atheism than it had for Christianity. (It is often forgotten that the Deist, Paine, wrote impartially against both.) And was it not that arch-tribune of the French Revolution, the great Robespierre himself, who went on record with the historic affirmation, "Atheism is aristocratic; the idea of a Supreme Being who punishes triumphant crime and avenges outraged innocence, is essentially the idea of the People."

Contrarily, the Communist Revolutions of 1917 *et seq.* were definitely anti-theistic. Whatever attitude one has to the Marxist-Leninist theory of Dialectical Materialism, it at least, and by definition, excludes the idea of God — any God. As Christian, and particularly Catholic, critics have not been slow to assert, it is the first openly anti-theistic philosophy in the history of the Western World to be associated openly with a widely influential political cult and movement. It is, today, a matter of common knowledge that organised religion, with but rare exceptions, has taken a markedly hostile attitude to the Communist creed, wherever found. And again, that this hostile attitude characterises in particular the most powerful of the Christian Churches, the Roman Catholic. By long tradition, the Vatican believes in taking its enemies one at a time; and today the slightest acquaintance with contemporary Catholic literature would demonstrate conclusively that Communism, rather than any one of its older religious rivals, represents public enemy number one both in the eyes of the Vatican and in those of many Christians who do not acknowledge the ideological leadership of Rome.

But, though these facts are common knowledge, the underlying reasons for them are by no means so clear. For whereas, say, at the beginning of the present century, it was probably true to describe the Church of England as "The Tory Party at prayer" and also to describe the Vatican as still mainly a feudal institution, this judgment would scarcely, I submit, be true today. Actually, the clergy of most of the Protestant Churches are nearly falling over each other to profess their democratic (and often enough socialistic) convictions, while even in the allegedly uniform ranks of the Church of Rome one will now find most political tenets even including a specifically "Catholic-Anarchist" movement which runs the American *Catholic Worker*. As the distinguished French Freethinker, Georges Las Vergnas, aptly commented in a recent article in our Belgian contemporary, *La Pensée*, Rome nowadays is "all things to all men" simultaneously . . . Fascist, Democratic, Conservative, and Labour, in different lands and races.

To this otherwise universal tolerance there is, however, one universal exception. No Catholic can in conscience and with the approval of his Church, vote for any Communist Party anywhere.

In the present writer's opinion, the real problem at issue is not so much Communism versus Christianity, so much as Catholicism versus Atheism and Materialism, both integral parts of the Communist creed. After all, it is often forgotten that long before Karl Marx and the Russian Bolsheviks, Christianity had its own Communist tradition; the now nearly canonical writings of the Church Fathers were full of socialistic statements about the iniquity of private property, the abuse of riches and the inalienable right of the poor to adequate subsistence. The founders of the British Labour movement, who were often "Christian Socialists," frequently quoted these socialistic *obiter dicta*. It is still the canonical law of the Roman Catholic Church, as expounded by no less an authority than St. Thomas Aquinas himself, that a starving person may lawfully steal if that is the only means available to support life. Nor is even extensive Communistic practice foreign to the annals of the Church. For a century and a half (c 1600-1768) the Jesuits ran their Republic in what is now Paraguay on such rigidly collective lines as to inspire Voltaire's notable *bon mot*: "In Paraguay perfect Communism reigned; the Jesuits shared all the wealth and the Indians shared all the work." However that may have been, at least "private property in the means of production, distribution and exchange" (the old socialist trinity) were certainly unknown in this Jesuit Arcadia of Christian Communism (cf. R. Fuclop-Miller *The Power and Secret of the Jesuits*). From which we conclude that at present Christian (and in particular, Catholic) opposition to Russian and Chinese Communism, is in reality mainly on account of its atheistic and materialistic connotations rather than to its economic theory.

Sir Thomas More, the author of the original *Utopia*, is now a canonised saint of the Roman Catholic Church, and a lecturer of the Catholic Evidence Guild once admitted to me that the Church would eventually have to come to terms with Communism on the economic side, as it has already had to do in regard to the liberal theories of the French Revolution which it formerly denounced with equal asperity.

The above supposition is confirmed by a recent article in the *Daily Express*, which describes in some detail the current formation of a "united front" against Communism by Christians and Muslims in Africa. We even learn that, at Cairo, demonstrations of students have been held in the streets under the comprehensive slogan "For Jesus and Muhammed against Communism." We learn that instructions have been given to Christian missionaries to "seek the things of agreement, and not the differences." Precisely! For Atheism is the common denominator that spells impending doom to all the gods. It would, for example, be equally fatal to the Christian Trinity and to the rigidly Unitarian god of the Koran. Consequently, this alliance of theistic creeds — traditional enemies! — against "Atheistic Bolshevism" has certainly a potent common basis in theology, if not in economics. Evidently the gods have borrowed from their Communist opponents their old tactics of the "United Front" and since Atheism (with whatever economic accompaniments) spells equal ruin to all the gods impartially, we are inclined to predict a promising future for the new celestial tactic of "the united

front," which may come in time to include *all* the gods in a common anti-Atheist Front. The mad Roman Emperor Caligula, is reputed to have once made the amiable remark that he wished all his subjects had only one neck so that

he could decapitate them all with a single blow! The united front of the gods will give Atheism, whether associated with Communism or otherwise, a similar opportunity to do precisely that.

Are We Intolerant?

By COLIN McCALL

I HAVE BEFORE ME A LETTER from a Glasgow undergraduate, Mr. A. W. A'Hara, expressing appreciation of Mr. G. I. Bennett's article, "An Atheist's Attitude to Theists" (THE FREETHINKER, 27/11/59). It arrived, unfortunately, after Mr. Bennett had written his further article, and it could not very appropriately be printed in our Correspondence columns. Yet it deserves to be put before our readers and, as it is really less a defence of Mr. Bennett than an attack on THE FREETHINKER, I propose to deal with it here.

Mr. A'Hara would like Mr. Bennett's to be "the prevailing tone of the whole magazine, rather than the vitriolic, almost psychopathic attacks of Ridley and Cutner," and he quotes Mill on the "danger of a hyper-antagonistic attitude." Recently, Mr. A'Hara tells us, he gave out copies of THE FREETHINKER to about a dozen young fellows, mostly undergraduates like himself, and "Apart from one confirmed Atheist and one Catholic, judgments . . . concurred: in their opinion it was so militant as to be the work of cranks, not really worth being taken seriously."

That THE FREETHINKER is militant is, of course, patent. It was founded as a militant paper — in the words of G. W. Foote in the first number — to "wage war against Superstition in general, and against Christian Superstition in particular," and it has kept up that tradition. It is a tradition of which I for one, am jealous and proud. That may make me a crank. But what is a crank anyway? How does he differ from the dedicated man? Does it depend on the cause he espouses? And how does militancy, as such, affect the validity of an opinion? Do the Direct Actionists make nuclear disarmament any less reasonable a cause than it would be if they believed in indirect action? Of course not. One may approve or disapprove of their methods, but presuming one believes in nuclear disarmament, their more "militant" methods should not in any way affect that belief.

So it is with Freethought. Some may find Messrs. Ridley and Cutner strong meat, and may prefer Mr. Bennett. All right: it is a matter of taste and I am not going to argue one way or the other. What I would suggest is that many, probably most, of our readers like all three writers, and consider that each in his different way (and F. A. Ridley and H. Cutner have very distinctive styles) does his best for Freethought. Moreover, let me state the obvious, less it be overlooked: THE FREETHINKER prints all three!

With all their differences, the three writers share at least one important quality — a quality which I am prepared to boast distinguishes our other contributors, too. I mean sincerity. And this, to my mind, is much the most important virtue in a writer for a paper like ours. By contrast, "Some," of Mr. A'Hara's dozen undergraduate friends who were critical of THE FREETHINKER, "agreed in the necessity of religion for the unthinking masses." Well, Mr. A'Hara, that sounds dangerously like dishonesty to me, and to be perfectly blunt with you, I am not especially worried over the views of such people about our paper.

What Mr. A'Hara's friends "missed in THE FREETHINKER was tolerance." I must say that they can't have looked very far. After all, we recently printed three contributions from Mr. Geoffrey Ashe, a Christian. In fact, we never

hesitate to print criticism from religious sources if it merits it — and even sometimes when it doesn't! This again is in the paper's tradition, as laid down in the first number, namely that, "Any competent Christian will be allowed reasonable space in which to contest our views." It seems to me that Mr. A'Hara is confused over the word "tolerance." He is not the first to be so confused, and he will probably not be the last. What he needs to distinguish between is: (a) respecting the right of a person to hold and express his views (which we do), and (b) respecting the views themselves (which we may or may not do).

The Freethinker and THE FREETHINKER have never been indiscriminate respecters of opinions. In order to be respected, an opinion must deserve, must earn, respect. It must stand up to the most searching examination and criticism. That is the very essence of freethinking. We don't deny the right of a man to believe that bread and wine can become the flesh and blood of a god-man, but we refuse to treat his belief with respect, much less with solemnity. It is absurd, and we believe in saying so unequivocally. That may be militancy, but it is not intolerance. The matter becomes complicated, of course, when it is considered in an educational context. Should a person who believes in transubstantiation have it taught as absolute truth to his children? This is a problem on which Freethinkers are by no means unanimous, but I think most would favour a secular public educational system and make religious instruction a purely private affair. Mr. A'Hara and his friends might consider this intolerant. But this is a problem involving the rights of two parties, the parents and the children, which needs to be weighed carefully and debated openly. Professor de Brouckère has something to say on the subject in our front-page article this week.

As Mr. A'Hara sees it, Atheism is illiberal. Needless to say, he sees it wrongly. When the Atheist "*insists* that there is no god, he is as irrational as a Christian mystic insisting there is," he says. I might dispute this if I felt inclined (I think it could be argued that even so, the Atheist is the less irrational) but I don't, because it is irrelevant. Atheists — or at least those who write for THE FREETHINKER — don't "*insist*" that there is no god. Like Bradlaugh, they say to the Theist: "We don't know what you mean by 'God'." They ask for a definition and for evidence. They deny specific cases, but not irrationally. On the contrary, they reject such cases on grounds of experience and reason: *rationally*, in short. If Mr. A'Hara thinks it as irrational to deny that $3=1:1=3$, as it is to affirm it, then he seems doomed to the worst kind of solipsism.

That he is far from seeing the matter clearly, is revealed by an illustration. He imagines himself as a guide to a Christian and an Atheist, who have no map and no knowledge of the terrain. He stops before a high mountain and asks: "Is there a cabin on the other side of the mountain?" The Christian answers "Yes," and the Atheist "No," and Mr. A'Hara then lectures them on the foolishness of answering such a question without knowledge. I suggest that he started the folly by asking such a silly question. However, he tries to "equate" his illustration with "metaphysics" by adding that there is no map of the place at all.

And he says: "To believe that a thing exists when its existence cannot be proved is just as absurd as believing that a thing does not exist when its non-existence cannot be proved." But let me point out that the illustration is invalid.

Asking "Is there a cabin?" is quite different from asking "Is there a God?" There is nothing unusual about cabins on mountain sides: we have plenty of experience of them. But we have no such experience of gods. Moreover, the first question is an empirical one: it can be solved by the simple device of climbing or circling the mountain. No such method can be employed with the second question. It is a question of logic: is it reasonable to believe in God? If evidence for God could be adduced, it would become an empirical question, but no such evidence has been adduced. In fact, the belief in most gods is irrational in the light of our experience (I say "most" because the term may sometimes be used as a synonym for nature or phenomena). It is, for instance, impossible to believe in an omnipotent, beneficent god. It is not a question of proving the non-existence of such a god: its existence is incompatible with the world as we know it.

As for the world as we don't know it: the Atheist leaves the Theist to argue about that—and, of course, Mr. A'Hara and his friends if they feel so inclined.

CORRESPONDENCE

MARY MAGDALENE AND THE ANGELS

I much enjoyed Mr. Cutner's five articles in reply to Mr. Ashe. One remark, however, puzzled me. Apropos the Resurrection story, Mr. Cutner says (18/12/59): "In this connection, we must note that, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Mary Magdalene had no difficulty in observing the angel — or angels. But according to John . . . she did *not* see them."

But John 20:11-12 runs: "But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre. And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain."

Could Mr. Cutner elucidate please?

ROGER THOMAS.

IN REPLY TO THE ABOVE

Mr. Thomas is quite right — I did "slip up" in the passage quoted, but not quite as badly as may appear at first sight. I left out one word — "first."

Here are the quotations from the four Gospels— Matthew: "In the end of the Sabbath . . . came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre . . . and the angel of the Lord descended from heaven . . . and the angel said unto the women . . ." (28, 1-5). Mary therefore saw the angel *at first*.

Mark: "And when the sabbath was past Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James . . . entering into the sepulchre saw a young man sitting on the right side . . ." (16, 1-5). Again Mary saw the "young man" (or angel) *first*.

Luke: "Now upon the first day of the week . . . they came unto the sepulchre and they entered in and . . . behold two men stood by them in shining garments . . . It was Mary Magdalene . . . which told these things . . ." (24, 1-10). Again Mary saw the men (or angels) *first*.

John: "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early . . . then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter and the other disciple and saith unto them: They have taken away the Lord out of the Sepulchre . . ." She did not see the angels. Peter and John then entered the sepulchre and saw the linen clothes, and went away "unto their own home," leaving Mary outside the sepulchre, and it was not until then, when she decided to look into it, that she saw the two "angels." In other words, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Mary saw the "divine messengers" *first*. According to John, quite a lot happened to Peter and "the other disciple" before they left Mary outside the sepulchre, and before she saw the angels (John 20, 1-2, 11-12). I regret not having made this clear in mentioning the way John almost always differed from the other Gospels.

H. CUTNER.

WHICH ONE?

Christians are urged to practise something known as "The Imitation of Christ."

The "sacred record" informs us that Jesus went to his execution as a lamb goes to the slaughter. Fair enough. But a few days previously he had, ranting and cursing and brandishing a cat-o'-

nine-tails, scattered a group of law-abiding tradesmen and chased them from their place of business. Or so "the word of God" declares.

Which Christ are the faithful supposed to imitate — the meek martyr or the noisy street-rowdy?

S. W. BROOKS.

OBITUARY

DAVID S. CURRIE, President of the Glasgow Secular Society, has died on his 88th birthday. He had held various Executive positions in the Branch, of which he was a most loyal and steadfast member. Unfortunately he lost his sight five years ago, and he was confined to bed in hospital for four years after a fall in which he broke his leg. When I visited him a short time before he died, however, he held up his hand and said, "Remember, Bob, a Secular Service, and let all know my firm conviction of the truth of Atheism." I complied with his wishes. Our sympathies go out to his son and family who carry on the Freethought tradition.

R. M. HAMILTON.

WE WERE VERY SORRY to learn that another staunch Scottish Freethinker had died in Paisley on December 3rd, 1959. John Stewart McPhail of Wemyss Bay, Renfrewshire, a member of the National Secular Society, was active almost to the end of his long life of 93 years, 64 of them as a gardener to the same family. Mr. R. Hamilton conducted the Secular Service, and again we are encouraged by the fact that Mr. McPhail's son is a Freethinker and member of the N.S.S.

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