

The Freethinker

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MOST PEOPLE who have studied the annals of what the historian Lecky once described as "the rise of Rationalism in Europe", will probably agree that the golden age of European Freethought was represented by the 18th and 19th centuries, in particular, the era that stretched from the French Revolution to the first World War. This was the precise era when anti-clericalism was at its height and when an ever-growing spirit of revolt against the dead hand of the Churches was everywhere visible. This mental attitude, shared by most of the leading thinkers and writers of the period, along with masses of more ordinary and inarticulate people, not only corresponded with the then rapid contemporary advance of scientific knowledge, but was also fully in line with the spirit of its time. For the precise era between 1789 and 1914, was essentially the epoch of liberalism, using the word in its wider sense. Not only was the liberalism of this age anti-clerical by conviction, it was also favoured by the social circumstances.

This was first and foremost, the age of *laissez faire*, *laissez aller*; the individualistic era when it was widely held that "the best government is that one which governs least"—as Humboldt described contemporary political practice—when the main, if not sole function of the State was merely to hold the ring for the free play of the natural economic forces. It is hardly necessary to point out at this time of day, the terrible social and economic conditions to which the abuse of this "free market" economy so often gave rise. But in intellectual matters, the liberal philosophy was, in general, highly progressive; the century of stupendous progress resulted largely from its dynamic urge. In the heady air of the 19th Century, religion, and in particular, authoritarian religion, found it increasingly difficult to breathe. Freethought was in the air.

Conformist Age

It appears to be an historic law that every age recoils sharply against the influence of its immediate predecessor. At any rate, this tendency is very obvious in the 20th Century. Our age, unlike the age of Voltaire and Bradlaugh, is essentially a conformist age. Everything tends in this direction; for mass production is, nowadays, the rule; the collective operates in politics, economics and in such diverse fields as education and public entertainment. In all these contemporary fields, the plural takes precedence over the singular. The individual is relegated to the margin of contemporary history and society. It is an interesting, if now academic speculation, to inquire what, in this year 1960, and in the television age, would have been the reception accorded to such bold iconoclasts as Voltaire, Paine, and Bradlaugh. Their own age was the age of the soapbox and of a literary public who read journals that were not (as Lord Salisbury was to describe our modern popular press) "written by office boys to be read by office boys". It appears altogether probable that such born rebels and iconoclasts would have found them-

selves socially ostracised and eventually relegated to the discredited fringe of their contemporary society. In quite a few "civilised" lands (e.g. Franco Spain, or even perhaps Ireland under "Rome rule"), they would have spent their adult years under lock and key.

Indisputably, this state of things is very favourable to religion, in particular to the collectivist type of religion of which Rome represents the leading example in the Western world. It is, in any case, hardly disputable that had such bold heretics lived a few centuries earlier in an age of unquestioning Faith, their lives would have been short and their ends correspondingly unpleasant. The effective motto of our own era appears increasingly

to be the Napoleonic precept about Providence (in this case contemporary history) being "on the side of the big battalions". Today, everything caters for the masses; the technical conditions of our era inevitably consign the intellectual minority to the margin of contemporary society.

Mass Media

In the field of propaganda, one so vitally important in and to the diffusion of ideas of an advanced nature that have not yet obtained general acceptance—and virtually all genuinely freethought ideas fall within this category—time was, and not so long ago either, when the social or religious heretic had access to the self-same techniques of propaganda as had his orthodox opponents. But that all belongs to the past; all the agencies of mass propaganda, TV, radio, the popular press, function almost exclusively in the interests of their conventional orthodoxy in Church and State, as indeed, in practically everything else. TV goes the round of the world, but the soapbox (the people's pulpit) remains in Hyde Park.

Education for Conformity

In brief, the current social set-up in our age of mass production, appears to be as favourable to convention, to conformism, to orthodoxy of every kind, as last century was to the individual protester, or, in general to every species of unorthodox thought. The value of the heretic, cut off effectively from virtually all the media of mass-communications, is reduced to the modest dimensions of the still small voice. One hoped that education might have done something to redress this (from our point of view) sorry state of things, but actually today, education far from being an emancipator, is itself one of the worst offenders. Education today, is essentially education for conformity. In this country, the educational tone is still largely set by the (self-styled) "public" schools which are still very largely only public in the sense once used of the English law by the late Mr. Justice Darling, *viz* "Our courts are open to everyone like the Ritz Hotel". As far as the public schools are concerned, they always have been and presumably still are, champions of conformism both social, intellectual and (a most important item), athletic as well. Speaking from personal experience (I

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Freethought in an Age of Conformity

By F. A. RIDLEY

spent four years assimilating the code with what degree of success readers must judge), I can assert most definitely that only a person of quite remarkable originality could emerge unscathed from one of these institutes of "higher learning".

Of course the public schools also produce their quota of heretics (Shelley, and in our own time, George Orwell, spring readily to mind). But they are also quite definitely the exceptions that (proverbially) prove the rule. Nor is the current educational curriculum (except perhaps in a few modern schools), any more favourable to originality. Mostly it consists of a monotonous repetition of cramming for successive examinations which stultifies any incipient growth of independent thought. (A brilliant student once admitted to me that he dared not express his real views in his BA exam for fear of prejudicing his chance. "Always agree with the examiners" was his recipe for success. Hardly conducive to a critical attitude.)

A Humanist Day School?

By E. G. MACFARLANE

THE DUNDEE HUMANIST GROUP last month advertised in the local press on the following lines, "A Public Meeting under the auspices of the Dundee Humanist Group will be held in the College of Education at 7.30 p.m. on October 21st, 1960. Speaker, Mr. Jas. L. Stewart (member of Dundee Education Committee), Subject, 'Dundee should pioneer a Humanist Day-School'. Objectors to the Christian monopoly in education specially welcomed".

This advertisement only appeared once and it attracted only 40 out of about 200,000 probable readers—which isn't perhaps very good going. Nevertheless I feel that the idea underlying the meeting deserves consideration from readers of THE FREETHINKER so I would like to outline the idea for them.

Mr. Stewart began by relating some of his experiences as a member of Dundee Education Committee, particularly occasions when he had tried to oppose the injustices accompanying the giving of privileges to members of the clergy. He gave various particular instances of ministers being given housing accommodation almost immediately instead of taking their place with the others who were already in the queue for houses. He also asserted that ministers of religion wielded an influence in the Education Committee out of all proportion to the support which they got from the public in general and that this naturally had a distorting effect upon the choice of teachers in posts of responsibility. Outspoken freethinkers for instance had much less chance of promotion under an education committee which was so largely composed of un-elected religious members.

He then gave instances of how the Roman Catholics set about being provided with a new school in the City and of how the agreement to spend large sums of public money on the fittings and furnishings of such schools became almost automatic and non-controversial.

Mr. Stewart then turned to the difficulty he had experienced in deciding where to send his own children and found that he would have to send them much farther away than he would have liked, to get them to a Protestant rather than a Roman Catholic school. But although he found a Protestant school better from his point of view than a Catholic school it was by no means the ideal. There arose the difficult question of deciding whether to ask that his children should be excused from religious observances. He knew that no proper provision was made for children in this category and that one had to weigh the possible

The Jesuits founded the examination system and one can easily see why; it does precisely what the Holy Fathers wanted their system to achieve: it turns out pupils with an appearance of knowledge but who have lost all critical capacity and usually all desire for independent inquiry. Or as the great T. H. Huxley so aptly noted, no doubt from much factual experience, "They pass, but they don't know". (A formerly distinguished professor once admitted to me that it would be virtually impossible for anyone with any originality to succeed under such a system.) In any case, it is a rationalistic critique that people should be judged by the ideas in their heads rather than by the letters after their names and, all things considered, the current outlook appears pretty gloomy. We may perhaps console ourselves with the philosophic reflection that the next century might, in its turn, react as sharply against this one as this one has done against its predecessor. If today is bad, tomorrow may be better.

discomfort to the child of being an oddity, against the harm the religious observances could do. In either case the situation was far from satisfactory because children could be cruel to "oddities" and he thought it wrong to acquiesce in religious teaching when one strongly believes it is a reactionary influence. This line of thought had brought him to the idea that there might be enough people in Dundee with Humanist ideas to justify a demand through the proper channels for the provision of a school for the children of Humanists. He thought that in the first instance a single primary school might be provided and that Humanists in Dundee would be pleased to make sacrifices of convenience in the matter of taking their children to a particular school of this kind.

He said that he had made inquiries about the legal position through legal advisers to the Corporation, and he felt sure that if a popular demand could be made in a proper way the Corporation Education Committee could not fairly refuse to meet the demand.

Mr. Stewart's address was given a very sympathetic hearing and he received a warm ovation when he finished his speech. Discussion was animated and an attempt was made to move that the Humanist Group Committee should be empowered to make arrangements for the collection of signatures, but this was postponed because this was a public meeting and some members felt that action of this kind was a matter for consideration among Humanist members only.

Later the Humanist Group decided to debate the matter at their meeting on November 30th in Green's Playhouse at 7.30 p.m.

I hope that before then some FREETHINKER readers may possibly be able to record their reactions to the plan by letter to me at Lansdowne Park, Kilspindie Road, Dundee.

WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS

— IMPORTANT NOTICE —

The Committee of the World Union has arranged a week-end conference at the Beatrice Webb House, Holmby St. Mary, near Dorking, for September 8-9-10th, 1961. Lady Barbara Wootton has promised to open the conference on the Friday evening; Professor Lucia de Brouckère, Dr. W. E. Swinton, Mr. Fenner Brockway, M.P., and Professor Ernest Kahane have accepted invitations to speak.

The Beatrice Webb House is in charming country on the slopes of Leith Hill. The charge for the period from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Sunday will be three guineas per head, inclusive of lodging and three meals. A coach, or coaches, from a London centre will take the party down on Friday and bring them back Sunday evening (this will be an extra). Full details will be announced early in the New Year. Readers are advised to book places early, applying to the Secretary, National Secular Society.

The "Truth" About the Inquisition

By R. W. MORRELL

MANY "MODERNS" fail in their understanding of the Inquisition because they do not appreciate "five basic facts", says John A. O'Brien, Ph.D., LL.D., of the American University of Notre Dame, in his pamphlet, *The Truth About The Inquisition* (printed and published by the Paulist Fathers of New York). These five are: 1. The Church is a perfect society, with legislative, judicial and executive powers. 2. People of the Middle Ages (and of today as well—Dr. O'Brien adds) looked on the faith as "a gift of God" and wished to maintain orthodoxy, whatever the cost. 3. Church and State were closely allied. 4. There was a severe penal code: the "penalties inflicted by the Inquisition were simply those in current use in their day". 5. The modern concept is of neutrality towards all religions, a concept that would have shocked the medieval mind.

When did the Inquisition begin? This question is posed and answered by Dr. O'Brien in a manner that really lets the cat out of the bag. He tells us: "it is not accurate to say that the Inquisition made its appearance in the 13th century . . . it was a stage in the process of evolution whose beginnings go back to the origins of Christianity". I could not agree more. The roots of the Inquisition are clearly buried among the teachings credited to the founder of Christianity. Jesus may have taught "the lesson of tolerance" but he also taught the lesson of intolerance, those not "for him", being his enemies. The Roman Church claims to be the institution founded by Jesus: it teaches that the soul, being immaterial, is of more importance than the material body. Acting on this, the Church was forced to take action to counter "error" if it was thought that the spiritual welfare of the faithful was threatened. Such a position is amply supported by the teachings of Jesus and his immediate followers.

The foundation of the Inquisition as a historical body took place in the 13th century, the impulse leading to it being the Albigensian Heresy. Dr. O'Brien devotes a number of pages to the Albigensians and tries to blacken their reputation as much as possible. Now as most of our information regarding such movements is derived from the records of the Inquisition and the Demonologies, we must treat the resultant picture with some caution. As far as I can see the heresy in question was a reaction against both Church and State. The Albigensian and similar movements, held that material things were evil, and this included the Church. They argued that they were trying to replace evil with good, and they gained widespread support, as even Dr. O'Brien is forced to admit (appearing to forget his second point). It "menaced not only the Church's existence", he writes, "but also the very foundation of Christian society and orderly government . . . entering Europe through Bulgaria and Lombardy, it spread like a tidal wave over Northern Italy, Languedoc and Aragon, and then swept northward through France, Belgium and Germany to the shores of the Baltic". From this we must conclude that it had mass support; hence one is inclined to smile when O'Brien gravely assures us that it was loathed by the populace. It would be truer to say that it was loathed by the Church.

The Roman Catholic reaction to the spread of these ideas was to start a bloodbath that no amount of whitewash can conceal. The Church held that, once baptised into "the one true faith", only excommunication could get you out, and it seems that the Church lumped what

it called witchcraft in with the above heresies, for a Bull of Innocent VIII (*Summis desiderantes affectibus*), dated the 9th December, 1484, drew attention to the falling away of the faithful in certain parts of Germany. That witchcraft had some connection with the heresies is borne out in the introduction to part three of *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Witch Hammer), which states that "the Bishops and their representatives strive by every means to rid their parishes entirely of the pernicious art of soothsaying and magic derived from Zoroaster". When it comes to describing the Roman reaction to the spread of heretical ideas, Dr. O'Brien starts to display his liberality and writes:

The Church cannot escape responsibility for the use of torture nor the burning of victims at the stake. The Church in the person of her pontiffs was responsible for the use of torture; this cruel practice was introduced by Innocent IV in 1252. In his Bull *Ad Extirpanda*, he decreed: "The podesta or ruler (of the city) is hereby ordered to force all captured heretics to confess and accuse their accomplices by torture which will not imperil life or injure limb, just as thieves and robbers are forced to accuse their accomplices, and to confess their crimes; for these heretics are true thieves, murderers of souls, and robbers of the sacraments of God". The pontiff tries to defend the use of torture by classifying heretics with thieves and murderers; a mere comparison in his only argument. This law of Innocent IV was renewed and confirmed by Alexander IV on November 30th, 1259, and by Clement IV on November 3rd, 1265.

Comments similar to the above go on for almost two pages. ". . . we frankly acknowledge the responsibility of the popes in the use of torture and in the burning of thousands of heretics at the stake. Their sanctioning of such cruel and brutal measures is unquestionably one of the blackest stains on the record of the Holy Office and will remain to the end of time a cause of obloquy and shame upon the papacy". Strong language indeed!

But time and again Dr. O'Brien informs us that the Inquisition and those who ran it were products of their age, and that our judgment should be tempered accordingly. He fails to realise that such pleas are hardly to the credit of the religion he supports. What a state of affairs when after hundreds of years of Christian domination, such brutal methods were commonplace. To quote the Protestant historian Dr. H. C. Lea to the effect that the "cause of orthodoxy was in this case the cause of civilisation and progress" will not wash. As the late Joseph McCabe has shown in his *History of the Popes*, civilisation glowed brightest where the impact of Christianity was weakest.

In fairness, though, it must be acknowledged that Dr. O'Brien comes down fairly and squarely against the Inquisition. What is more, he questions the value of certain of his Church's Canon Laws, and declares himself in favour of religious freedom, along with separation of Church and State, unlike his fellow co-religionist Cardinal Cushing, who attacked this latter principle in the *New York Times* for January 14th, 1947. The Cardinal wrote: "The extreme development of the idea of separation of the Church and State is 'fantastic and un-American'."

Dr. O'Brien's position is rather weak. The Canon Law of the Church is framed according to its teachings and the fundamental position these present is that the Roman Church is the organisation founded by Jesus, and that the head of it, the Pope, is his representative on earth, via apostolic succession. It follows from this that only the Roman Church can be correct in religious matters. She makes no bones about this, claiming to be the "repository
(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

We must confess that the account of a "thanksgiving service" recently held in Blackpool came as a surprise. It was "an end-of-the-season" one, specially arranged for boarding-house proprietors and private hoteliers, thanking God Almighty for a wonderful season—in spite of the weather. They "never had it so good". All the same, the presiding representative of the Lord, the Rev. J. Fawcett, warned them that "there was a danger of being swamped by the impact of material possessions"—though he piously refrained from giving the cure for that straight from Jesus himself. It was to sell all they had and give to the poor—advice which has never been enthusiastically followed even by hoteliers. It's so much easier and cheaper to thank God in church.

★

Roman Catholic Groups and Centres, etc., have always an easy method of settling accounts with their opponents. Any bookseller, for example, who has the temerity to expose for sale an anti-Catholic work receives a polite letter asking him to withdraw the book at once or face a boycott from all Catholics in the district. This has, in nearly all cases, the desired effect. We note that the "Look-Listen" Roman Catholic Group have recently threatened Granada TV that if it didn't mend its ways, and provide the right type of religious programme to suit them—implying of course that other viewers could go hang as far as they were concerned—they would "instruct their members to restrict purchases of goods advertised in Granada TV". This is a specimen of "tolerance" by Catholics, and it gives us a very good idea of what would happen if they once more got power. Perhaps they will one day?

★

Our eminent Air Marshal, Lord Dowding, is not the only person who fervently believes in Fairies, for we note that *Sunday Pictorial* has given almost half a page to an enchanting review of a book by Miss Marjorie Johnson who has compiled a "Kinsey Report" on *The Sex Life of Fairies*. If the dear little people exist, they *must* have a sex life, and Miss Johnson reveals how they make love, how the babes are born in a maternity home, and how they share each other's wives and hubbies. She got her information from "fairy spotters" so it can be relied on. Fairies have the luck (denied to humans) of being able to pop over in a flash to another "astral planet", and their babies can get their food from "ethereal powers".

★

One thing has not yet been discovered about fairies— when it is that they reach the age of puberty; and we do not even know when they become sex conscious; but they have discovered "the secrets of universal love". Thank God, female fairies are never "catty", nor male ones "thugs". However, the charge made by Miss Johnson, that they are polygamous, was later indignantly denied by a fairy writing to *Sunday Pictorial*. All parents are first chosen by a Council, and retire for 13 "oliads", reappearing only with their offspring. Sometimes, an unlucky fairy is "vaporised" after being seen by a "disbeliever", but that can only rarely happen. What assets to Fairyland are people like Lord Dowding and Miss Johnson!

★

The Rev. J. Watson of St. Mary Magdalene in Walworth is putting up a rare fight against the "fund-raising activities" of the Church. He claims that "the Church has a notoriously bad name in money matters, firstly as a very wealthy landowner, secondly as a bad landlord, thirdly as a chronic beggar, fourthly as a gambler on the Stock Exchange,

fifthly as a builder of over-large churches and extravagant clergy houses". Well, well. We are pleased this time all these charges do not come from *our* side.

AMIDST THE CROWD

It was rather a case of "heads I win, tails you lose", for me to claim that all civic virtues belong to the madding crowd; "civic" meaning city. However, I reassert emphatically that the "ignorance, superstition and fecundity of the peasant is a world-wide problem". The peasant is of necessity (determined by his environment) conservative and reactionary; cultural and progressive movements arise in the town. That is simply a historical fact, but, I hasten to add (lest it be assumed that I am a member of the 3rd International or the Housewives' League) supported today by UNRRA, UNESCO, WHO and no doubt all the letters of the alphabet, except maybe RC. It is true that many troubles only show themselves in the town. When the tribesman or peasant, uprooted from his natural habitat, superstitious and moral (in the sense of customary) traditions, is thrown into the vortex of the free association of town life, his moral traditions are no longer adequate, he retains only his superstitions. In Africa, etc., this phenomenon is obvious and recognised by authority, that it is also the case with the immigrant Roman Catholics to England and America is also obvious to the Secularist.

I am sorry that I have only succeeded in raising Rusticus's "ire", I had hoped to appeal to his reason. No generalisation is correct in every particular instance, and maybe the stalwart Wessex yokel is the particular instance. Nevertheless the nostalgic yearnings of Rusticus are for the very evidences of the countryman's servitude to his cultural retardedness. He sighs for the Old Village Life; for the days of the paraffin lamp, coal cooking, guttering bedside candles, earth closets at the end of a sodden path, pump water shared by a terrace, rainbutts, empty in the droughts, the pub and church the only alternatives for social life and no place for the heretic. The village festering with Mothers' Unions, Harvest Festivals, squalid scandal, old folk bent with toil and rheumatism, youth frustrated, continual emigration of the bright youngsters from the bi-yearly increasing family circle, thatch and lath fostering germs, the horse the only means of multiple transport, the nearest bookshop or library a day's walk away, the Parson and Squire the Lords of Creation, the fictitious crime of poaching and the real crime of fox and game hunting and bird rearing and shooting. No, Rusticus, your rose was grown on a dunghill. Transport, culture, radio, electricity and water have been brought to the village, and you must accept the inevitable changes. In the straight back, bright eye and intelligent outlook of the new farm-hand, you must find your solace. We have a spate today of writings that hold up the past as the criterion of the best; the Merrie England of the days of Faith. It is historically untrue, it is just a lie assiduously disseminated in the cause of obscurantism.

I understand the nostalgia, for I suffer from it also, but the inaccuracies offered in defence of the countryman are surprising. The travelling circus on the village green dates from time immemorial in Europe, it may be passing as village life is decaying. Thomas Paine was a townsman. Thetford has a civic history that reaches back to the "Saxon Chronicle". Once Thetford boasted 99 churches, 5 convents, a bishop, a guildhall, a grammar school, a Member of Parliament, a thriving industry and above all a record of peasant revolt. Industrialisation has passed her by, she has reduced her churches, lost her conventual establishments and Member of Parliament, but she is still the capital and centre of Breckland culture. It is also a plain historical fact that animal welfare societies arose in the towns of non-Catholic countries. Animals are kept as "pets" in the town, even the long-suffering horse, by virtue of its very scarcity, has become the darling of the roundsman's customers.

Thus, I remain, Sir, entirely unrepentant, "civic virtues being to the town".

EVA ENURY.

THE "TRUTH" ABOUT THE INQUISITION

(Concluded from page 379)

of all Truth". Hence no opposing religious group can be teaching correct doctrines, though they might have "part of the Truth". They lead people into "error", and this can affect the salvation of man's immortal soul. Dr. O'Brien's condemnation of certain Canon Laws—which he describes as dead as the dodo bird—and his support for religious freedom grants, in effect, that "error" has the same rights as "Truth".

THE FREETHINKER

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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 4 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

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 29th, 7.15 p.m.: BLYTH THOMPSON (South African High Commissioner's Office), "South Africa—Past, Present and Future".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 27th, 6.30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "Sinclair Lewis—Novelist for Freethinkers".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, Edgware Road), Sunday, November 27th, 7.15 p.m.: G. N. DEV, "The Language Problem in India".

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, Hight Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, November 25th, 7 p.m. A Meeting.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Educational Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, November, 27th, 2.30 p.m.: C. BORRETT (Economic League), "The British Social Security System".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, November 27th, 11 a.m.: JOHN LEWIS, Ph.D., "I Change Worlds".

Notes and News

REGULAR VISITORS to the office will be very sorry to hear of the death, early on November 18th, of Cecil Harry Harniman. Mr. Harniman was cheerful and active—a glutton for work. He had worked part-time for the Pioneer Press after retirement nearly five years ago, because he couldn't stand being idle, and the Board of G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd would like to place on record their appreciation of his loyal service. He would have been 70 on Sunday next. We send our deepest sympathy to Mrs. Harniman.

MANY NEWSPAPERS have expressed the hope that the Archbishop of Canterbury's projected courtesy call on the Pope will do much "to break down barriers" between the Churches of England and Rome. F. A. Ridley's Views and Opinions article last week put the matter in its proper perspective and indicated the formidable nature of some of the "barriers". It is interesting in this connection to recall a recent speech by the head of the Church of England, the Queen. As Mr. Ridley has often amusingly

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED: £189 8s. 5d. R. MacNab, 6d.; Miss E. Lloyd, £1; Puis John 23, £1 13s. 5d.; D. Dambe, 5s.; J. S. Barker, £3 10s.; Mrs. J. Grubiak, 5s.; T. Roberts, 4s.; R. Reader, 2s. 6d.; H.B., 7s.; Mrs. N. Henson, £1. Total to date, November 18th, 1960. 198 1s. 4d.

reminded us, Her Majesty—is a Presbyterian in Scotland, and in Edinburgh on October 11th, she told the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that the Reformation was a "distant turning point in the nation's life"; that "Holy Writ was liberated to the people, and as a result the Word of God was revealed again as a force to be reckoned with in the affairs of both public and private life. The Gospel was once more seen to be a living light by which men ought to direct their lives, and perhaps remould their institutions" (*Leicester Mercury*, 11/10/60). Not exactly a speech that Pope John XXIII would approve, we fear. Still, perhaps Dr. Fisher will have a word with the Queen's scriptwriters and suggest a hasty change of tone as his Roman holiday (December 1st to 3rd) draws near.

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THE *Leicester Evening Mail* (3/11/60) reported the appearance of a 28-year-old German woman, Kathe von Langen, before a Magistrates' Court, accused of attempting to strangle her six-year-old daughter. When charged with the attempted murder, the woman is alleged to have told Detective Inspector G. Brobyn that, "The spirits made me do it". A month or so before (5/10/60) the late *News Chronicle* had reported an even worse tragedy, this time from Germany itself, where a 23-year-old gardener, Heinrich Pommerenke was tried at Freiburg for four murders. Asked about his motive, Pommerenke said, "I had seen the film *The Ten Commandments*. During the performance I thought 'these women must be killed'". Asked why he thought this, he replied: "Because the women in this film are so fickle".

★

LAST WEEK Colin McCall ended an article showing the greater incidence of crime among Roman Catholics than among other religious and non-religious groups with a quotation from the Minister of Education praising denominational—and particularly Roman Catholic—education. It is fitting therefore that we should print two articles on this issue dealing with Freethought and education: Mr. Macfarlane's on plans for a Humanist primary school in Dundee, and Mr. Steinhardt's report on recognition for Freethought in the schools of Berlin.

THEATRE

Progress to the Park, by Alun Owen (Theatre Royal, Stratford, London), recovers from a poor first act and develops into an entertaining "slice of life" on Merseyside. Perhaps it especially appealed to me as a Northerner with a close acquaintance with Liverpool, but its humour and understanding must surely come over to all. So, too, must its presentation of the Protestant-Roman Catholic feud, ranging from the serious (love between Protestant boy and Catholic girl) to the absurd (cheating at a bowls match at the "Coach and Horses"). There is, says one (autobiographical?) character, "more segregation up here than there is in Little Rock". And again: "You're so busy being Catholics and Protestants you can't take time off to be people". Mr. Owen's success (once over that first act) is in showing, often most amusingly, that they are all people, and generally likeable people at that. It is their creeds that cause the trouble.

Harry H. Corbett produces *Progress to the Park*, and a large cast serves him well. C.McC.

NEXT WEEK

AFRICA AT THE RELIGIOUS CROSS ROADS

By F. A. RIDLEY

On Controversial Questions—4

By H. CUTNER

IT WOULD BE INTERESTING to know exactly how many articles extolling Buddhism have appeared in the past in our Freethought journals? In my early days, Buddhism appeared to be a "religion" which impressed many Freethinkers and Freethought writers, as satisfying all our "religious instincts"—though I could never find out from them why some of us never had any religious instincts, and therefore didn't want any religion. When I came to examine Buddhism for myself, I found in it dozens of features which repelled me; though any good Buddhist would be able—in their opinion—to cope with objections. As far as I was concerned, I found nothing whatever in Buddhism except a few trite moral maxims which have always been the stock-in-trade of those religions which add a little ethics to their supernaturalism, like Christianity for example.

What is it in Buddhism which attracts some people? I have never been able clearly to find out. We are often told that—for Freethinkers at least—there is nothing supernatural in it, that it has no God, and that Buddha really was an Atheist. And in the next breath, most good Buddhists (I mean of course the European variety) will refer to Buddha (or *the* Buddha) as "the Lord Buddha". What does a Buddhist mean by the word "Lord"? If you press him enough you will find out that he means almost what a Christian means when he says "our Lord Jesus Christ". I heard even Dr. Donald Soper on TV refer to "our Precious Lord"; and in exactly the same way a good Buddhist will refer to "the Lord Buddha". Naturally, he does not mean that Buddha is "the Son of God"; but he does mean only a little less than that pious nonsense. And did Buddha—the Buddha—ever deny the existence of a God? If so, where?

Just as in the case of Christianity, the only way we can find out something about Buddha and what he taught is to go to the "documents" which describe his life and work. Ever since I have written articles for this journal I have stressed that we know nothing of any "original" documents for Christianity. We never hear of the four Gospels until about the year 180 AD—about 150 years after the date given for the death of Jesus; and nobody knows who wrote these Gospels, where they were written, in fact, we do not know for certain in what language they were "originally" written. And the date given for Buddha is 500 or 600 years earlier. What is the truth?

There are no "original" documents on Buddhism and its Buddha. (How myths can be perpetuated you will find in the article by A. D. Cohen in the October *Humanist* the statement that "Buddhism in its original form acknowledges no deity". I wonder if Mr. Cohen would be good enough to tell me where I can find Buddhism in its *original form*?)

Every writer on Buddhism has had to deal with the question of God in it, and what the Buddha himself thought or taught. John M. Robertson gave copious extracts from various writers on the subject in his *History of Freethought*, and came to the conclusion that "it is permissible to say both that Buddhism recognises Gods, and that it is practically atheistic".

The truth is that as far as we can judge from the "documents" (as Max Muller concedes) all that Buddha did—if he did anything about it at all, and nobody knows—was more or less contemptuously to refuse to consider the old Pagan Gods, Indra, Agni, and Yama, had anything

"divine" about them and at the same time say that they were "superhuman beings". But did he ignore "God" as understood by all Theists? In a little work entitled *Mysteries of Life, Death and Futurity* by John Timbs (1891), there is reproduced a letter by Colonel Sykes, FRS, sent to *The Times*, and a few extracts may interest readers. Timbs says that, "In Germany, England, and elsewhere, it has lately been the fashion to nickname a certain class of freethinkers *Buddhists*; but this term is altogether inapplicable . . . and is founded upon a general misapprehension . . ." Colonel Sykes was known as a "celebrated Hindostance scholar". He wrote,

Instead of going to primitive Buddhism, its genuine religious tenets [are accepted] from those embodied in works which were written in a language foreign to Buddhist literature . . . promulgated in a foreign country, and of a date from 1100 to 1200 after Buddha's first preaching . . . As well might they pronounce primitive Christianity from the lives of the Roman Catholic saints of the Middle Ages . . . the use of Sanscrit for Buddhist works was a comparatively modern innovation . . . Mystical transcendentalism [is] a comparatively modern and corrupted state of Buddhism . . . Buddha constantly refers to a First Cause, another world, and a state of rewards and punishments after death. Buddha's own hymn on his becoming Buddha testifies to his belief in God . . . Though the Buddhist doctrine of Nirvana or absorption into the First Cause may shock a Christian's idea of the immaterial condition of man in another world, it is certainly neither Atheism, Materialism, nor Annihilation.

No doubt Colonel Sykes, like Professor Rhys Davids (who was also a great authority on Buddha and Buddhism) was a Christian, and we can therefore understand why he was so anxious not to equate Buddhism with Atheistical Freethought; but my own difficulty has always been to track down "primitive" Buddhism and the evidence which proves that what Buddha is supposed to have said at any time really came from him. Professor Davids, it is true, claims that "of early Buddhism, indeed, it is already possible to form an idea, which in its main features is certainly accurate"; but is it really accurate? And are the various lives, legends, and stories we know of the life of Buddha based on historical evidence? Nobody knows, for the very simple reason that nobody has so far proved that Buddha or the Buddha, or to give him his family name, Gautama, really existed. Everything written about him was put together centuries after his supposed death (about 480 BC). Even the famous Asoka, the Buddhist Emperor of India (264-228 BC), who did so much to spread the teachings of Buddha was really, as Professor Davids says, "a Hindu of the Buddhist sect". Whatever Asoka may or may not have believed, he loved to call himself "the delight of the gods"; so he, at least, believed in them.

In his valuable *Orpheus*, Reinach points out that even Indian authorities throw doubt on the existence of Gautama; and that in the collection of Buddhist sacred writings far more voluminous than our Bible, there is not a line which we can attribute either to Buddha himself or to any of his immediate disciples. "Buddhists themselves", he adds, "claim it is true that immediately after his death a Council of his disciples were called together in which the teachings of Buddha were sung; but this Council is a myth, and the one which took place 100 years after his death is another". On the other hand, Reinach agrees that the Council called by King Asoka in 244 BC really took place; and of course we can date the spread of Buddhism from then as quite historical.

As it is quite impossible to say with any certainty whatever what Buddha really thought about God Almighty or

the Creator or whatever term we use which means the same thing, it is interesting to see how Professor Rhys Davids manages to tell us all about it. That is, he does his best to distinguish whatever was "originally" taught, from the more or less hopeless confusion into which the

various schools of Buddhism later cast it. This will, I hope, intrigue those readers who feel that an "Atheistic" system of morals like Buddhism must have something to commend it. If I can, I shall try and gather the various threads together in my next article.

Freethought and the Schools in Berlin

By WALTER STEINHARDT

RECENTLY, THE BERLIN *Voice of the Freethinker* published a most informative article by a former Government school-inspector, Herr Paul Fechner. It deals with the situation in law regarding the rights of the teaching of "Morals without religion" in State-schools. Literally translated, the subject in question (*Lebenskunde—unterricht*) would be "life—knowledge—instruction" and embraces a fairly wide field.

It is indeed a remarkable achievement of the Secularists of Germany to have their rights of access to youth in schools recognised and regulated by law.

Beginning in the ill-fated Weimar Republic, the then Minister for Education, Konrad Haenisch, enabled children withdrawn from religious indoctrination to receive in principle and fact *Lebenskundeunterricht* from suitable teachers. This policy also resulted in more than 50 schools in Berlin being operated on a purely secular basis. No mean attainment!

After the Nazi collapse, a law passed in Berlin in 1948, conceded admittance not only to the churches to teach religion, but also to associations of *Weltanschauungen*. They were to have at their disposal class-rooms, light, heating, etc., to carry out the specified education. This opened the door to the Berlin League of Freethinkers. Not even the bigots of the churches could deny them the holding of a *Weltanschauung*.

Later, further school-laws were enacted, but did not alter the fundamental right imparted in 1948. Financial support through public means is now secured. A curriculum has been developed by a special study-group. Books to aid the tutor have been issued, others are in preparation. The 6 in my possession are absolute gems for Freethought tuition.

In various districts, courses are now in progress and gradually extending. A great need felt by non-religious parents is being discharged.

The syllabus used at present is divided into sections according to the age of the child, and the type of school attended. It sets out to communicate a world-picture based on science but strictly within the scope of the child's understanding. Stress is laid upon the encouragement of candid and critical thinking. The child should become a conscious and sincere representative of his own opinions—however immature or inarticulate these opinions still be. At the same time, the child is advised to heed the views and notions held by others. Last but not least (and in Germany of particular consequence), the active guarding of the democratic conceptions of the Republic and the values of international good-fellowship are contrasted with the rabid fanaticism of not so long ago.

How does the Freethought teacher undertake such work?

During the first to fourth school years, he will endeavour to stimulate the little ones to relating to him and the class, their own adventures and everyday experiences. He is establishing a contact on a "give-and-take" basis. He will play with them and not merely supervise their play. Later, short stories and fables are told. Stories of animals lend

themselves as easily understood examples and illustrations of social significance. Whenever possible, children will be taken out to observe nature. Always, the nursing of the child's own judgment and initiative is kept in view.

At about the 5th and 6th year in school, instruction takes different forms. The youngster's fondness for tales, sages, and ancient histories are applied, to acquaint them with the dawning of religious ideas and practices. It is shown as part of man's evolution and of his own making. Other themes touched at this age are accounts of the lives of plants, animals and men, and the relationship of families, friends, groups, parties, people and states.

For pupils of grammar schools, a more advanced study is envisaged. Comparative religion and the connections of State and Church, particularly in Christian areas, are included. Man is realised as responsible for his moral conceptions. His moral behaviour is seen entirely as a social phenomenon. The case is made for the aspiration of moral behaviour divested of derelict religious ballast and extortion.

Space does not permit a more detailed report of the work of our friends in Berlin but mention should also be made of their educational functions in connection with the *Jugendweihe* (the secular celebrations or dedication for children upon leaving school), which forms a large part in the care for the young. The age-group here affected is between 14-15, the difficult time of puberty, when reasonable guidance is of particular value. In the impressive list of great men of Freethought presented to the school-leaver for his attention, are three from this country: T. H. Huxley, Charles Darwin and Bertrand Russell. There can be no doubt that pioneer work of the highest order has been, and still is being done by German secularists. May further success requite their efforts.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE MEETING
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16th, 1960. Present: Mr. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Trask, Messrs. Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Ebury, Hornibrook, McIlroy, Mills, and the Secretary. Apologies from the Treasurer, Mr. Griffiths, and Mr. Johnson. New Members were admitted to Birmingham, Glasgow, North London and Wales and Western Branches which, with Individual members made 11 in all. Abortion Law Reform Association and Noise Abatement Society reports were before the meeting. The 1961 Conference had been booked to take place at the Conway Hall, W.C.1, at Whitsuntide, and London members who could offer accommodation to provincial members would be asked to notify the Secretary. The Secretary had accepted an invitation from the American Rationalist Federation to visit the USA on a lecture and goodwill tour in October, 1961, and had recorded an interview for the BBC North American Service programme on "Postmark UK: Borough High Street". At the suggestion of Mr. G. I. Bennett, a letter of congratulation to Penguin Books on their success in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* case was approved. A tape-recording of Mr. Ridley's debate with Dr. Norris (Christadelphian) held in Leeds, had been prepared by Birmingham Branch and had been presented to the Society by Mr. W. Miller for the use of Branches. Thanks were expressed to Mr. Miller. Branch correspondence was dealt with. Mr. Ebury handed over £5 to the Building Fund, another monthly contribution from North London Branch. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, December 14th, 1960.

CORRESPONDENCE

STERILE?

In the absence of positive arguments on either side, the controversy between Mr. Corsaro and Mr. Cutner is rather sterile. There is no point in quoting lists of writers who advocate this or that view, since few of their books are readily accessible to the average reader, and many of them are long out of date.

Mr. Corsaro begs the question in describing his supporters as "qualified theologians". What is required is a person trained and experienced in the methods of historical criticism, able and willing to apply these principles to the biblical narratives in the same way as he would to any other collection of records. Obviously few theologians are likely to do this.

On the other hand the pure myth theory seems to me to be no more than Christian fundamentalism spelt backwards. There is much in the Gospels and Acts which, allowing for distortions, is not historically improbable. After all some basis is needed to explain the origin and development of early Christianity. No doubt we should like to have an objective account by a detached observer, but we have to take our authorities as we find them. The task of Freethinkers should be to consider each statement on its individual merits, and to make some attempt to sort out fact from fiction.

W. SMITH.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

I notice on the front page of the November 4th issue an unfortunate reference to Christian Science, showing a shallow knowledge of the subject.

If it is true that adherents of this sect "often doom their children to a premature death", then Christian Scientists are a dying race doing their bit to solve the population problem! Of

Christmas Cards

In response to many requests, we are offering two kinds of Christmas cards for sale, one of which is illustrated below. The size is 5" x 4" when folded. There is a simple greeting on the inside page. The price together with envelopes and post paid to your address is 5/- per dozen. A second design, "The Devil", price 6/- per dozen, will be illustrated next week.

Please order from *The Freethinker* office as soon as possible as supplies are limited.



Have Faith!

course this is nonsense and in fact some Insurance policies offer them particularly favourable terms in similar fashion to Vegetarians. It is not a question of refusing all medical aid but a matter of personal decision as to what kind of aid is considered best.

L. C. WARREN.

IN A RUSSIAN SCHOOL

It may interest you to know that some time ago I sent a copy of THE FREETHINKER, with other papers, to the USSR (Lithuania). I have since learned that extracts from it were used in the English lesson for boys and girls about 14 in a country school.

F. M. BLAKE.

RELIGION OF U.S. PRESIDENTS

I note in THE FREETHINKER for October 7th 1960, page 322, a brief article entitled, "Religion of Candidates" which apparently is largely taken from the American publication, *Church and State*. I am not certain of your purpose in publishing this paragraph and may be out of order in writing you. In other words the paragraph may have been published as sarcasm as an indication of misinformation which has appeared in the magazine *Church and State*, though on the face of it, it would appear to be an informative article notwithstanding the fact that it contains more misinformation than anything else.

The article states, "The current nominees thus perpetuate a long standing tradition—that only church members obtain nomination of the major parties for the presidency. There have been only a very few exceptions to this rule during American history".

Well, permit me to suggest that if you are interested in American history, just attempt to find the Churches to which the first eighteen presidents of the U.S. belonged as communicants, and I think you will have a long day at fishing with no bites. Jackson joined the Church, Presbyterian I believe, after becoming President and at the instigation of his wife. None of the others were communicants unless possibly John Adams may be called a communicant as he was raised as a youngster in the Unitarian Church, though I question whether the Church of England or any other Church recognises the Unitarians as religious, certainly not orthodox. Since the time of President Garfield there have been a number of presidents who were not communicants but became so after becoming politically conditioned. For example, the present incumbent was raised as a Jehovah's Witness but soon escaped and had no further religion until he was nominated for the presidency.

IRA D. CARDIFF (U.S.A.).

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