

The Freethinker

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I RECENTLY REREAD THE BOOK of the Belgian Catholic philosopher, Henri Dorlodot, *Darwinism and Catholic Thought*. The author was a professor in the ancient Catholic University of Louvain, and his book is perhaps still the most consistent attempt to reconcile traditional Catholic philosophy and theology with the modern scientific concept of Evolution, as propounded by Darwin and by his more recent neo-Darwinian followers. The importance of such a task, not only for the Roman Catholic Church, but indeed for any other form of Christianity is surely obvious, since the theory of evolution is now so firmly embedded in modern thought that any religious cult that still rashly rejects it is doomed. For only the most primitive fundamentalist sects of the Billy Graham type, still persist in rejecting Evolution along with so much else that is essential to modern culture. But it is an invariable and recurring fact that "What the literate world thinks today, the illiterate will think tomorrow". Hence such pre-scientific sects are doomed to remain on the fringe of civilised society and, ultimately, to die out with the further progress of society, since evolution remains a fact, even for those who reject it.

Evolution and Catholic Philosophy
 The Roman Catholic Church is well aware of the above fact, as is amply demonstrated to any perceptive student. As Joseph McCabe pointed out long ago in his autobiography, Rome has always applied two quite different rules of treatment respectively to the educated and the uneducated Catholic. Where it can rely upon its more intellectual followers, it is prepared to give them quite a remarkable amount of latitude. With regard to Darwinism, the Church appears to have done this from the start, for after all, Rome is a worldly-wise institution and, in any case, she burnt her fingers so badly in the *cause célèbre* of Galileo and of Copernican astronomy (when the Vatican had rashly condemned the heliocentric theory only to have later to eat its own words in a manner quite unbecoming to an "infallible body"), that any repetition of such a blunder might well prove to be irretrievable. Hence, the Vatican has wisely avoided any open condemnation of Darwinian evolutionary theory, and has actually officially tolerated it, or at least some aspects of it, as a "permitted hypothesis". Canon Dorlodot's book is symptomatic of a whole *corpus* of literature, usually of a more popular kind than his undoubtedly erudite treatise designed to reconcile traditional Catholicism with the Darwinian point of view. Probably it is only a matter of time before the same process will be undertaken in relation to the still more heretical social and economic doctrines of Marxism and other sociological heresies. For Rome is only inflexible where her ends are at stake; where her means are concerned, no one is more flexible or more opportunistic.

Evolution and Christianity
 Despite the learned arguments of our Belgian author, there does not in final reality, appear to be any viable

method of bridging the gulf between the evolutionary view of the world and traditional Christian doctrine, particularly since Roman theology is now about the only logically consistent system of dogmas that still embodies the traditional Christian orthodoxy. For Rome has officially condemned all concessions to Modernism. (The Protestant Churches, apart from a few illiterate fundamentalist sects, have nowadays no consistent systems of theology at all).

Rome however, still has: and speaking personally, I would endorse in general the respectful tributes paid by McCabe and other ex-students of Catholic theology to its remarkable intellectual comprehensiveness and logical consistency once granted their intellectual

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —
Christianity and Evolution
 By F. A. RIDLEY

premises, conjoined with the state of knowledge of their day. Saints Augustine, Aquinas, and their fellow-doctors of the Church often demonstrated outstanding intellectual ability. (The crude conception that they were mental morons is itself a moronic doctrine). However, it must be pointed out that all these so often subtle thinkers and learned scholars were inevitably men of their time, nor can it well be disputed that these intellectual assumptions like their mental premises were those of their time. They were entirely inconsistent with any comprehension of, or still more, acceptance of the hypothesis of evolution. The briefest glance at the traditional scheme of Christian theology is sufficient to demonstrate this fact beyond any reasonable doubt.

Christian Theology
 The real founder of Christian theology was not Jesus of the Gospels (who never mentioned Adam or the Fall) but the Pauline author of the Epistles (particularly Romans), the first and the most influential of Christian theologians, the founder of Christianity as a theological system. The Pauline scheme, amplified, but not essentially altered, by later theologians, had at least the aboriginal merit of logical simplicity and consistency. God had created Adam, the first man, and our common ancestor, perfect in the Garden of Eden. As a result of Satanic temptation Adam "fell", and his sinful descendants have from then till now been subject to the primeval taint of "original sin" acquired by Adam and subsequently transmitted to his descendants. From this hereditary taint which doomed the sinful human race to Hell, mankind was saved by the voluntary descent from Heaven, life on earth and death on the Cross of Jesus Christ. As a result of which celestial transaction, the human race is no longer irrevocably doomed but can be saved by the voluntary self-immolation of the "Second Adam", solely provided that they voluntarily accept that salvation. Such, in the briefest possible summary is the traditional Christian scheme of salvation.

Evolution v. Christianity
 As Catholic apologetics never tire of pointing out, the Pauline scheme of salvation is perfectly logical. But whilst this is so, it is entirely inconsistent with the facts which a modern scientific view of the Universe discloses. There

never was an Adam, nor a Garden of Eden, nor an argumentative snake. More disastrous still for the old theology, there never was a Fall either. Historically, mankind has come *up* and not *down*. Moreover, it is precisely evolution that has been responsible for this intellectual upheaval. How, accordingly, can an orthodox Christian really believe in evolution? Christian evolutionism is, in my opinion, an absurdity. A Christian evolutionist must logically believe that there was, at some remote period, a family of soulless ape-men who, unaccountably gave birth to a human being endowed with an immortal soul which, according to Christianity, represents the essential dividing line between mankind and the animal creation, to which

the parents of the first authentic *Homo* must have belonged. Unfortunately, science does not appear to know anything about such a freak of nature. Moreover, since it is now certain that the earliest men (*Pithecanthropus* etc.) were not the ancestors of our men, *Homo sapiens*, the Adam of Christian evolutionists could not have been *our* ancestor nor bequeathed "original sin" to us. On the whole, and despite Dorlodot *et al*, we think that Christianity is easier to defend as a frankly pre-evolutionary, pre-scientific, philosophy. For traditional Christianity and evolution mix about as well as oil and water; they are products of different ages and of irreconcilable modes of human thought.

A Quick Glance at the People's Padres

By N. E. S. WEST

FOR THE PURPOSE of this article, let us use the word "padre" for the clergymen, priests, medicine men and witch doctors who claim to know the will of God. There has been a veritable horde of them throughout the ages—and they still flourish. Now, briefly, let us see what these padres have done for the people—these padres who pretend to know the will of God. J. Eric S. Thompson in his *The Rise and Fall of the Maya Civilisation* (1954), relates how captured warriors were sacrificed in their thousands to appease God.

This God had to have human blood. The practice of this sacrifice was imposed by the padres and it continued for as long as the padres remained in power. These padres also instituted the practice of throwing infants into wells or over cliffs to appease the God. The Jews, apparently, practised the sacrifice of the first-born. After a time, God was appeased with burnt offerings. These offerings were sheep and cattle, so one would suppose the padres got plenty of meat.

Later, the Jews adopted the practice of tithing, i.e., paying one-tenth of their income to the church. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church the padres collect huge sums by means that are almost equivalent to force. Purgatory was invented and fees are collected for praying departed souls out of it. Wars have been promoted by the Popes and Bishops of this Church. It forced the Crusades on the people, hoping to hamstring Islam, and it burned thousands of witches and other non-believers at the stake. One notable instance was Joan of Arc. After burning her for her pride and disobedience, she was canonised. (And the Roman Catholic Church claims to be infallible.)

The padres throughout the ages have robbed the poor and have kept them in ignorance and poverty. The padres claim to have jurisdiction over the souls of men, and a man can only save his soul by paying fees for prayers and doing penance as dictated by the padres. The padres—especially those of the Roman Catholic Church—don't like to appear in civil court for their misdeeds. They prefer to be tried in the Church courts where there is no publicity. The padres have often preached peace, but often promoted war. The Roman Catholic Church appears to be doing all it can to promote war between Russia and the Western Powers.

Today, the world is worried over excess population. The birth rate is particularly high in backward countries. Yet birth control is forbidden even though the progeny would most assuredly be doomed to poverty all its life. This is the outlook in much of India, China, South America, Spain and Italy. The areas dominated by the

Roman Catholic Church show a very high percentage of illiteracy and illegitimacy. The people fear the Church and suffer as a result of that fear.

The heartless and dictatorial padres are not yet through this cycle of domination. Women become pregnant against their will and in due course give birth to children without drugs, thus fulfilling the Scriptures which command women to bring forth in pain. There are other padres who forbid blood-transfusions and even forbid their followers to seek medical assistance when sick. The results are just as tragic as the former practice of burning victims at the stake. There is said to be honour among thieves, but there is only hatred between competing padres.

Magic Moments—With Catholics

Recaptured by L. MURRAY

"It could be said that Christ was a cunuch".
Youth (19) "You're wrong! He was a Catholic".

Boy (16): "King Billy asked for Holy Water when he was dying".
"Where did you read that?"
"My teacher told me".
(The boy attended St. Joseph's R. C. School, Woodside, Glasgow.)

"No one has gone to Lourdes with one leg and come back with two".
Youth (19): "Miracles can't do the impossible. You're looking for magic".

"No one can give an understandable explanation of the Trinity".
Girl (22): "Oh, yes we can! It's a mystery".

Youth (20): "Catholics can plan their families as long as they don't control themselves".

Girl (22): "Adam and Eve were Christians".

Youth (18): "God is a man. I've seen his picture".

NEXT WEEK

THE MONARCHY

By F. A. RIDLEY

The Baha'i Faith

By R. W. MORRELL

LIKE THE FLOWERS THAT bloom in the spring, religious sects blossom forth on an unsuspecting world from time to time. When we think of new sects we tend to associate them with the United States (it could be postulated that religious sects are among that country's best exports!) but America is not the only source of religious sectarianism. One world wide movement has sprouted from Persia of all places, claiming to be an independent religion. It is known as the Baha'i Faith.

Baha'ism grew up round a Persian religious fanatic Mirza Ali Muhammad. He took the title of the Bab, as it is known in the west, the Arabic title being *Bab-ud-Din* (Gate of the Faith) and his movement gained widespread support. This, as is only to be expected, alarmed the religious authorities and they let loose a reign of terror that claimed many of the Bab's followers as victims, and the Bab himself was eventually shot. Baha'is, who tend to play down miracles, have surrounded the execution of the Bab with an air of the miraculous. His death started a chain of events common to many sects; rival groups strove to gain the leadership of the now tottering movement. Eventually, after one side had attempted to poison the leader of the other side, and he in turn had got mixed up in a plot to assassinate the Shah, both sides were exiled, one party ending up in Cyprus the other in Palestine. The leader of the Palestine section was Mirza Husayn Ali, who had been born into a wealthy Persian family and had early become a follower of the Bab. Some time after the latter's death, he claimed to be the designated leader that the Bab had said would come after him. Certain evidence was produced in an effort to give substance to this claim, but it did not convince a great many of the Bab's followers. Nevertheless, Husayn Ali gained sufficient support to create an influential party within the Babist movement, and he himself took the title *Baha'u'llah* (Glory of God). For over 24 years he was detained in a penal colony at Acre. After his death he was succeeded by his son Abbas Effendi, who took the title *Abdul Baha* (Servant of Baha) and was knighted by the British for service to the people of Palestine. (He arranged for food supplies during the time of famine.) It was Sir Abdul Baha who launched the faith on its path of world growth. (Perhaps we should add that his assumption of leadership did not go unchallenged, and the sect underwent a further split. Baha'is call those who did not accept Abbas Effendi as leader, "covenant breakers".) Sir Abdul Baha was succeeded by his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, first of the faith's hereditary "Guardians". Shoghi Effendi put in sterling service in promoting the faith throughout the world, and his period of leadership saw a rapid increase in the sect's membership. The growth was strongest in the United States, where there is a Baha'i temple — the first Baha'i temple was in Russia, but was taken over by the state as an art gallery and library shortly after the revolution. Shoghi Effendi died in London about two years ago. His death was unexpected and caused consternation in Baha'i ranks; this consternation increased when it turned out that he had nominated no one to succeed him as Guardian; hence he was the first and last Guardian of the Faith. This may not appear of much significance to non-Baha'is, but the office of Guardian was of extreme importance to the administration of the faith. The Guardian was the only one who was allowed to interpret the scripture, "the Guardian alone has the right to interpret authoritatively the teachings of Baha'u'llah and to state authoritatively their implications.

In doing this he receives divine guidance that makes his interpretation infallible." (Ferraby, J. *All Things Made New*, p.27) Baha'is have been trying to figure out the position regarding interpretation ever since the death of their leader; they have not found an answer yet.

The basic teaching of the faith is one of unity. The followers of Baha'u'llah argue that all religions are one, that they are revelations from one God, revelations that have been made through a succession of prophets, they maintain that Baha'u'llah is the latest and greatest of these people. But anyone who looks at Baha'i arguments relative to the supposed unity of religion will find little but superficial statements. For example, they attempt to get round the fact that there is no God in Buddhism (a nasty little fact if you postulate revelation!) by denying that this is the case and declaring that the original teachings "gradually disappeared, and ignorant customs and ceremonials arose and increased, until they finally ended in the worship of statues and images". (Baha, A. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 152) Other Baha'i teachings stress the value of education, term work "worship", argue the need for an international language, maintain the equality of the sexes, condemn asceticism and religious mendicancy etc. And on this last point we observe another Baha'i assumption, that the Christian religion is based on such principles. One would suggest that budding Baha'is read Chapman Cohen's little essay on *Christianity and Ethics*. They also postulate that there is no clash between science and Religion. "Religious Teaching", writes Abdul Baha, "which is at variance with science and reason is human invention and imagination unworthy of acceptance . . ." What is being said is, in effect, that you should throw overboard any teaching that has been "revealed", if it is questioned through scientific research. A neater bolt hole could not be wanted. It need come as no surprise that the teachings of the faith do clash with science. Baha'is argue that man is not an animal: science, despite Baha'u'llah and Co., thinks otherwise.

It is a cardinal teaching of the Baha'i faith that its members take no part in politics. The rule is one of unquestioned obedience to the powers that be. This policy is adopted because the faith teaches that its administrative order, based on an International House of Justice, and national and local spiritual assemblies — all elected bodies (the first international body is due for election in 1963)—will replace existing administrative machinery when Baha'is are a majority throughout the world. As non-Baha'is cannot serve on these bodies, the advent of a Baha'i majority would mean that all non-believers would be stripped of any say in running their affairs. The Baha'i administrative order is, in effect, nothing more than a form of dictatorship. Baha'is hold that it is a democratic institution.

I have sketched briefly the history of the faith, its claims and teachings, and have drawn some critical conclusions. In conclusion we might look into the state of the religion today. The faith (it has no paid clergy and is throughout a lay body) is now represented in well over two hundred countries. In Britain it has groups in most major cities, and in out of the way places like Orkney Islands. It has made rapid strides in Africa and certain Pacific areas; it is said that there are not enough trained Baha'is in Africa to deal with the "declarations" being made. New

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

All good Christians will have had a terrible shock on learning that the BBC was going "to drop its main religious programmes" the other Sunday, in favour of "covering the closing ceremonies of the Olympics", according to *News Chronicle*. And its commentator, Norman Hare, commenting on this was painfully depressed about it. Why, he almost despairingly cried, this means that the BBC gave only eight minutes to religion on the Sabbath Day while ITV actually devoted 2½ hours! Still, thank God, the religious programme will come back as merrily as ever — that is, if religion can ever be merry.

★

In the meantime, it is good to learn that the Vatican has stepped up the pace a little more in Eire that hotbed of religious and political Roman Catholicism. Priests are facing some drastic regulations there — they must not bet, own racehorses, or have a drink in hotels or pubs. The only plays they are now allowed to see are those that are written by priests — of all people! And of course they are not allowed to read any book or newspaper which even mentions birth control. In fact, one of our Sunday newspapers, the *Empire News*, is banned in Eire. No wonder there is a steady exodus over to England, so long Ireland's traditional enemy.

★

Two of the most famous verses in the New Testament, stoutly maintained as absolutely the true words of "our Lord", are, "These signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them . . ." The bit about serpents is especially intriguing, for one of the congregation of Charles H. Hall, "an evangelising minister of the New River Free Holiness Church", at Nashville, Georgia, looks like facing the death penalty or 20 years imprisonment. He put his trust in Jesus who said in God's Precious Word that you could "take up" serpents and he obviously meant it.

★

At all events, Mr. Hall brought in a poisonous rattlesnake, allowed a Mr. Hill to handle it which he did to the accompaniment of "Alleluia", "Sweet Jesus", and similar examples of religious ecstasy, and the rattlesnake, who had never heard of either Jesus or the Gospels, promptly bit him, a bite which sent the devoted believer to Kingdom Come in four hours. In spite of Jesus, no one in Nashville is allowed to possess or control a poisonous snake, so "the prayer-shouting motel owner and preacher" (the description comes from the *Daily Express*) looks like having a rough time. But surely a word from Jesus in Heaven could save him?

★

A well known woman's magazine "She" has, in its September number, a beautiful and sympathetic account, fully detailed and illustrated, of Mr. Samuel Shenton, the modern champion of the Flat Earth. In it, he demolishes the pretensions of distinguished scientists and astronomers who so mistakenly believe that the Earth is a sphere. He proudly quoted the Sacred Writings with its "The Earth has Heaven above and water underneath", and how dare anyone question these Divine Words?

★

Mr. Shenton's marvellous stand for the Flat Earth of the Bible has been referred to in these columns before, but *She* has given us some of his proofs — and no doubt there

will be some readers silly enough to accept them. He is now a "celebrity", for he has appeared on the radio, given many lectures, and "has been invited to debate with several student bodies". But are there really any students who think there *must* be something in it?

★

Now that Father Huddleston has been made the Bishop of Masasi, ITV took the momentous occasion for Mr. Chris Chataway, Mr. James Cameron and Miss Hannah Stanton, to interview him. He discussed his coming work — but apart from one question, all the four were almost Fundamental in their outlook. The new Bishop's work was, as far as we could see, to be handing over the old old story in its most primitive form.

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One question by Mr. Chataway was, "Is it fair to export our type of Christianity to primitive peoples?" — And the answer came pat. Christianity was a "universal religion". This is just as true as saying that Muhammadanism is "universal" or Buddhism. Christianity's outlook is purely Oriental. The attitude of Jesus and Paul to slavery is still the attitude, for example of Orientals.

★

At last wonderful proof of the existence of Jacob and Abraham has been discovered by archaeologists. They have uncovered the remains of an Anannite town named Beit Eal which dates from 1700 B.C. and as (we are told) it is the "legendary" home of the two Patriarchs, this proves that they undoubtedly existed. So the remains of the old Fleet prison prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller really existed because they lived in it for a time. It's just as simple as that!

THE BAHAI FAITH

(Concluded from page 307)

temples are almost completed or under construction in Africa, Australia and Germany. From this it would appear that the prospects are bright, but this is by no means certain. In this country, and in Europe in general, converts are few; many members have drifted from the faith without giving notice or resignation (I know of a number). Then there is the system of pioneers. A pioneer is one who goes to open a locality to the faith or to strengthen an assembly in danger of lapsing, (for a town or area to have assembly status there have to be at least nine adult Baha'is resident within the civic boundaries) and his going from one area to another may rob the first of its only active members and thus bring a decline. Hence the statistics trotted out by the faith from its Israel-based headquarters are apt to deceive. To my mind the long term prospects for the faith on the basis of its present showing are not very bright, and some active Baha'is share this view. At the time of writing it is in the throes of a ten-year crusade and, while certain of the goals of that crusade have been met, it is by no means, as yet, a complete success. In particular, the goals set for Europe — increased assemblies, rapid gain in membership etc. — have been anything but successful, and the crusade finishes in 1963. In a desperate effort to make the crusade the victory that they wish it to be many active Baha'is are leaving this country (two at least from my own town Nottingham) to pioneer in Europe.

The blow to Baha'i morale if the crusade does fail would be even greater than that of its Guardian's death. Hence the frantic efforts to make it a success.

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ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. DAY—We have sent your letter to Father Paris.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.
- London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.; Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. MILLS and WOODCOCK. (Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria statue.)
- Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Meetings every Sunday, from 5 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. TRIBE and J. P. MURACCIOLE.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 7.30 p.m.
- 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, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street.) Sunday, September 25th, 6.45 p.m.: P. J. MORGAN, "The Press".
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) Annual Reunion, Sunday, September 25th, 3 p.m.: Guests of HONOUR, ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON and C. BRADLAUGH BONNER. N.S.S. members cordially invited.

Notes and News

THE PARISH MAGAZINE is not a literary form with which we can claim familiarity but, judging from the occasional specimens that come our way, it is notable neither for style nor content. And judging from St. Hugh's, Market Harborough (quoted in the *Leicester Mercury*, 6/9/60) it must contain some pretty wild statements. "It is said that we do not want a Continental Sunday in England", wrote the Rev. Victor Reynolds, Vicar of St. Hugh's, "but from all appearances we have got one"; which may or may not be true. But, the Rev. Reynolds continued, "90 per cent of the people on the Continent always attend their Sunday Mass"; and that most definitely is not true. We doubt if there is a country in the world where 90 per cent of the people, ever attend Mass, let alone "always", and there certainly isn't one on the Continent. As for the Continent as a whole . . . well, the remark is simply ridiculous.

★

THE *Irish News* and *Belfast Morning News* (2/9/60) contained an interview with Father Hugh Magorrian, an Irish priest on leave from East Location, East London, South Africa, where he has a troop of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. It seems that he finds that the task of keeping the youth of the location "true to the Faith", arduous. Among other difficulties is a shortage of musical instruments for, while non-Roman Catholic Scout and Guide troops "have their bands to keep them 'in tune'," Father Magorrian's boys and girls have none, and so some of them drift away to non-Catholic groups, where they are readily

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

Previously acknowledged: £162.0s.3d. P. C. W. 1s. 2d.; D. Dainow, £1 1s.; H. C. 10s.; T. Yelland, £1.; H. Pollard, 5s.; "C", 8s. 6d.; R. S. Astbury, 10s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1 1s.; C. Cullen, 7s. 6d.; E. Swale, 10s.; Total to date September 15th, 1960. £167 14s. 5d.

provided with instruments. It may strike one as surprising that a mere band should divert anybody from the "true" path, but Father Magorrian points out that the native is a great lover of music. An appeal is therefore being made for any band instruments, "even second-hand bugles and drums" to assist the Father in "his missionary endeavours to save his native youth".

★

A FEW DAYS AFTERWARDS (8/9/60) the *Belfast Telegraph* reported a religious rumpus in Whitehead, where Bible texts had been painted on glacial rocks on the foreshore by an evangelist, Mr. Tom Vezey. The Town Clerk, Mr. W. J. Regan thinks that they contravene a by-law about the posting of placards and the putting up of slogans and should be removed. "The fact that they are religious texts is completely incidental", he says. Mr. Vezey says they are not slogans, "but the word of God", and a Presbyterian butcher, Mr. James Kernaghan supports him in this. Indeed if the texts are removed, Mr. Kernaghan says he will "personally go down and repaint them". If he does, we trust he will paint them a little better than Mr. Vezey did, judging from an accompanying photograph.

★

TO COMPLETE AN IRISH TRILOGY of notes, we turn back to *The Irish News* (20/8/60) which, picturing a pigeon plunging earthwards like a fighter plane belching fire, dealt with the consecration of people and objects. "To consecrate ourselves to Mary",—it declared in the usual automatic way — "is to place ourselves as obedient children in the hands of our Blessed Mother, as docile instruments in the service of our Queen". To consecrate an object is "to set it apart for exclusive use in divine worship". The "little cup used at Mass to hold the Precious Blood" is instanced, and we are told that "Only Communists would desecrate it by using it at drinking brawls".

★

IN KEEPING with his resolve to make the name of Thomas Paine better known in this country (in which he will have the blessing of all Freethinkers) Mr. Christopher Brunel wrote on "Mister Common Sense" in the September issue of *Labour's Northern Voice*.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14th, 1960. Present: Mrs. E. Venton (Vice-President) in the Chair: Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Trask; Messrs. Barker, Cleaver, Ebury, Hornibrook, Johnson, McIlroy, Mills, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Ridley and Corstorphine. New members were admitted to Dagenham, Kingston and North London Branches which, with 3 Individual members, made 7 in all. World Union of Freethinkers reunion in Geneva was reported by the Secretary. Assurance that the Paine plaque would be overhauled had been received from the Town Clerk of Thetford; receipt of R.C. criminal statistics acknowledged by Minister of Education. Gratitude was expressed to Mr. and Mrs. J. Collins for remembering the Society in their Wills. Advertising in *Rationalist Annual* and *Pulse* was authorised. Central London and Glasgow Branch matters were dealt with. News of the likely revival of the latter branch was received with pleasure. Various lecture arrangements were made. It was decided to have small pocket calendars printed for 1961. North London Branch announced intention to make regular monthly donations of £5 to the Building Fund to a total of £100. This branch had also made collections for the Fund, and branch members had contributed amounts in addition. Thanks were expressed to Mr. and Mrs. Ebury for their splendid efforts for the Fund. Gratitude was also expressed to Mrs. Ebury for her full Executive Committee reports sent each month to the Secretaries of all North-Western area branches. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, October 12th, 1960.

The Existence of God

[Editor's Note: This letter from Mr. V. G. Davies and reply by Dr. Edward Roux, Senior Lecturer in Botany at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reprinted with permission from the July issue of THE RATIONALIST, organ of the South African Rationalist Association.]

To the Editor: In your June issue "E.R." appeals to certain concepts which have no meaning unless the fundamental concept of God is accepted, and this appeal is made in order to try and show that God does not exist. He refers to "evil, cruelty and waste in the human experience", but these concepts can exist in human experience only if human experience includes the ultimate or fundamental concept of God. One may as well refer to shadow in order to try and prove that light does not exist. If there was no light we would have no standard with which to compare darkness with light, and likewise if there was no God we would have no standard with which to compare evil with good.

If existence is matter alone, then the human intellect could not conceive of such entities as "good" and "evil" because "good" and "evil" have no relationship to matter as such. If existence is matter alone, mankind is but a more complex form of matter than the atom, and complexity of atomic form cannot evolve "good" and "evil" any more than density of darkness can evolve light and shadow. God is no more the cause or sanction of evil than light is the cause or sanction of shadow. It is the intervening object that causes shadow, and it is the intervening object of human abuse of free will, or original sin, that is the cause of evil and suffering in human experience. "E.R." has merely succeeded in showing us that one of the best ways of proving the existence of God is to try to prove his non-existence.

V. G. DAVIES.

Dr. Roux replied as follows: -

Mr. Davies is trying to tell us that we cannot conceive of evil, cruelty and waste unless we conceive also of their opposites, namely goodness, kindness and (presumably) good husbandry. This we can willingly concede. But it is a *non sequitur* to say that if there was no God we would have no standard with which to compare evil with good. The Christian may define good behaviour as that which God commands, and he may then discover what this is by reading his Bible or consulting his priest.

On the other hand there are individuals (e.g. freethinkers) and whole communities (e.g. the Confucianists of China) who do not acknowledge the existence of God, who do not accept the Bible and have no priests, but who nevertheless have very definite ideas about what is good and what is bad behaviour. In fact both the Christian and the non-Christian acquire knowledge of what is "good" and "bad" in the course of their early childhood, quite apart from whether they "are brought up religious" or otherwise. At a very early age the child learns that certain acts are approved by his elders and others disapproved. The former, he soon learns are "good", and the latter "bad". "Bad" acts are visited with punishment and have painful consequences. Ideas about good and evil differ widely from tribe to tribe. Thus playing games on Sunday is good in the eyes of Catholics, evil in the view of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Catholic and D.R.C. gods obviously disagree on this matter. Moral sanctions clearly do not come from some supernatural being but are man-made. God is simply a glorification of the tribe and is made in the tribe's image.

Though there may be disagreement about Sunday sport, contraception, polygyny, the eating of pork, and other matters, there is, on the other hand, considerable agreement about certain other items of behaviour. Theists and atheists

will agree that killing (of other men) is wrong except in time of war or in other special circumstances specified by law. One can easily see why murder has become a crime, since any tribe that permitted it would have little chance of survival.

It is difficult to discover what Mr. Davies is trying to say in his not very illuminating last paragraph. He is apparently sniping at the Materialists, and his idea of a Materialist is one who asserts that "existence is matter alone". Then he goes on to say that good and evil have no relationship to matter as such. Therefore, he implies, since "good" and "evil" in fact exist, they must owe their being to some non-material source, in other words God.

Mr. Davies speaks of good and evil as "entities". One gathers that they are of a different kind of substance from that which is called matter and can exist independently of matter. This way of speaking is the cause of the old mind-matter controversy which has produced useless argument since Grecian times and will always remain unsolved because the difficulty is inherent in the words used.

An abstract noun like "sin" does not denote an entity (something which exists out there). It is an omnibus word for those forms of human behaviour which are not approved by the tribe or the Church. "Evil" is not an entity: it is an adjective used to describe things hurtful and destructive of man and his goods. Before man evolved on earth there could be no sin, no good and no evil.

The materialist's particular prejudice is to assert that the world appears to consist of a substance now called matter-energy. This substance, differentiated and recombined in different ways exists in things like stars, planets, rocks, trees, bacteria and men. Some bodies exhibit complicated forms of behaviour which we call living. Some of the living in turn behave in ways which we describe as intelligent. We are not justified in concluding that there is an entity called intelligence floating around in the universe and waiting to be picked up.

Materialism is a highly sophisticated philosophy. What mankind started with is what the new-born baby starts with, an awareness of his body and of sights, smells, tastes and sounds. This is and remains our mental world, from which we derive a picture of an outer world in which we live, move and have our being. With the invention of language we find a means of recording information about the outer world in a socially-communicable form. This information has reached vast proportions as a result of printing and the use of the scientific method.

No one has yet seen an atom, let alone an electron. The assumption that such things exist has been found useful in making television sets and hydrogen bombs. When mental activities are investigated they are found to be inseparably connected with nervous systems, consisting of cells, which in turn appear to be made up of molecules, atoms and electrons. It seems to the materialist that somehow these and similar particles are the *sine qua non* of everything. This conclusion may be a false one, but it is difficult to see how it can be demolished by purely verbal methods, which is what theists like Mr. Davies attempt to do.

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Far From the Maddening Crowd

By RUSTICUS

The truth of the matter is, that neither he who is a fop in the world is a fit man to be alone; nor he who has set his heart much upon the world, though he have never so much understanding; so that solitude can be well fitted and set right but upon a very few persons.
—Cowley.

OUR VILLAGE RAILWAY STATION is situated half-way up the side of a steep hill, on a man-made shelf, as it were. At one time the station employed a station-master and three porters. This was in the days when the railway company did a roaring trade in the transportation of watercress milk and humanity — days when a thirty mile return ticket to the coast could be obtained for one shilling. Sixty years ago a popular local excursion was to the Birmingham Onion Show, a red letter day in the lives of the locals.

The station staff was gradually reduced to one porter. Harry was a kindly old chap. On dark winter nights he invariably made quite a little ceremony of lighting late travellers down the steep station steps. I can smell his ancient and battered oil lamp to this day. Eventually even his services were dispensed with, and the century-old station became a minor Halt, tickets being obtainable from the guard, or at the local market-town station. Now, even the Halt has been closed, the station buildings demolished — and left in an untidy heap — and the station gates padlocked. Even the signal box has disappeared, and the long platform, a mass of weeds, is rapidly disintegrating.

Sitting here, on the unkempt grassy bank of the derelict station, it is difficult to shake off a feeling of regret and melancholy. Where once was bustle, laughter — and, no doubt, occasionally tears — now is silence, solitude and decay. My sole companions are a pair of goldfinches, feeding on the luxuriant weeds growing on my own property — British Railways — and the guard of a passing goods train has just given me a severe look. However, perhaps Sir Brian will be able to turn a deaf ear.

I have penetrated the defenses of the old station — not for the first time — chiefly to contemplate the rural scene from its high eminence. Alas, my vision is repeatedly clouded over by the ghosts of old men and women — and some children — whom I see entering, or leaving, silent and ghostly trains, back these fifty years. They set off for weddings, funerals, Sunday-school treats, holidays (invariably with relations, owing to their poverty), visits to hospital, or maybe friends in villages up and down the line. Some are only making their weekly three mile trip to the local market town, return fare 6d. In the "old days", before the war, many of the village folk had nothing to look forward to but their weekly visit to "town" — there to gossip, meet old friends, and make their few frugal purchases. "I got it in market", they would proudly declare, exhibiting a handsome geranium to a neighbour. Pathetic little purchases, but who shall say of less significance than the vulgar purchases of the rich and proud? Most of the old villagers now lie "where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap". Their lives were spent in grinding poverty: they went their simple ways, bearing injustice, pain and loss with a stoical fortitude not met with in these progressive times. Maybe the few coppers they were able to spend on market day brought a little joy into their hard lives. Let us hope so. Gray had the old village people in mind when he wrote: -

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

Another train, in the flesh — or metal — now roars through the station, a fast passenger this time. Its roar and rattle sweep all my ghostly friends into oblivion, and I now see the countryside with clear eyes.

In that fascinating little book, *The Charm of Birds*, Viscount Grey says, of August and September — "these two months are to me the least interesting of the year. As far as the woods are concerned September is a dull month." As a general statement perhaps this is true. However, a particular wood I have in view from the station platform is anything but dull. It is the wood used by the local rooks as their roosting place, and for the last hour the great black rascals have been flying in from the fields for the night. They never approach the roost in one large flock. They are invariably spread out in a long straggling line over miles of countryside. The flight line over the village never varies, and the rooks always appear at dusk from the same direction, summer and winter, a fact I have noted for many years. The air corridor along which the approach is made is quite narrow, and the homing rooks fly in singles, pairs, trios or in large groups. One group I have just counted numbers over seventy birds. The rockery must contain not hundreds but thousands of birds: many times I have determined to count them, but have not yet got around to the task. It should be a fairly easy job, the birds approaching from one direction only, the south-west. I will certainly take a census one of these days and report my findings.

Beyond the rookery the ground rises gently to the skyline, the latter being crowned with a single line of elms, or "ellums", as they are termed hereabouts. A field to the right of the wood contains a herd of Friesian dairy cows, their black and white hides showing up clearly against the bright green backcloth of the rain-soaked grass. Further to the right I note several fields recently denuded of bumper crops of wheat and barley: the stubble gleams palely in the declining light of day. Suddenly seven swans appear from down the valley, flying in stately procession on powerful wings. What a tragedy it is that periodically one of these magnificent birds flies into the overhead electric cables which cross the valley, invariably breaking its beautiful neck. The Post Office will always fix corks to telephone wires in the neighbourhood of pigeon lofts, as a warning to the birds. Surely the Electricity Authority could undertake some similar form of protection for the swans, even if this entailed painting the cables with luminous paint, for it is usually at dusk that the swans come to grief. The cost would not be prohibitive, for the swans' line of flight is only one hundred yards wide.

Dusk now enshrouds the derelict station, a dusk rapidly turning to darkness. The red sun has dropped below the central Dorset heights, and massive black clouds, rolling up from the south-west, absorb its last rays. My ghostly friends are returning from the shades, accompanied by numerous bats, large and small. One of these nocturnal mammals is equal in size to a starling, and seems determined to frighten me off the premises, making repeated dives at my bald and shining head.

I don't like the fellow, and shall take the hint.

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"Inherit the Wind"

IT IS DIFFICULT to do justice to this magnificent reconstruction of the famous "Monkey Trial" which took place in Tennessee in 1925. The defendant was a more or less obscure teacher who tried to make his Bible-sodden students see in Evolution a first step, so to speak, to modern knowledge; but it was breaking the law to teach such heresy, and he was soon hauled up to face trial before the courts. Against him was a Fundamentalist attitude to the Bible almost impossible to believe — fanatical and, of course, ignorant. Against him also was brought the famous Presidential candidate, W. G. Bryan, who embodied everything one could hope for in sheer Fundamentalism; and to defend him was the famous Agnostic lawyer, Clarence Darrow. The background of the trial with its hysterical crowds shrieking "Down with Darwin", "Don't Monkey With Us", "Goodness, Not Gorillas", "You Can't Take the Monkey Out of Us", and many more similar and pious slogans is wonderfully produced, especially as in contrast we see Gene Kelly as a hard-headed cynical reporter, laughing at these quite hopeless fanatics in much the way that not only the rest of America but almost the whole world, laughed at them.

But it was the lawyers, Bryan and Darrow superbly acted by Frederic March and Spencer Tracy, who shared with the producer, Stanley Kramer, all the honours. In their two ways, they gave us some of the greatest acting I have ever seen. Even if you completely disagree with him, you could not help feeling a little pity for Bryan, so mercilessly castigated by Darrow who hadn't the heart to feel anything but human and generous pity for his opponent when he died after his "victory".

This is a film for Freethinkers, especially as it is the first I have seen with a definite Freethought message. I do not know how any Christian can see it, and yet remain fervently loyal to Christianity. Here we see what must have been the attitude of Christian priests which led to the horrors of the Inquisition — the sadistic fanaticism which true Christians preached for over a thousand years, and which, if it had not been for the progress of Science, we might well have had with us even now.

"Inherit the Wind" is a moving film in many ways and a great tribute to its producer, Stanley Kramer. He said on the TV that he had just a little sympathy for Fundamentalism, and he shows this without in the least destroying the film's devastating criticism of the kind of Christianity our forefathers had to put up with.

Perhaps one day some producer will discover in the turbulent lives of Charles Bradlaugh and Thomas Paine the same kind of exciting material for the screen as this celebrated "Monkey Trial" has given us. H.C.

CORRESPONDENCE

SIN

In reply to Dr. Hope (28/8/60): "Sin" is an offence against the god, or against his ethical code. Sin is persistence of the primitive taboo. Breaking secular laws is not sinful to the religionist.

The Roman Catholic group has a high percentage of crime, but a low percentage of sin — (i.e. Missing Sunday Mass, eating meat on Friday and so forth). The post mortem threat of Hell does create fear, guilt and anxiety in the believer's mind. I did not use the words "coward's castle" in my letter. Of course a Freethinker may not be an accurate thinker. The quality of thought depends on the quality of the brain and the education it has received. But would Dr. Hope explain what *he* means by "freethinking"?

L. MURRAY.

THE LIMIT?

Really, Mr. Duhig, you are the limit! Having delivered yourself of a piece of most stinging abuse of Mr. R. Smith, who has dared

to disagree with you, you complain of my "personal abuse [of you], so crudely offensive as to be quite unworthy of a reply"! You remind me of a boxer who, because he can't hit his opponent effectively, becomes very wild in his charges. On my card Mr. Smith (whom, incidentally, I don't personally know) is well ahead on points.

I stand by what I said. A man who isn't fair with those who honestly hold a point of view different from his own reflects no credit on the cause he thinks he champions. Freethought should be a byword for forthright but well-founded criticism. Yes, indeed, expose error as error. Call lies by not another name. Have no truck with evil. Condemn infamy for what it is. Spare not a villain. But answer honest men as you would wish them to answer you.

G. I. BENNETT.

REAL OPPONENTS

From several quarters I learn that recently, Drs. Heenan and Dwyer, of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Britain, enjoyed a Roman holiday on ITV ably assisted by Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge and another equally inefficient "unbeliever". It would appear that, as usual, the supposed unbelievers patted, or lobbed the ball into the padres' court, but could not between them muster up anything in the order of a fierce service, or a smash, which might have put the professional apologists on the defensive.

One wonders if these programmes are deliberately arranged by the Religious Advisory Bureau for boosting religion. If not it would surely occur to the programme planners to approach the proper sources from which to secure competent opponents, who have a case to put and the ability to put it.

May I suggest that your readers who receive these programmes and are exasperated by them, should write to the programme planners and demand that real discussions be televised? H. DAY.

PLATO AND CHRIST

In his article on Shelley, Denis Cobell states that much of Christ's teaching was founded on Plato. Now, assuming the existence of Jesus, what did an illiterate man wandering about in the desert know of Plato? Mr. Cobell does not mean Christian teaching; that is obvious. Perhaps Mr. Cobell would kindly explain what he means. Apart from this, congratulations on a fine article, Mr. Cobell.

R. BORSMAN.

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