

The Freethinker

Volume—LXXX No. 40

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

IN A MOST INTERESTING ARTICLE published recently in this paper, Mr. Alan O. Snook, turned a critical eye upon the shortcomings of the British Monarchy which he aptly described as the centre of, what is in effect, a fetishistic cult. I was much interested in Mr. Snook's most opportune castigation of the royal cult, particularly after the orgy of sensationalist snobbery that attended the translation of H.R.H. Princess Margaret into Mrs. (shade of Queen Victoria!) A. A.-Jones. A little time back, I was also very impressed by Mr. Snook's three articles on those pioneers of our evolving democracy, the Tolpuddle Martyrs of 1834. It so chanced that a few days ago, I met a descendant of one of them to whom I gave copies of Mr. Snook's FREETHINKER articles on this dramatic theme.

Past and Present

However, *revenons à nos moutons*; in this case, to the Monarchy of Great Britain represented (worthily or unworthily) by the reigning Dynasty of Hanover-Guelph-Wettin-Battenburg-Windsor. At present, as Mr. Snook noted, the principal function of the Monarchy is to act officially as the ceremonial head of the British State and, unofficially, as the visible embodiment of the Godhead to all the snobs in Great Britain—in London Society in particular—of which there appear to be a very large number. The actual political importance of the present-day monarchy does not appear to be very great. Gone—and long gone—are the days of the absolute monarchs of the Tudors and Stuarts, of “the Divine Right of Kings to govern wrong”. Gone, too, are the days when George III, that ambitious moron set to work, via the agency of his satellites, “the King's Friends” (Lord North *et al*) to coerce England and to subjugate America. Gone even are the days of Victoria “the Good”, “the Great”, who actually owed both her monarchical status and her historical reputation to the peculiar inability of her royal uncles (her “wicked uncles” as they have been aptly described) to produce any legitimate offspring competent to succeed to the British Throne; an omission more remarkable in that their illegitimate progeny were second only to the huge brood of bastards produced by that royal polygamist, Charles II. (Incidentally, we recall that the late Mr. Justice Eve officially bestowed his judicial blessing, and even recommended for use in his court, that good old English word “bastard”. Both Charles II and the early Hanoverians concurred in practice with his Lordship's injunction.)

English Republicanism

Thanks to the very fortunate coincidence of Victoria's later years with the dazzling apotheosis of British Imperialism that witnessed her Diamond Jubilee in 1897, the last years of that very reactionary old lady were a blaze of glory the result of which has been to create a Victorian legend even more misleading than are the bulk of historical legends. As far as the Queen's own personality was con-

cerned, there was very little correspondence between Victoria's staggering historical reputation and her really rather commonplace abilities and personal outlook. When John M. Robertson, in a pamphlet entitled *Royalism*, described her as mentally “sub-normal”, he perhaps rather overshot the mark. But certainly not more — in all probability a great deal less — than did, and in some circles probably still do, the sedulous purveyors of the official mythology anent “The widow of Windsor”, Victoria “by the grace of God”, etc. One serious historical result of this sacrosanct mythology has been to obscure the existence and strength of the very active and vocal English Republican movement that

flourished quite considerably in the early and middle years of the Widow's long reign, before the cult of Imperialism (founded by Disraeli and popularised by Kipling) surrounded the monarchy like a veil. Earlier on, Republicanism had been very active in Britain, its outstanding personality being Charles Bradlaugh whose *Impeachment of the House of Brunswick*, forcibly exposed the glaring faults of the early Hanoverians, described by Bradlaugh, in a trenchant epigram, as “small breast-bested wanderers”. At the time when Bradlaugh formed the National Secular Society (1866), Republicanism was very much in the air. Incidentally, it is relevant to recall that the aims and objects of the National Secular Society, still include Republicanism. Most of its leading representatives have adhered to the Republican platform as most assuredly does Bradlaugh's present successor as President of the National Secular Society! It was, indeed, Charles Bradlaugh's powerful combination of Atheism and Republicanism that made the MP for Northampton the bugbear of his contemporary reactionaries in both Church and State. Did not a Tory journal of that era scathingly refer to his constituency as “that stinking den of Republican cobblers”? (A few years back, on the only occasion that I have ever visited Northampton, I was informed by its present Labour MP, Mr. Paget, that there were nowadays no Republicans in Northampton. Mr. Paget went on to record the surprising opinion that Bradlaugh was “a great Christian”—a judgment which would scarcely have commended itself to his great predecessor.)

Our Present Monarchy

However, “the fashion of this world passes away”—including Victorian Republicanism. Since when, the Monarchy *mystique* appears to have waxed *pari passu* with the actual political insignificance of the institution itself. Queen Victoria died in the odour of sanctity, and her successors have been even more unremarkable. Edward VII, whom even a Tory journal once described as “a drunken libertine” had a personal entourage composed mainly of cosmopolitan experts on “slow horses and fast women”. (The only man who is ever recorded as having addressed this throw-back to the early Hanoverians as a human being, was the famous American pugilist, John L.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Monarchy

By F. A. RIDLEY

Sullivan, who once greeted the Prince of Wales with the notable query, "Glad to meet you, Wales, how's your Mother?" (Queen Victoria probably was not amused!) George V relatively respectable, was otherwise a complete mediocrity, besides being a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary. Persistent rumours went the round, at the time, that the King played an active role in the behind-the-scenes intrigues that got rid of the Labour Government in 1931. The tragi-comedy of the brief reign and enforced abdication of the Duke of Windsor is only notable for the intense conservatism that still dominates the ruling circles in these islands, and of course, it cast a glaring light on the real political insignificance of the monarchy when it clashes with vested interests in Church and State. George VI was

entirely inoffensive and completely insignificant, while it has been not unkindly (nor inaccurately) said that the mental equipment of her present majesty would surely make her a success behind a counter. Be that as it may, the royal *mystique*, to judge from recent events, was never more potent than now, though it is an interesting speculation whether that very clever young man, the Duke of Edinburgh, will succeed in modernising the archaic institution. Republicans have only one consolation; it is now possible constitutionally, as it was not in Bradlaugh's day, to proclaim Great Britain as a Republic inside the Commonwealth, and thus quietly get rid of the monarchy without melodrama or guillotines. *Speed that day!*

Boys' Clubs and Religion

[Editor's Note: The author of this article is associated with a long-established boys' club that is affiliated to the NABC. Out of consideration for his club leader rather than himself he feels he must remain anonymous.]

IN ITS RECENTLY PUBLISHED annual report, the National Association of Boys' Clubs rejects the "informal youth work" approach of the Albemarle Committee on youth services. The association favours working for specific objectives, and one of these—the one most likely to concern secularists—is the inculcation of a religious faith. By this the NABC usually means Christianity, though it does condescend to recognise that the Jewish religion also exists—in fact one of the Association's better known supporters, Sir Basil Henriques, is Jewish. The report expresses the belief that "men need a religious faith before all other things, and in our experience, the opportunities to seek and to find that faith should be given during the formative years".

This does not represent any radical change in policy; the association has, as its declared policy, a concern for boys' "spiritual" welfare, as much as for their material well-being. Much has been said recently on the value of work among youth; more financial assistance is to be given by the government to youth services. It follows that there will be a demand for more youth workers, leaders, helpers, etc., and the NABC wants to ensure that these people are religious. By this it does not mean that they should be religious fanatics; not by any means, but it is stressed time and time again that leaders should have a faith that places Christ first and foremost. This point was made in a pamphlet by Stanley Nairne, Secretary of the Scottish Association of Boys' Clubs (affiliated to the NABC). In fact it could be said that efforts are being made to make club leadership a closed shop. Sir Basil Henriques says almost this in his pamphlet published by the NABC, *Club Leadership As A Vocation*: "Putting Club Leadership at this extremely high and spiritual level", he writes, "would seem at first to rule out those who have not experienced this call from God—the agnostic or the atheist. Actually, it does not altogether do so". He then goes on to give a number of reasons why leaders who do not share his religious convictions (i.e., belief in a god) are not quite right as club leaders. In 1944 the NABC issued a report *Religion in Boys' Clubs*, which while embodying an escape clause, made it perfectly clear that the non-believer was not welcome. This was also brought out in an article by one R. Poole, in *The Boy* (the official journal of the NABC, now renamed *Challenge*) for Summer 1948. Mr. Poole stated: "It should be made clear that the only true leadership is in the imitation of Our Lord". As to the

escape clause in the 1944 report, the same writer bluntly asserted: "Quite certainly it was never intended to mean 'an agnostic can run a perfectly good boys' club'." If this is what is thought of an agnostic's chances, what price those of a declared atheist?

So far I have not dealt with the attitude of boys towards religion, or the extent it is represented in the average club programme. In regard to the latter, this is largely determined by the attitude taken by the leader or, to a lesser extent, by the management committee (in many cases members of the management committee exhibit little enthusiasm to take an active role in club activities). In a club attached to a church or religious organisation, religion will play a prominent part, but in the average "secular" club it is more often than not confined to a Sunday service giving the leader a chance to announce future activities. Some look on it as valuable for that, for many club members appear never to read the club notice board. From my own not inconsiderable experience I have found that most boys are not interested in religion, and this fact appears to have dawned on Mr. Poole, for, in the article already referred to, he declares that "most discussions of religious problems in the movement seem to centre round 'How to take Christianity to the boy', 'How to put religion in the club' and so on". In the pamphlet *Youth Clubs and Community Centres*, published by Aberdeen Education Committee in 1954, it is also noted that club leaders find it difficult to "talk religion" with club members. The approach, it is suggested, should be made "carefully and sincerely". Put briefly, most club members look on religion as a bore, and religious activities something to be put with. The sooner they are over the better.

In reading of the attitude of the NABC to religion, one fact sticks out. If a boy wants to join a club but comes from a non-Christian home he will have to put up with various forms of Christian propaganda or remain outside. When we consider this point, we should bear in mind that youth clubs get assistance from public funds. At least in school the boy would be protected (for what it is worth) by the clause in the 1944 Education Act which allows for withdrawal from religious instruction. It is now time that I said a little about the NABC. It is an association of clubs; it does not control them. This is important, for it means that the policy of the association could be reversed if sufficient pressure were exerted on it. This is where Secularists can play a part for, though I may have created the impression that the religious bodies have the youth clubs in this country well and truly where they want them, this is not so. Most clubs are independ-

(Concluded on page 316)

This "Incarnation" Business

By H. CUTNER

IF ANYONE IMAGINES that it is easy to understand what the word "incarnation" means, let him try to find out from our dictionaries and encyclopedias. One would have thought that our Bible dictionaries especially would devote a long article to it, but such works as Dr. Smith's *Smaller Bible Dictionary* (616 pages) and Cassell's *Bible Dictionary* (1,141 pages) appear to have shirked the subject, perhaps referring to it, however, in other articles. Dear old Buck's *Theological Dictionary* tells us that it is "The act whereby the Son of God assumed the human nature; or the mystery by which Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word, was made man, in order to accomplish the work of our salvation." As this wonderful "explanation" of what the word means assumes everything we want an explanation for, and as probably Mr. Buck felt this, he sends us to his article on the Nativity, and to *Meldrum on the incarnation*—a work I am quite unable to consult at the moment. The Nativity article contains nothing about the Incarnation—as I suspected—and so I went to a Roman Catholic work which is supposed to supply an answer to every objection levelled at the Christian religion.

This is the American *Question Box* by the Rev. B. L. Conway, and he answers the question, "What do Christians mean by the Incarnation?" by

The mystery of the Incarnation is the unique and marvellous union of the Divine Nature and the Human Nature on the one Person of the Word Made Flesh, Christ Jesus. We call this union unique, because no other being is constituted in this way; and because it is brought about only by God's Infinite Power and Love . . .

Now, at a first glance, it will be seen that this, like Mr. Buck's, is no explanation whatever. In fact, it is just gibberish, except to priests and believers who are not interested in the meaning of words. Both classes are roundly told that the Incarnation is a "mystery" which here can only mean that it is (as I have said) simply gibberish. Nobody can possibly know what is meant by the "unique and marvellous union of the Divine Nature and the Human Nature". Christians accept over and over again a number of words and words put together as having some meaning and, if asked what they mean, they blandly declare "it is a mystery." And Mr. Conway graciously adds that "the mystery lies in the fact the two natures constitute one single Person, although they are not fused into one single Nature." How is that for an "explanation"?

In case you want to know where the Bible comes into this, Dr. Conway admits it *doesn't*—"the Bible does not contain the precise theological formula of 'two Natures in one Person', but it expresses its identical meaning clearly in many passages". Apart from the "clearly", I am sure you can get any "theological formula" quite easily from the Bible. All you have to do is to repeat "Jesus Christ is Son of God and Son of Man, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and born of the Blessed Virgin in time" as Mr. Conway does, and the trick is done. But what this egregious nonsense really means is quite impossible to discover.

Like Mr. Buck, Mr. Conway actually senses this a little. He says,

Although the Incarnation is indeed a transcendent mystery which never could be discovered by the unaided reason, it is not against reason. Reason can prove that Christ claimed equality with God and that He confirmed His claim to be divine by miracles (John 10, 25).

In general, when a priest or parson talks about the Incarnation he very gravely and reverently recites the opening

verses of John which the reader may remember refers to the "Logos" translated as the "Word".

All the same, I suspect that *when* the Incarnation took place must have been the subject of many lengthy treatises (in Latin) by Christian theologians, and I'm sorry to say that I do not read Latin. But I had the *time* of the Incarnation explained to me by an earnest Catholic once from Mark 1, 9-11—a delightful passage worth reproducing from God's Precious Word:—

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in who I am well pleased . . .

Now I ask in all seriousness, can anyone in this year 1960 read this absurd rigmarole without laughing? Fancy "a voice" coming from "heaven"—the voice presumably that of God Almighty *residing* in "Heaven" speaking in Greek to a Jew who (as far as we know) only knew Aramaic. One wonders how much further Christians can go in sheer credulity. The story would be laughed out of court if it appeared in Grimm, or Anderson, or the *Arabian Nights* as *true*; but it is in the Bible, it is a "revelation" from God Himself, and shows how, as Mr. Conway says, the two Natures, Divine and Human, were fused. If this particular yarn does not prove the Incarnation, then what does?

Of course, Mr. Conway himself prefers the explanation given in John. He says

St. John in the Prologue of his Gospel states the doctrine with a clearness and a beauty never equalled. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us."

I dealt with all this in a recent article and do not wish to go over the same ground again; but what is so amusing about it is that what sounds to an average man empty babble is put forward as "clearly" telling us what the Incarnation means. I doubt whether anything else in the Bible is so thoroughly devoid of meaning.

The real truth is, as I indicated in my previous article, that this Incarnation business is pure Paganism and based on ignorance and credulity. St. Augustine admits this when in his *Confessions* he says that a great deal of John and his Word can be found in Plato. E. P. Meredith, in his brilliant *Prophet of Nazareth*, tells us that the doctrine of the Logos was taught by Pythagoras and "Prometheus, who was both God and man, was designated the Logos" (quoting Aeschylus). Meredith gives numerous examples from the admissions of Christian writers that this "incarnation" business was taken almost bodily from Paganism.

Readers must never forget that famous aphorism—"What is true in Christianity is not new; what is new in Christianity is not true."

OTHER-WORLDLINESS

A 14-year-old boy who killed two playmates (aged 9 and 11) in West Memphis, Arkansas, surrendered soon after the shooting and told the police he had deliberately planned it to earn the electric chair (*New York Journal-American*, 11/9/60). Dumping the shotgun on a counter, he said he had killed the two younger boys "because I want to die. I do not belong in this world. I want to go to heaven. If I just killed one they might just send me to reform school again. But if I killed them both they'll send me to the chair".

This Believing World

The Christian Dictatorship in South Africa has just expelled a Christian Bishop. Is it surprising? Christians have always been notorious for expelling other Christians—one has only to read in the Sacred Writings how Paul and Barnabas and Peter quarrelled and “withstood” each other, and no doubt withstood many other stout-hearted believers as well. In London, we are told, “Church authorities are surprised and indignant about the deportation”. We cannot help wondering whether they and the Bishop would have been surprised and indignant if it had been a Muslim or a Jewish Rabbi who was expelled?

★

In the meantime, we are wondering also whether South Africa's treatment of Bishop Reeves isn't a wee bit like the fanatical Christians of the South angrily attacking Senator Kennedy's candidature for the Presidency of the USA? Even Mr. Nixon, the other candidate, is begging voters to leave religion out of the question. But like Mr. Dick's famous Memorial and King Charles the First (in *David Copperfield*) it is difficult to keep religion out of anything. Particularly Roman Catholicism.

★

A flaming heading in “Today” asks if Astrology is “Truth or Quackery?” and pronounces as fact that 20,000,000 Britons “seek their fortunes in the stars”. This may not be quite right, but millions certainly like to read what the popular astrological column has in store for them. It is difficult to learn what the writer of the article himself really thinks of the ancient art, but Miss Dorothy Adams, the pet astrologer of *Psychic News*, provides us in *Today* with an elaborate Horoscope of Mr. Billy Butlin, so famous for his Holiday Camps. As Mr. Butlin has made a great success of them, Miss Adams has very little difficulty in proving how much of this success was due to the lucky birthdate he was provided with by his parents. We shudder to think what would have happened to Mr. Butlin had he been born a few days—or even hours—later.

★

Lots of people must have been born exactly at the same time as fortunate Mr. Butlin—alas, we hear nothing of them. The date is September 24, 1899, and the sun was 6 degrees 30 minutes of Libra and Venus—the lady who rules his horoscope (and for that matter, rules many males who know nothing about horoscopes). But what with “a second configuration of the Sun and Jupiter and the Moon in Leo, to say nothing of the way Venus progresses opposite Neptune”—in his second house of course—can we wonder at Mr. Butlin's phenomenal success?

★

The saving power of the Cross has been always sung with gusto by Christians, but a little item in a newspaper caught our eye the other day. It appears that near Vienna recently, a “single stroke of lightning killed 88 sheep in a thunderstorm”. There is nothing remarkable about this, but we learn that the sheep had gathered around an iron Cross on a mountain, and the lightning struck the Cross and killed the sheep. We wonder how our Christian friends (if we have any) who believe in the Design argument, and in Jesus and his Cross, would explain why the sheep were thus killed?

★

The “Sunday Express” headed an article the other week, “Vicar may become chaplain to ETU”, and commented, “Although it is normal Communist policy not to recognise the Church, the vicar's application is being considered

by the ETU executive”. His name is the Rev. V. Symons, and he has high hopes that his application will be accepted. At all events, when Mr. Symons invited the union to give a new window to his church they did so with alacrity, and the ETU leaders, “including Mr. F. Haxell, have attended services there”. Should we be surprised that the ETU may now have its own chaplain? Of course not. Most of its members are believers, and the ubiquitous Church never misses a chance.

★

According to the “Church of England Newspaper”, the “Church of England is as dead as mutton”. It all depends on what we mean by the term. As far as its *possessions* are concerned, the C of E is a long way from being dead. As far as its particular tenets about Christianity are concerned, thousands of people no doubt sincerely believe in them. But if we substitute for the Church of England, the religion of Christianity—of course this religion is, in the opinion of millions of intelligent people, as “dead as mutton”.

★

Who really believes on the strength of a wrongly-translated verse from Isaiah that somebody called Jesus was born in 1 AD from a “virgin”? Who believes that this Jesus came from Heaven to “save” mankind because a mythical Adam ate an apple in the year 4004 BC? Who believes in the Devils and their Hell vouched for by Jesus? Who believes that any *prayer* whatever has the slightest effect on anything? We could multiply these queries a hundred times—and the answer would have to be that the C of E as a whole believes in none of them. On questions of “theology” it is certainly as “dead as mutton”.

BOYS' CLUBS AND RELIGION

(Concluded from page 314)

dent, though affiliated, and they will welcome adult helpers. There is no reason whatsoever why Secularists should not be among these people. I will not for a moment suggest that the task to be undertaken is easy; it is not. But one way in which secular influence could be promoted is to work for the foundation of youth clubs in areas where there are none. What the attitude of the NABC would be to a request for affiliation from a club that rejected religious activities as part of its programme I cannot say. I suspect that this has yet to happen. I have already mentioned that adult helpers are welcome, their welcome will be greater if they have any skills that are of value to a club; coaching in various games for example. I happen to know that football referees are in short supply in many areas, and clubs would welcome one as a helper, even if it were only to train members in the noble art of being a referee. To counter religious influence in youth clubs is a job that calls for sacrifice, but if Secularists would make the sacrifice, the task would not be anything like so hard as it now is.

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NEXT WEEK

THE HOSTS OF HEAVEN

By GUSTAV DAVIDSON

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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, 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

Harlow Humanist Group (Halling Hill Common Room, The Stow), Thursday, September 29th, 8 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Atheism and Society".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 2nd, 6.30 p.m., Concert, "Showtime" (Directed by G. CHAPLIN).

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Elite Cinema Restaurant), Saturday, October 1st, 2.30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "Freethought in the World Today".

Notes and News

OCTOBER 4th is World Day for Animals, and Miss Florence Barker, M.A., Hon. Secretary of the International Cultural Forum (United Kingdom Branch) has used the occasion for a review of "Progress in Animal Welfare", which will appear next week. A similar article by Miss Barker last year (THE FREETHINKER, 11/9/59), was recently reprinted in *Vegetarian India*.

★

AT ITS SPECIAL MEETING on September 18th, the Glasgow Secular Society elected a new Hon. Secretary, Mr. L. Murray, an occasional contributor to THE FREETHINKER and—as readers of his "Magic Moments" last week may have guessed—an ex-Roman Catholic. Nobody is happier about the appointment than Mr. R. Hamilton, veteran President of the GSS, and Mr. J. Barrowman, retiring Secretary, who accepted the position of Treasurer. Indeed, Mr. Murray will not lack support from as fine a group of stalwarts as could be found anywhere. He is keen, and we wish him every success.

★

ANOTHER NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY branch that can boast many stalwarts is Birmingham, and when members are more or less confined to home through age or sickness, Branch officers take turns in visiting them and writing to them. A recent jumble sale made a nice profit, much of which will be used for sending Christmas parcels to elderly Freethinkers. President, Mr. W. Miller, Secretary, Mr. W. Morris and Treasurer, Mr. J. W. Vernon, are strong believers in making and keeping personal contact with members. Two other NSS Branch Secretaries, Mr.

E. Mills (Kingston) and Mr. W. J. McIlroy (Marble Arch) spring to mind in this connection. And, incidentally, Mr. McIlroy would like to thank the supporters of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament who have written to him c/o this office.

★

THE LARGEST BRANCH of the National Secular Society is, of course, North London—President, Mr. Len Ebury, still our foremost outdoor speaker but now, we are glad to say, well supported; Secretary, Mrs. Eva Ebury, whose articles are so much appreciated by readers (see letter this week). We should like to express our appreciation to Mr. and Mrs. Ebury on another score: for their wonderful effort on behalf of the NSS Building Fund. By regular monthly donations of £5 (two already made), the Branch intends to give £100 to the Fund, in addition to the not inconsiderable private contributions of its members. Not all Branches can hope to equal this, perhaps, but we trust they will give what they can to this worthy cause. The NSS has its own premises but has had to use capital—and sacrifice income—to get them. Moreover, unlike the churches and chapels, it has to pay rates and taxes.

★

"THERE MAY BE BIGGER TROUBLE over the Whitehead rocks controversy", announced the *Belfast Telegraph* (10/9/60). It seems the Board of Trade or the Belfast Harbour Commissioners may find themselves involved, but a rather different technical point intrigues us. It will be remembered (THE FREETHINKER, 23/9/60) that evangelist Mr. Tom Vezey argued that Bible texts were not slogans but the word of God, and therefore didn't contravene a by-law. Now the original texts have been disfigured beyond recognition (e.g. "After death the judgment" became "Dafter death the judges"). Are they still the word of God or mere slogans?

★

"A 300-WORD ARTICLE in a Soviet provincial newspaper reveals that anti-Jewish attacks are permissible in Krushchev's Russia." We find this *Daily Express* (20/9/60) remark puzzling. Are they not also permitted in, for example, Britain, and the US? And, shouldn't they be? We don't advocate any different treatment for Jews than for anyone else—and no immunity from criticism. Unfortunately, since the horror of Nazism, criticism of Jews and Judaism is liable to be misinterpreted. The article referred to, appeared in *Soviet Latvia* and was, first, an attack on the setting up of a "capitalist enterprise" which it said had been hushed up due to Jewish influence, and second, an attack on the Jewish religion. We cannot pass judgment on the first, but we strongly support the second. And we reprint the ending of the article which read: "The Rabbi of Riga says that on the Day of the Last Judgment Jehovah will decide who is to be rich and who is to become poor. For the time being, it is the racketeer Gutkin and his friends from the Jewish community who enriched themselves".

★

"H.M.S. BEAGLE is to leave Plymouth tomorrow to retrace part of the voyage made by Darwin in 1831." This was the start of a leader in the *Western Evening Herald* for September 19th, 1960. The paper went on to ask: "How may visitors know that Darwin set sail on his fact-finding voyage from Plymouth? Where are the plaques that tell them so?" We hope the city will take the hint and commemorate the momentous voyage in an appropriately permanent way. Darwin may have described his two months wait at Plymouth as "the most miserable which I ever spent" but, as the *Evening Herald* remarks, "He would have found the modern city quite a change".

A Freethinker in Geneva

By COLIN McCALL

"GENEVA IS CRAMFULL OF ATTRACTIONS for the British Freethinker." So wrote the President of the World Union of Freethinkers, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, in our issue of July 29th. And so it proved—for one British Freethinker at any rate. It was my first visit to this city at the southwestern tip of the crescent-shaped Lac Lemman, where the Rhone reasserts itself as a river, receives its tributary, the Arve, and pursues its way, via Lyons, to its delta by Marseilles. This city surrounded by mountains, all "subject", as Shelley put it, to the great white mountain itself, Mont Blanc, which deigns occasionally to emerge from the mist and demonstrate its sovereignty. Its brief appearance in early September was the occasion for appropriate obeisance on my part.

Geneva is obviously a prosperous city, with new, and for the most part elegant flats everywhere, and many more on the way. The cost of living is high, and who buys all the watches, I don't know; but life, one feels, is good here. The lake, of course, is the centre—and not just topographically. Beautiful and blue by day; at night it is irresistible, rainbow-coloured with reflected neon-signs that lack their usual vulgarity. But one should tear oneself away from the quays and lakeside gardens, at least to see the Reformation monument (a wall, in fact) with its huge central quartet (Farel, Calvin, Bèze, Knox) illuminated stark, and almost frightening in the darkness of the park.

Less frightening, though, in stone, than flesh and blood—if blood they had!

The great monument is misnamed. It honours Calvinists and Puritans rather than the Reformation as a whole. Wyclif and Huss are notable absentees; Luther and Melancthon have separate monuments. And the emphasis is political. Hence the presence of Cromwell. Perhaps the finest here is Roger Williams, a genuine advocate of religious freedom.

For the Freethinker, places often mean people, for it is people who give character to places, and nowhere more than in Switzerland as G. R. de Beer has shown. Geneva itself means Calvin, Rousseau and Voltaire. For the first I have hatred: for the second, indifference; for the third unbounded admiration. I don't begrudge Jean-Jacques his statue and his little island: he deserves them as a famous citizen of Geneva. And the island offers a quiet and shady retreat from the hurtling traffic and the heat at all times of the day. One can gaze up at the mountains or down at the swans, and listen always to the water. But I can raise little enthusiasm for the man.

But Voltaire! Who can be indifferent to that name? Certainly not I. No one could keep me from Les Délices (his Genevan home) preserved as a museum—and aptly named. Over the border too, into France: to Ferney, or Ferney-Voltaire, as it is now. Here the great man grins from the top of a fountain, and stands, a little bent, mocking perhaps, yet benevolent, in the *Avenue de la Mairie*. "To the Patriarch of Ferney," "to the Poet-Philosopher"; and a list of his great achievements as writer, benefactor, and fighter for freedom can be read on the plinth.

Calvin also has his friends. But not among Freethinkers. It were not wise to allow people freedom to say what they liked, for then Epicureans, atheists, despisers of God would be heartily pleased. So ran Calvin's justification of what Voltaire called the first religious murder of the Reforma-

tion; what "friends" of the "great Reformer" have termed an "error": the burning of Servetus.

Servetus was neither an Epicurean, an atheist, nor a despiser of God. "Jesus, Son of the everlasting God, have pity on me!" he screamed as the roasting flames rose about his chained body in this foulest of murders. No, Servetus was not an atheist, but it is fitting that atheists and freethinkers should remember him. Fitting that Charles Bradlaugh Bonner and André Lorulot should speak at the unveiling of the new statue to him at Annemasse (again just over the French border) on September 4th, 1960, after an opening speech by the Mayor, M. Montessuit, in the town square, and a procession through the decorated streets to the municipal park where the statue (a replica of a former one destroyed by the Nazis) has been erected by subscription. A statue which, said M. Montessuit, will inspire pity and stimulate thought.

The unveiling was performed by M. L. Guersillon, President of the Committee responsible for the subscription, and the Marseillaise was played as the tricolour fell to the floor. Then Mr. Bonner retraced the life and work of Servetus, as he did in these columns (August 12th), and M. Lorulot gave one of his most inspiring speeches, concluding: "Honour to Michael Servetus, and honour to all those who suffered for the great cause of human reason that will finally free us from all superstition and all tyranny".

There is—need I say?—no statue of Servetus on the Reformation monument: he went too far for the Reformers and denied the Trinity. But Farel is there. Farel, who travelled from Lausanne to pester the condemned man for a recantation: in prison, at the sentencing, in procession to execution and at the very stake itself. Was Servetus prepared to renounce his teaching against the Trinity and so gain the blessing of a milder form of execution? Would he acknowledge error and repudiate his false doctrine? Servetus would have none of it. Though unjustly sentenced, he asked God to be merciful to his accusers. "What!" exclaimed Farel. "After committing the most abominable sin, do you still try to justify it?" (*vide* Stefan Zweig, *The Right to Heresy*). Yes. Farel is there: and in fitting company. Alongside his master, Calvin himself; that epitome of intolerance, Knox; and Bèze, Calvin's apologist and successor.

Dominating the old part of Geneva is St. Peter's (Protestant) Cathedral, where Calvin preached; where Servetus for some unaccountable reason attended morning service on Sunday, August 13th, 1553; where he was recognised by his former fellow-student in the pulpit, and was arrested as he was leaving. Near by is the Town Hall where the awful sentence was pronounced. Chained and tattered, hardly able to walk, Servetus was brought from prison to hear it from the steps: "We condemn thee, Michael Servetus, to be conveyed in bonds to Champeil, there to be burned alive, and with thee the manuscript of thy book and the printed volume, until thy body is consumed to ashes. Thus shalt thou end thy days, as a

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warning to all others who might wish to repeat thine offence".

It was left to Castellio (as Zweig notes) to ask: "Who would today wish to become a Christian when those who confess themselves Christians are slain by other Christians without mercy by fire and water and the sword and are treated more cruelly than murderers or robbers?" And to shatter Calvin's defence with the humanistic: "To burn a man alive does not defend a doctrine, but slays a man".

Approach to the Deity

ALAN O. SNOOK

I HAVE JUST BEEN LISTENING to a parson addressing his god, during a broadcast church service. Will some kindly Christian soul explain why their reverences cannot address the heavens in a more intelligent manner? The style varies from the pseudo-respectful, ingratiating and grovelling, to the familiar hail-fellow-well-met-slap-happy-good-old-dad attitude. The jovial type of approach certainly gives the unbeliever more amusement than the mock-serious: I imagine the unknown god of the Athenians is able to look upon the familiar and hearty parson with benevolent tolerance. But were I an inhabitant of Olympus I should certainly resent the approach of the groveller, especially when he makes unreasonable, unseasonable, unmerited and childish demands upon my patience and generosity.

In any event, any gods who chance to inhabit the mountain must be feeling pretty bored after 3,000 years of Hebrew and 2,000 years of Christian supplication.

As a small boy I used to listen to a certain Methodist parson, the Rev. G--- B---, long since gathered to his fathers. (By the way — why do these chaps insist upon referring to themselves as "reverends"? Bit high falutin', surely?) The Rev. G. B. was a blood and fire merchant, and I used to sit rivetted to my seat in mortal terror, conjuring up lurid visions of a furious god livid with anger, bent on consigning me to everlasting fire and hideous torture for having robbed an orchard or robin's nest. Had I been the arbiter of human destiny I should have felt pretty peeved with the Rev. G. B. His reverence used to threaten his congregation with one wildly gesticulating fist, whilst the other was raised aloft in the face of his god. He addressed his remarks to stellar space in a voice of such truculence that I often expected God to descend and blast us all to blazes. I visualised a fiery shower of thunderbolts and meteorites raining on the humble chapel, the parson alone surviving the celestial visitation. Another parson, once pointed an accusing finger directly at me, rasping in a high falsetto that I stank to high heaven — of sin. I was seven years of age at the time.

In conclusion: the service referred to in my first sentence ended with the hymn — "Out of the depths we cry to Thee". People in fair circumstances who whine for supernatural help in this manner should take a walk around a State mental institution or Cancer hospital. They might then realise that some of their fellow mortals in *extremis* have reason to cry from the depths — but don't. As for the hymn — "There is a fountain filled with blood", one can only suppose that intelligent parsons — there are a few — must feel like African witch-doctors presiding over some bestial sacrificial rite when listening to it. But perhaps Catholic services take the entire box of biscuits: when listening to these I rapidly drift into a state of semi-consciousness, imagining myself hiding in the bush, cavedropping on some primitive native ritualistic orgy. How men of the intellectual stature of Waugh and Greene can subscribe to such a fantastic religion is a thing I shall never begin to understand.

Father Paris and Mrs. Ebury

Dear Mrs. Ebury,

There was nothing in my letter (THE FREETHINKER, 19/8/60) to be "amazed and shocked" about.

Theology, as I understand it, far from being "incapable of reasonable proof", is highly reasonable. In fact, one can only start studying theology after a due course of philosophy (which is "reasoning" par excellence) and of its ancillary studies: Physics, Biology, Astronomy, and so on, which need a good exercise of the mental faculties. These are the human tools of the theologian, and one cannot be a good theologian if one is not a good philosopher.

But theology is based principally on Faith (Revelation), and its object is to explain as much as possible the mysteries of the Faith; showing their reasonableness, and answering objections. The best example of theology is St. Thomas's *Summa Theologica*.

Because theology presupposes the existence of God (the Creator) and you materialists deny it, it follows that there can not be (properly speaking) a common ground of discussion between you and theologians. This does not mean that theology has no answers to your difficulties, which often proceed from lack of knowledge and prejudices (the result of calumnies); but the proper ground of discussion between you and us is philosophy.

When you will admit, through the philosophical study of nature, as many before you have done, that matter (the Universe) must have been created, as I briefly tried to show you in my letter—and that it implies a Creator, who being Infinite Intelligence and Will Power cannot but be Personal—then we shall be logically able to study together and discuss the more arduous subjects of theology, namely: Revelation and the mysteries of the Faith. That's the method: step by step. Otherwise confusion would ensue. The words "excommunication, persecution and extermination" are out of place, and better leave them for others less calm than your goodself.

You have pity for the alleged millions of victims of the Catholic Church's persecution (!), but you do not seem to have any pity for the sufferings we Catholics have had through the ages, and the most inhuman brutalities we have been subjected to (Remember the English Martyrs!) not only in the past but also in these our times through Communist persecution.

There is so much hatred against the Church because there is hatred against God, and, in the words of St. Paul, the Church of Christ is "the Church of the living God".

To Mr. Murray I would like to say that in my letter I did not argue from "design", but from the nature of matter, in that it is indifferent to be (exist) or not to be, etc. Trinity is not a subject of Science or Philosophy, but of Theology. Let us not put the cart before the horse!

G. M. PARIS, O.P.

Editor, *The Faith* (Malta).

Dear Father Paris,

Thank you for your instructive letter, I had accepted your previous statement in its literal sense, that Theology was not to be argued with a Materialist. You tell me now that to understand Theology, I must follow you step by step through a philosophical study of nature, to a creator; then by philosophy, physics, biology and astronomy, faith and revelation to comprehend the reasonableness of Theology. A tall order! Does this apply also to the throng of illiterates, who are claimed as faithful sons and daughters of the one True Church; or is this knowledge the prerogative of the professional theologian alone, who is content that his flock shall believe without understanding?

Were you to follow me, step by step, through astronomy, physics and biology, it would lead you, not to revelation of a Personal Creator of Infinite Intelligence and Will Power, but to a purposeless, wasteful, painful universe. Then, were you still to presume a creator, you would turn from it in rage and long with Omar.

"To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire
Would you not shatter it to bits, and then
Remould it nearer to the hearts' desire."

An Atheist cannot hate something, which, for him has no existence; he despises the institutions built on the baseless concept of a god and condemns the iniquities enacted in its name.

Do I not feel pity for the English Martyrs? you ask. Dear Sir, if I could but express in words the pity I feel for deluded, misled, misguided humanity, even the moulded heart of Torquemada would throb again and break with pain. I can not; but, from 2,000 years ago, I offer you that poignant cry of the great Secularist, Lucretius, "To what foul deeds religion urges men!" Cogened by lies of nuptial bliss, Iphigenia, the fairest maid of Greece, was sacrificed by a father's hand, to placate a disgruntled god. Only a fairy story, truly, but also the age long tragedy of fanatic faith.

EVA EBURY.

CORRESPONDENCE

PRAISE

I enjoy THE FREETHINKER very much. The articles present an interesting variety in all facets of Freethought. I have enjoyed the correspondence and articles of Mrs. Eva Ebury. I think that her contributions are well reasoned and well presented, are direct and hard hitting; mince no words, and positively state her position. Her writings reveal many years of intensive study, reflection, and an acute intellect brought to bear upon her subject matter. And the output of Mr. Ridley certainly amazes me for quantity and quality. I am a firm believer that praise should not be withheld from our stalwarts, for they receive a comparatively small, or hardly any, return at all, for their devotion to "the best of causes". Our world of conformity smothered them with a conspiracy of silence, for they know they can't openly refute them.

LEON SPAIN (Philadelphia).

As a reader of THE FREETHINKER for nearly 60 years, I should like to express my appreciation of the contributions by Dr. J. V. Duhig. I hope he finds time for many more. A. ALEXANDER.

OLD AGE AND DEATH

I have been much interested and considerably amused by some of the correspondence on this subject.

"Interested" because at the age of THE FREETHINKER the topic becomes "current", and "amused" because I cannot restrain a ribald hilarity at morbid "sob stuff".

However I would suggest for those who cannot face a "cold" common sense and rationalistic view of life and its end; who want something more "warm and comforting" and don't find it in the Christian myth and twaddle, that they try a different religion. It seems a well established fact that the yellow Japanese Shinto has much less fear of death than the white European—or other—Christian.

That prince of observers of human mental make-up, W. Somerset Maugham, writes "It would be interesting if it could be shown that the fear of death is a European malady: observe the stolid composure with which Oriental and African races look forward to it". And, "No egoism is so insufferable as that of the Christian with regard to his soul" Verb. sap.

E NEWBOLD.

FOOD AND POPULATION

Rupert L. Humphris requests me to answer the two questions:

1. Can science or any just and sound economic system increase World food supply every generation and go on doing so in perpetuity?

2. Can human beings increase their numbers every generation and go on doing so in perpetuity.

The expression "in perpetuity" and its twin "unlimitedness" are terms which metaphysicians classify as "absolutes". What is meant by them exactly I do not know but I do know that they are figments of the mind due to the processes of abstraction and imagination and bear only the remotest connection to man's economic welfare. Nevertheless, I shall try to guess what the questioner really wants and attempt an answer.

To me, all things are relative (this is the only absolute truth of which I am aware). Therefore, all things are limited. Therefore, the potential food supply and the population of the future are limited. In my article (which Rupert L. Humphris does not appear to have read very carefully), I stated that the Globe sets the limit to the production of subsistence and that the opening up of the world's resources would eventually lead to smaller families. The question of contraception, at least from the economic point of view, does not arise.

The most cruel, brutal and inhuman institution of mankind that I know of is the present system of landownership, the principal cause of war, poverty and disease.

W. HARTLEY BOLTON.

CHRONOLOGY

The present dating of the Jewish calendar is 5721 (from September 21st) supposed to be from the creation of the world. But this dating was not generally adopted by the Jews until the 9th Century of our era. I am not surprised that "Infidel" got no reasonable answer from many Jews; the great majority are totally ignorant of their own history or the real origin of their beliefs or customs. J.R.

THE MEDITATIONS OF MARCUS AURELIUS

I was very interested in Mr. Bennett's two articles on Marcus Aurelius, but I should like to put this point. If these reflections had been the work of an ordinary citizen and not ascribable to an emperor, do you think that they would have been transmitted through the centuries? There was nothing very fresh or original in these writings except that they came from the mind of an emperor. It is certainly odd that they had no effect whatever on his wife, the Empress Faustina, whose character has come

down (rightly or wrongly) as being one of the worst women of her time.

Moreover, is there any more ground for assuming that the three emperors named were such beneficent rulers than there is for assuming the truth of many statements in Plutarch's Lives or in the purple passages of Biblical, Hebraic, and Arabic history? There is no legislative evidence to support the statements: nor is it the fact that Rome was ever at peace for forty years.

C. H. NORMAN.

SENATOR KENNEDY

It puzzles and saddens me that you continue to hold so strongly your opinion on Senator Kennedy and the Presidency. I feel sure I cannot be the only one of your readers who rubbed his eyes and felt that these comments (Notes and News, THE FREETHINKER, 16th September) should have been included under the heading in the opposite page, "This Believing World".

How I wish I could share your strange optimism about Mr. Kennedy acting as an individual if he becomes President, though I do not doubt his sincerity. Your optimism, if I may so with great reluctance, borders on the naïve. Do you really believe that American Catholics will not press, press, press and lobby? Do you really believe that the Catholics will let such a wonderful opportunity escape them? A Catholic President! I can almost see the Pope and Cardinal Spellman *et al*, rubbing their hands in gleeful anticipation.

It is all the more distressing considering THE FREETHINKER, more than anyone, except, perhaps the Russians(!), is well aware of the attitude of Catholicism to Communism. Whatever his own feelings, Mr. Kennedy will find himself forced into some tricky situations. Brinkmanship will be perpetually with us. How the late Mr. Dulles would have loved that!

I know I am not completely alone in my fears as the editor of *The Humanist* has expressed his disquiet over the possibility. I only hope you are right and we are wrong. G. H. HEY.

[Colin McCall will reply to this letter next week.—Ed.]

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