

# The Freethinker

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ON THE THRESHOLD of the sixties of the 20 century, it becomes timely as well as topical to hark back to the 1860s. The 1860s represented a notable decade, particularly for heretics in both Church and State. On their threshold appeared Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), and eight years later (1867), Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. Neither book in the form in which it originally appeared, represented the authors' entire gospel: Darwin waited

until 1870 before issuing his still more devastating sequel, *The Descent of Man*, which definitively banished the Garden of Eden to the limbo of pre-historic fiction, and definitively traced mankind's origin back via the primeval jungle to the still more primeval slime of the antediluvian ocean. Whilst it is now known that the first volume of *Das Kapital* (which was all that Marx actually published in his lifetime) represented a mere fragment of the truly colossal tome that he had originally intended to publish. (The unpublished draft version of *Das Kapital*, ran to 1472 pages, but only part of this vast compendium has seen the light).

Sandwiched in between these two classics was a thick *magnum opus*, also in the encyclopedic class, Thomas Henry Buckle's *History of Civilisation in England*. Not perhaps quite in the epochal class of the masterpieces of Darwin and Marx, but actually almost as famous in its day, and undoubtedly a work of great scholarship and perhaps still greater power of critical analysis and insight that is proverbially superior to mere book learning. The publication of any one, let alone of all three of these books, would have been sufficient to make the decade—1860-70 (which witnessed as noted above, the issue of Darwin's second great work, *The Descent of Man*) an ever-memorable one, particularly for political, religious and what we may perhaps term, generic heretics.

## The Unholy Trinity

Writing at the end of the century inaugurated in 1861, it can hardly be disputed that the *magna opera* of Charles Darwin and Karl Marx have been the most influential, if not the greatest books of the past century. The theory of evolution first put on a scientific basis by Darwin, has not only given traditional religion its ultimate blow (as only now is beginning to become manifest), but has actually revolutionised the whole universe of human thought. Whilst similarly, the socialist philosophy expounded by Marx has not only dealt the death blow to the old *laissez faire*, *laissez aller* economic system which is everywhere on the out—even in lands that still style themselves as Capitalist countries (e.g. the Tory Party would certainly have been described as a socialist party by the Tories of my youth)—but what is perhaps equally important, has based the International Labour Movement upon Materialistic and Atheistic principles. There can, in fact, be little if any, exaggeration in the assertion that between them, the books of Darwin and Marx have done more to radicalise human thought than any comparable works that may have

appeared at any time since the pioneer masterpieces of the great Greek thinkers who laid the foundations of human science and of human rational thought. Equalled perhaps only by the great scientific heretic, Galileo (1564-1640), Darwin and Marx represent the master-heretics of modern times. Whilst, though Buckle—the third person in this unholy trinity—has not been quite so successful as his great contemporaries in preserving to posterity

his originally world-wide fame, yet he was indisputably both a great philosophical historian—perhaps indeed, still the greatest who has written in the English language—and his great unfinished work, *The History of Civilisation in England*, remains (as the

*American Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* describes it), "one of the most important works in the history of the Social Sciences".

## Neglected

One can perhaps relevantly add that Buckle also has a certainly minor, but by no means negligible, advantage over his great contemporary heretics; it is very much easier to read him than either the English naturalist or the German economist. Also of his contemporary historical reputation and his actual influence on contemporary heretics, there can be no doubt at all. As the authority already cited notes: "Its brash confidence in progress, its lordly generalisations, its apt detail and its swinging rhetoric, its attacks on conservatism, especially on clerical conservatism, gave it a place superior to that occupied by Comte, Mill and Spencer in the minds of thousands of obscure faithful 19th century Radicals".

Instead of wasting its print and time in resurrecting the deservedly forgotten names of so many clerical and political reactionaries of this period, modern research might do a lot worse than concentrate on this now unduly neglected eminent Victorian and his pioneer essay in history as neither tradition nor art but as an exact science. If he made, as he probably did make, mistakes, so do all pioneers, even the greatest, including Darwin and Marx themselves.

## 1860s and 1960s

The period we have been dealing with was an heretical, that is to say, a revolutionary age. Darwin, Buckle and Marx, were all profoundly revolutionary and their work aroused the fiercest hostility in those dominant circles in Church, State, and in the economic order, which felt both traditional beliefs and social ascendancy directly threatened. How fierce were the controversies excited—and in some quarters still excited today—by the major heretics of the 19th century, can still easily be discerned by any curious inquirer who takes a stroll to the Library of the British Museum or the Bodlian Library at Oxford. There will still be found innumerable tomes of every conceivable size—and of every intellectual calibre—refuting the "errors" of these great critics of religious, political, economic and historical orthodoxy. Indeed, the implacable

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## The Heretical Sixties

By F. A. RIDLEY

hatred so often displayed in these vehement polemics must often appear surprising in and to our softer and more conformist age. For, whatever its cause, whether it be progress or decadence (both of which have been called in to account for it) it appears indisputable that our own age is not an age favourable either to the appearance of heretics, or to the wide diffusion of their ideas. Television, radio, the press, all appear to adhere to the Napoleonic precept that "Providence is on the side of the Big Battalions". A state of things one may add, that appears to be universal throughout the civilised world including incidentally, that East, as well as West of the political-ideological equator of our era, the Iron Curtain.

## Still They Come!

By H. CUTNER

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY was the period *par excellence* for tracts, and millions of them must have been distributed with the Precious Message of Christ Jesus, and the Hope of Eternal Life and Bliss for all who accepted him, and the Terrors of Hell and Damnation for all who rejected him. This was the theme of nearly all tracts, and I have always admired the way in which they manipulated the story to cause joy or terror, as the case may be.

Religious tracts still appear—though perhaps not in the enormous numbers enjoyed by our grandfathers. Many come my way, and before me are three all distinguished by an ignorance so appalling that I can only speculate—to myself of course—on the mentality of the writers. They appear to think that we are not in the year 1960, but in 1860 or even in 1760. One of them is entitled, "Browned Off?" and we are then asked "Where can true happiness be found?" and assured it isn't in wealth. After that, we are given the royal words good Queen Victoria spoke to a crofter who asked her about Paradise: "By the grace of God and the all-availing Blood of Christ, I'll meet you there". Probably they have now met.

Then we are given the awful picture of Byron writing, "My days are in the yellow leaf . . ." and a much more pious one of Napoleon telling us that "Jesus Christ founded his Empire on Love", and Sir Walter Scott "when he came to die", begging for "only one Book—the Bible". Of course, even Thomas Paine had to shriek out during his last moments—"O Lord help me! God, help me! Jesus Christ, help me!" and Voltaire, "I am lost! Oh that I had never been born!" As it is very difficult to pin similar beautiful truths on Ingersoll, we are told that he said at his brother's grave, "We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailings".

If all this does not bring you to Christ, we are given a kind of "proclamation" by Field-Marshal H. R. Alexander, Admirals Cunningham and Tovey, and General Paget to the effect that to "ensure peace of mind" you must have "faith in Christ the Lord". Admirals and generals seem to have a penchant for recommending religion or forcing it on their followers—but we wonder whether this "proclamation" is really genuine?

In any case, the idea behind this hopeless jumble of saintly drivel is that we should immediately accept Jesus, and join the Heavenly Choir of similar believers in Paradise—sooner or later. What a horrible fate.

Then a gentleman called Coates tells us about "A Preacher of the Old Days" who is not now very popular, who goes about everywhere, and his name—this should frighten you—is "Death". Whatever you do, you can't get rid of him. "You may even get rid of the Bible"—you may "disprove its histories"—you may "ridicule its

Where are *our* Darwins, Marxes and Buckles? Or, if it is too much to expect such intellectual giants to recur after only the lapse of a single century, where are our local, if lesser, heretics to make our own decade also a memorable one in the annals of subversive thought? One thing is at least certain: our age could do with them. The still small voice of heresy was never more wanted than in this age of mass-media in which the conformity of television has succeeded and is fast superseding the subversive soap-box. Where indeed, in the approaching 60s are the successors of the great heretics of the 1860s? Echo answers, "Where?"

teachings" and, horror of horrors! you may even "reject the Saviour". In fact, there may come a time when you may not find a house "with a Bible in it"—but you can't get rid of "the Old Preacher". And therefore if you will only put your trust in Christ who died for us, "Eternal Life may be YOURS". If the capital letters have not convinced you, then "the Old Preacher" will get you—nay, he "has GOT you". Isn't it sublime?

The third pamphlet comes from one of those Jewish bores who has found Jesus, and then proceeds to fill pages of almost insane tosh about the Jews rejecting their Messiah. Modern Jews of course laugh or try to laugh this balderdash out of existence protesting that they don't want a Messiah these days even if Christians do; but these pages of imbecility are considered by their writers as outshining all other literature. The one in front of me is, "We Have Found the Messiah" by Aaron Judah Kligerman and is the last word in sheer silliness. Trotted out for us are the usual "prophecies" in the Old Testament—all of which were applied to Jesus when the Gospel writers were "inventing" their "ideal". But so badly selected are they, that it can be shown quite easily that these "prophecies" no more applied to Jesus than to jam pies. Biblical prophecies in any case are only fulfilled—on paper. None of them ever happened.

The people who write all this religious twaddle never attempt to prove anything. They are relics of credulity and superstition, and as such are irreclaimable. May their ashes rest in peace.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, December 14th. Present: Mr. L. Ebury (Vice-President), in the Chair, Messrs. Barker, Cleaver, McIlroy, Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Trask and Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer, Mr. Griffiths, and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Kidley, Hornibrook and Johnson. Letter from Sir Allen Lane of Penguin Books, thanking Committee for letter of congratulation on case of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was noted with approval. New Members were admitted to Blackpool and Marble Arch Branches which, with Individual Members made 9 in all. It was noted with satisfaction that one new member was a Headmaster prepared to express himself openly on religion in the schools. The minutes of the Humanist Council meeting held on November 8th were before the meeting. Correspondence was dealt with from Messrs. J. Q. Hughes and G. Hibbert. The Unitarian Social Service questionnaire to teachers on religious instruction in schools was considered and thought very satisfactory. It was hoped that the USS would pass on the information they obtained from it. Blackpool and Sussex Branch matters were reported. The possibility of a North London Branch meeting at White Stone Pond being included with other items in a film for showing at Hampstead Festival 1961, was mentioned. Mr. Ebury handed over usual monthly cheque for £5 for the Building Fund on behalf of North London Branch. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, January 11th, 1961.

# Sin and Society

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

SIN IS DEFINED (OED) as "Transgression of the divine law or an offence against God". The present interest in sin by religionists is mainly centred about the fear of divine reprisals, punishment in this world, such as being struck dead like Ananias and Sapphira, not so much for lying as for deceiving a holy person (lying is nothing to a Pope or Cardinal) or punishment in the next, an eternity in "Hell", an abominable conception but thought by Christians compatible with the idea of an "all-loving god".

But what is so tragically funny about this Sin-Morality system is that its major officials can count on escaping Hell even after murdering thousands of people, as Popes and Cardinals constantly did, while junior officials can with safety swindle the public in such disgraceful rackets as Lourdes and Fatima; the former PP of the latter will understand me. These murders and swindles are not sins because they glorify God! The huge difference in principle between the Sin-Morality system and Secularist and Humanist ethical systems is reflected in that between Canon law and Civil and Common Law, and further reflected in the tacit exemption of clergy, notably Roman Catholic, from trial and punishment by civil courts in some countries. It is held that a priest who commits murder, as Père Desnoyers, abbé d'Uruffe, or rape or assault, either sexual or otherwise, or theft, is not guilty of anything but causing grave scandal to the Church, a serious sin more worthy of ecclesiastical reproof than mere murder. Desnoyers was simply sent to a monastery and, I should think, released and sacked. So that the Sin-Morality system is a menace to public order fully confirmed by crime and prison statistics.

Now sin, in the Sin-Morality system is related primarily to breaches of a code of superstition and ritual; civil crimes are of minor importance and can be summarily dealt with in a confessional by a church officer in such a way as to give the impression that civil obedience need be only a casual or trivial matter; what is of supreme importance is to avoid sin (we shall see why later, the reason is not ethical) and in the case of the clergy to avoid scandal.

The major sins are, of course, things which diminish the power, wealth and prestige of the clergy, such as blasphemy, atheism, heresy and reading books which tend to promote these things. It is a grave sin not to attend to all the details of ritual and of prescriptive devout practices and observances: the principal being the Mass, an elaborate piece of magic done in most elaborate fancy dress, using extremely costly apparatus of gold and silver decorated with precious stones. The culmination of the ritual is the alleged change of a piece of bread into the body of a dead God, the body being multiplied a hundredfold or more, which is then eaten, the whole show being ritual cannibalism. In fact it is a gigantic fake, but the assistants take it as genuine and think it does them some good; what that is neither I nor anybody else has ever been able to determine. But the hocus-pocus makes such a deep impression that believers pay enormous sums for it to the priests. And believers consider attendance at this circus much more important than payment of their debts. This accounts for the lawlessness of adherents of the Christian religions, especially the Catholic. This deplorable dichotomy is well represented by noticing that a Sicilian gangster would far rather shoot a policeman than eat meat on a Friday.

Let us look at some sins. The supreme sin is to deny the authority and impugn the dignity of God and the clergy, so that blasphemy and heresy are much worse than murder, and are punishable in Canon Law by death. State Civil Law does not give two hoots what you believe so long as you behave yourself; that is to say, that responsible rational guardians of the good of Society do not regard Sin as of any importance. You acquire a load of guilt from Sin if you do not pay money to the clergy for meaningless performances of ritual in fancy dress and fake miracles with holy water and other instruments of fraud. These deplorable practices are so old that even people today do not realise that a company promoter who tried to float this stuff as a public company would go to jail. The only effect of all this that I ever noticed is that it softens the brain and opens the purses of the dupes. Then it is wrong to eat meat on a Friday, God only knows why; the act in itself is wholly neutral morally. If you read Victor Hugo or Darwin, you lay yourself open to horrible punishment. It is obvious that prohibition of sin has no moral purpose, this being solely a method of conserving priestly power. You load a man up with a sense of guilt and through the confessional you can, by saying some silly prayer formulae for a few minutes, discharge the guilt, recover peace of mind and go on to rob or rape somebody; go to confession, get relief and so on ad infinitum. If you divorce your wife or husband you sin gravely if you re-marry during the life of the divorced partner. The gross cruelty of this is so obvious that the State will grant the necessary facilities for renewal of happiness with a new partner. It is, in effect, an offence to have made a mistaken judgment in selecting a spouse. But Popes can and do grant divorces without sin, an example of the duplicity which governs the lives of so many religionists who end up so often in jail. The Sin-Confessional cycle is one of the most vicious rackets in the world, creating an unnecessarily huge Catholic criminal population.

Apart from the sin of neglecting devout observances which are morally meaningless the worst sins are those of sex, which is what one would have expected from celibate officials. The basic sin is relations with somebody other than a spouse, and prostitution on the female or male side is a really big sin, being due in the priestly mind to "unlawful passion". So far as the female prostitute is concerned this is quite false since street girls are almost invariably frigid. Prostitution is not due to female concupiscence but to hatred of a repressive family life and of harsh or unsatisfactory parents. This accounts for the huge preponderance of Irish girls on—or just off—the streets of Liverpool and Glasgow. Irish family life is intensely rigid, and fathers are tyrannous and, in far too many cases, heavy chronic drinkers. The rigidly repressive family life is due to the tight hold of the priests and the sense of sin they generate in so many households for their own purposes, power, wealth and prestige.

So long as Sin, a system of factitious offences against an organised mass of superstition on behalf of a non-existent god, is given preponderance in religious minds over rational behaviour in a rational world, and so long as religion emphasises blind unquestioning belief in a superstitious system of law as paramount over human law and human rights, so long will we be faced with the gigantic bill for

(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

We note—not without surprise—that Sir Harold Nicolson has called his latest work, *The Age of Reason*, a title which Thomas Paine has made famous for over 160 years, and which surely belongs exclusively to him. No one has a right to use it any more than the title *Vanity Fair* for a new novel. Having said that, we are sure the book itself must be intensely interesting, as it deals with so many great historical figures most of them as anti-Christian as Paine himself.

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The "Daily Telegraph" critic says that, among others, there are good sketches of Catherine II, who had a great admiration for Diderot, and Frederick the Great, who had Voltaire at his court for many years. Sir Harold gives "hostile portraits" of Addison, Swift, and Rousseau, and "sympathetic pictures" of Voltaire, Franklin, Horace Walpole, and Tom Paine (is the "Tom" the reviewer's?) We wonder whether Sir Harold would agree that over the years the figure of Thomas Paine is now greater than ever? And his famous book, *The Age of Reason*, still as unanswerable as ever?

★

Oh dear—with Christmas here, we have the Rev. F. Gould, the vicar of St. John the Divine, Earlsfield, objecting to "unruly children" singing carols for begging purposes, and calling this "prostitution". They shouldn't be allowed to "cash in on the Birth of our Saviour", for they do not understand the words of the carols, and they sing them with "irreverence". This is truly awful, for we were always given to understand how wonderfully happy all carol singers have been for many centuries not so much to pass round the hat, but because "our Lord" was born in a stable with the animals looking piously on, and Angels singing hosannahs. How horribly mistaken we have been!

★

In the "Sunday Pictorial" Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge (who is in America) surveying among other things there the religious scene, tells its readers that "all denominations are packed to overflowing every Sunday". Every variety of sect "can count on abundant congregations, ample funds, and eager worship". In fact, "Christianity Incorporated is a flourishing concern". But do many of these church- and chapel-going people really believe in their religion? According to the all-observing eye of Mr. Muggeridge, belief in religion has nothing whatever to do with their worship. They are fighting Atheistic Communism, and the battle must be fought with Christianity solidly behind them.

★

American church-goers may not like Roman Catholicism over much, but the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury for them ties up with the hatred religion has for Communism; so they all go to church thanking God for it being also the enemy of Russia. Mr. Muggeridge concludes that Christianity's "ancient truths shine with a new light amid the clamorous and ingenious persuasion to consume which (American) affluence requires". Still, whatever the reason, it is the Church which gains not only believers but cash.

★

ITV took us back the other Sunday to the publication of a new *Life of Jesus* by John Presbyter in 95 AD, together with a panel of book critics from countries surrounding the Mediterranean who all discoursed in the 1960 manner with each other on the marvellous merits of this wonderful book. There was of course one exception—a kind of utterly futile and feeble critic who put forward elementary

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED, £198 1s. 4d. J. Arkell, 10s.; A. W. Hook, 10s.; W. Wilkie, 10s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1 1s.; Mrs. R. Poulter, £1; J.R.C., 1s. 2d.; A. Georgetti, £3 5s.; Mr. & Mrs. Corrisken, 10s.; A. George, 5s.; H. Fiddian, 2s. 6d.; A. C. F. Chambre, 10s.; Anon, 5s.; Miss N. Brooks, 10s.; J. Pearson, 19s. 10d. Total to date, December 30th, 1960, £208 0s. 10d.

criticisms which were supposed to be, no doubt, really devastating.

★

The cream of the show was, however, bringing in two people, very old, survivors of two famous incidents in the life of Jesus. The first was an old gentleman who partook of the famous loaves and fishes, and the other was an old lady who remembered Peter denying his Lord. Both were Christians and both knew Jesus "in the flesh". Incidentally, the *Life of Jesus* by John Presbyter was shown as a beautifully bound volume printed in English! In 95 AD!

## Scottish Scrap-Book

BY THIRTY-TWO VOTES to twenty-five, Ayr County Council recently went on record against the siting of a polaris base at the Holy Loch; one Labour member opined that this would make the Holy Loch unholy. But the Rev. George Johnson disagreed. He made it clear that he was "all for" a missile base which he thought would prevent (sic) a nuclear war.

Just to confuse us a little more, another minister, this time the Rev. Murdoch Campbell, of the Free Church, writing in the *Glasgow Herald* pointed out that to say, as some folk have done, that a nuclear war would be man's work entirely and not God's, was wrong. In fact this "is a complete denial of the Scriptural doctrine of an all-embracing Providence".

God, he says, is present in all the processes of Providence and in all the events of History—"nothing happens without His permissive will and fore-ordination. The fall of a sparrow or the destruction of a world happens just as He decrees. History is really His story".

Comment: What a mess God has made of history up to the present. Methinks it may improve if man took over.

★

Folk who live in Shettleston, Glasgow, who wish to read THE FREETHINKER in the local public library have to be patient: the copy they read comes from Woodside District Library. And it is a week late.

Explanation: Shettleston Library borrows it from Woodside and returns same after a week. In other words, the Corporation Library Committee (no doubt influenced by the local Ward Committee) will not allow a copy to be displayed in the library in Shettleston, but borrow it from Woodside because they are (rightly) pestered by readers.

Shettleston is, of course, the district which, for years, has been represented by that well-known Catholic (Labour) M.P., John McGovern, former Independent Labour Party member who recently vacated his seat. Seems his spirit lives on.

P. KEARNEY.

## SIN AND SOCIETY

(Concluded from page 419)

the endless trail of crimes committed by religious believers. In any community the best behaved and most intelligent citizens are the Atheists, Secularists and Rationalists: they are too busy at work and too sound morally to bother about Sin.

## THE FREETHINKER

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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Members and visitors are welcome during normal office hours. Inquiries regarding Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, January 1st, 6.45 p.m.: G. BRIDGEN, "Through Priestcraft to Secularism".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, January 3rd, 7.15 p.m.: GLADYS FARNELL, "Russia Revisited" (Colour Slides).

Marble Arch Branch (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place), Sunday, January 1st, 7.15 p.m.: D. TRIBE, "The Psychology of Conversion".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, January 1st, 11 a.m.: H. L. BEALES, M.A., "The Next Ten Years".

## Notes and News

AT A TIME when more and more towns are accepting "offers" from the Knights of St. Columba to provide cribs in public places, it is good to know that at least one, Poole, has refused. Our friend, "Rusticus", sends us a cutting from the *Western Gazette* (9/12/60) which reports the rejection and gives the comments of the oh-so-well-meaning Knights who "can't understand the decision . . . We suggested the crib not as a piece of Catholic propaganda [who could think such a thing?] but as a way of bringing home to everyone the true significance of Christmas". The Mayor's Chaplain, the Rev. Bryan Bell, was surely sound when he said, "Everyone can have the kind of crib they want in their own homes or churches and use it as they want to. But to have one in a public place might give offence to some people". It is good, for once, to note that the susceptibilities of *non-Catholics* have been taken into consideration.

The *Daily Sketch* is, as we all know, a paper with a highly developed conscience. Not surprising then, that it should, on December 12th, publish an "investigation to shake Britain's conscience", asking in the boldest of middle-page spreads: "Floods: Why Blame God?" He gets blamed too often declared investigators Neville Randall and Leslie Watkins, and "Usually for our own inadequacies". They found that "in almost every case the authorities knew that their districts were in danger": that small floods had occurred previously; experts had advised; but that little had been done, presumably because of cost. "Stir up your local council now", says the *Sketch*, "while the mud is still damp on their boots—and on yours"; which is very reasonable, though the paper itself is talking after the event, when we can all be wise. And, of course, we agree that it is foolish to blame God. But we put it to Messrs. Randall and Watkins that it is equally foolish to praise him or thank him when things go well.

WE HAVE MENTIONED before how officers of National Secular Society branches like Birmingham and Marble Arch make a special point of regularly visiting veteran members who are unable to attend meetings. Such visits are always appreciated and mutually beneficial. Mr. W. Miller, Chairman of Birmingham Branch, tells us how encouraging it is to visit Mr. and Mrs. J. Hall, who are 87 and 86 respectively, and as keen as ever. Mr. Hall has been a reader of THE FREETHINKER for 60 years, and we wish him and his wife a very happy New Year.

## TRANSPORT COMMISSION AND FAMILY PLANNING ADVERT

IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS on Tuesday, December 13th, Lord Shepherd asked a question originally put down in the name of Lord Jessel. It was:

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they are aware of the action of the British Transport Commission in ordering the removal of a perfectly harmless Family Planning Association advertisement and, if so, whether such action has their approval.

Lord Chesham replied:

My Lords, I am told that the poster in question was withdrawn by the British Transport Commission because it was controversial on religious grounds. The responsibility for such decisions rests with the Commission, and Her Majesty's Government do not seek to influence or express any opinion on them.

Then, Lord Shepherd asked:

My Lords, is it not remarkable that this advertisement, which had no controversial or objectionable matter in it, which had been fully accepted by the Board four or five months ago, and which was issued by a very responsible organisation, should now be removed, bearing in mind that dubious advertisements are still being shown on the railways in London? Does the noble Lord not remember that a similar attempt was made in this House to prevent the Family Planning Association from appealing for funds on the B.B.C., and on that occasion the Board of the B.B.C. stood firm? Is it not against all tolerance that this should happen, and is it not more an arrogant attack on liberty?

And Lord Chesham answered:

My Lords, I do not believe this is an arrogant attack on liberty at all. So far as I am aware no one has suggested—at least, I have not been told so—that this poster was in any way offensive in itself. Indeed, I have seen a copy of it and I have one here. The poster itself is not exceptionable, but I am informed by the British Transport Commission that they have received letters objecting to the poster on religious grounds. I think I should remind the noble Lord of Rule 18 of the Commission's regulations regarding advertisements which they cannot accept. Rule 18 deals with posters "which refer to religious or sacred subjects in a manner which might give offence or contain matter or illustrations likely to be construed as religiously controversial". Evidently this poster was so considered, and the British Transport Commission, it appears, saw fit to withdraw it on those grounds.

Lord Chorley, a Vice-President of the Family Planning Association, asked Lord Chesham if the Government had any information to support the view that the Roman Church was "conducting a vendetta against the Family Planning Association", but Lord Chesham declined to comment. The decisions were the responsibility of the British Transport Commission, and he repeated that "the Government do not seek to influence or express any opinion".

"It is all very well to ride away behind this immunity of public Corporations" said Viscount Alexander of Hillsborough, ". . . but it is obvious . . . that very soon we shall have to have an actual Resolution debated in the House on this matter, because it goes from Corporation to Corporation now on the very matter which is being discussed.

Lord Shepherd hinted that he would raise the matter outside Question Time.

# Critical Views Beyond the "Curtain"

By PAT SLOAN

SPOKESMEN OF THE ESTABLISHMENT never cease to lament the declining interest in religion and religious morals, a decline which continues despite the plugging of such topics *ad nauseum* by the BBC and ITV, and by a press which combines lip-service to Christianity with the mass popularisation of unethical behaviour as "news", especially on Sundays. In no other country have we such bigoted sabbatarianism that it is forbidden to watch live ballet or Shakespeare on Sunday while anyone can get their day's ration of other people's immorality from the press; or such hypocrisy that while gangsterism and murder are crimes, gangster films and comics focus attention on crime as the best entertainment except sex. We chase the prostitutes off the streets while landlords' rents and the GPO's telephone income are swollen from the business of the call-girl racket.

Until the past hundred years or so, all men's ethical codes have been inextricably bound up with superstitious views of life, whether in the form of primitive totemism, in the worship of fertility gods and goddesses or war gods, or in the epoch of their amalgamation into the "great religions" of the past two thousand years. It is only today that it has become possible for human communities to be run on the basis of a scientific and materialistic approach to life.

If, therefore, we see around us an intense conflict between ideologies and social systems this is not surprising. Mankind is emerging from the age of superstition into the age of reason, and this is taking place simultaneously with social changes; the struggle for a rationally organised society, in place of an irrational society based on vested interests and superstition. And today, whether we like it or not, one third of humanity is now living under a new social system which professes to be based on reason. Even though a "curtain" may still separate that part of the world from our own, and the other side of that curtain is often portrayed as a hell of tyranny and barbarism, it is also being seen, sometimes most unexpectedly, as a centre of a new ethical development.

Billy Graham, for example, during his last tour of Europe, visited Moscow. And though this was probably the only capital in Europe where he could not hold a public revivalist meeting, he returned to this country saying that while, in London, he found that our parks "looked like one great bedroom . . . in the Moscow parks I saw thousands of young people, but not a single couple locked in an embrace." He added that though hating Communism "I love the Russian people and the moral purity I found among the Muscovites." (*News Chronicle*, June 17, 1959).

Edward Crankshaw, well-known as *The Observer's* Russian expert, writes in his book, *Krushchev's Russia*, that "confident unfrightened young men are springing up like grass", that the Russians as a whole are "kinder to children than we are", that in the USSR today "at twenty-one, you are well-fed, well-dressed, well-educated, in some ways well-entertained", and, as a whole, the youth "are so well-behaved". (*Op.cit.* pp. 127-137.)

So, peep behind this mysterious "curtain", and perhaps a new world with new positive ethical values is coming into being despite, admittedly, many negative features in the process of its birth. Moreover, if new and positive ethical values are arising, then they are of the greatest importance, for they demonstrate that a society based on atheism can produce a high level of morality.

If we study the curriculum of the schools of the USSR today, we find no religious instruction. But morality is taught in the social subjects by a conscious policy of popularising the heroes of history, science and the arts. No Soviet child is submitted to the confusing and demoralising experience of being taught the Genesis story of the Creation during Religious Instruction only to be countered by the theory of Evolution in the Biology class a few hours later. But they are told of the good lives that have been led by outstanding personalities right through human history. Their eggs, it may be said, are widely distributed, not all placed in the one moral basket of a nebulous non-historical Jesus.

The idea of a life after death is not dangled before the eyes of young Soviet citizens as an essential (as many here believe) stimulus to good behaviour. But they are told that Nikolai Ostrovsky's book, *How the Steel was Tempered*, is one of the greatest books of the Soviet period, and it contains a very moving passage in which the hero, Pavel Korchagin, visits the site where some of his comrades are buried, following a massacre by the Whites during the Civil War. Standing beside the simple graves Korchagin muses:

Man's dearest possession is life, and it is given to him to live but once. He must live so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the shame of a mean and petty past; so that, dying, he can say: All my life and all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world—the fight for the liberation of mankind. And one must use every moment of life, lest some sudden illness or tragic accident cut it short.

There may be disagreement as to how the "fight for the liberation of mankind" should be waged. But surely no rationalist could disagree with the sentiments. And it is this attitude to life and death with which young people are being brought up in the Soviet Union today.

Which is the higher standard of morality—one which may demand supreme sacrifices on earth but with the confidence that this means piling up "treasure in heaven"? Or one which, while offering no reward, calls on people to live for, and if need be die for, the cause of humanity?

In the USSR today there is a great deal of discussion taking place on the nature of the good life. Among those contributing has been Ilya Ehrenburg, who in the youth paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* recently conducted a discussion on personal behaviour and personal development. His conception of a good life is one of all round development, combining knowledge of, or participation in, the arts, science, sport and, an essential ingredient, "great love". This is the idea of self-development being put before the youth of the USSR today.

We know that, in the years culminating in 1953, the State Security services ran amok. But we do not always realise the extent to which this has now been changed. Not only has "legality" been restored, but actual experiments are now in progress aiming at the complete elimination of crime within ten to fifteen years from now. It is believed that by that time the economic motive for crime will have been obliterated in general prosperity while the remaining psychological motives will have been reduced to a minimum.

At the present time great attention is being paid to the reforming of offenders, and to cutting to a minimum the number of cases brought before the courts at all. Wherever possible, minor offences are being dealt with by public censure only, preferably at the offender's place of work.

When, on a recent visit to the North of England, I accompanied two Soviet citizens, they were proudly shown the Magistrate's Court in Gateshead as an example of how British justice works. They saw a succession of men fined about £1 each for drunkenness on the previous Friday and Saturday night. Instead of being impressed, one of them whispered to me: "They'd never be brought to court at all with us nowadays, they'd be reported to their place of work and censured publicly for anti-social behaviour at a trade union meeting. We find that this is much more effective than court proceedings and a fine".

And Pavel Nilin, whose book *Cruelty* on the early years of the OGPU was most favourably reviewed in *The Sunday Times* last year by C.P. Snow, wrote in *Literary Gazette* (December, 1959) as follows:

It is all-important that young people, those not essentially bad but who have slipped up and find themselves on trial, should be able with the aid of the court to look confidently and without fear to the State, secure in the knowledge that

it can never punish them without cause or prove indifferent to their fate.

A number of prisons have been closed down in the USSR during 1959, including two in Moscow. The police (or "militia") have also been abolished in some towns, volunteers from local factories taking their place in the keeping of order. It is claimed that the crime rate has considerably declined since the change.

And so it is confidently predicted that in ten to fifteen years crime will have been wiped out like typhus or malaria. Is this a utopian prophecy?—It may seem so, but it should be remembered how many Soviet prophecies have been discounted abroad by sceptics who have found in due course that they have been fulfilled.

A new ethic, based on a new system of society, both materialist and scientific, is maturing at the other side of that "curtain". It is no good turning a blind eye to what is going on.

## "Elmer Gantry"

By COLIN McCALL

"SINNERS! ELMER GANTRY IS COMING!" announced the posters in the London Underground in a suitable warning red. They were, of course, advance publicity for the film of Sinclair Lewis's novel (though in keeping with modern techniques this was not disclosed at the time), and this seems an appropriate opportunity for reconsidering the novel, particularly as it is now available in paperback (Panther Books, 5s.).

In my opinion, Lewis is at present rather underrated in American critical circles. I think his best work will last, and I think *Elmer Gantry* is one of his two or three novels that rank second only to *Babbitt*. Moreover, it is the one that has most direct appeal to Freethinkers, due to its subject-matter. It deals with religion, and it is significantly dedicated "with profound admiration" to the great American iconoclast, H. L. Mencken, who exposed everything he considered sham and hypocritical, especially in the religious field. We may say—and this is high praise—that the book is worthy of its dedication. It is a simply brilliant satire: an exposure of Christianity, particularly, but not only, of the Baptist evangelical kind.

Elmer Gantry, when we meet him, is at Terwillinger College, the athletic idol of the College, but not really liked. His only friend is his room-mate, Jim Lefferts, a Freethinker, whose pride is possession of works by Ingersoll and Paine. Jim is, we are told, the only man in Terwillinger who doubted that Lot's wife had been turned into a pillar of salt, and he fascinates Elmer by his "wickedness" in posing a few awkward questions to the College President. Elmer himself is rather more respectful of authority and—as Lewis tells us in his delightfully satiric way—"after giving minutes and minutes to theological profundities" has concluded that "there must be something to all this religious guff if all these wise old birds believe it . . .".

Always, Lewis is satirising religion. Elmer defends a religious speaker at an open air meeting and when things are looking very rough, "Providence intervened in its characteristically mysterious way"—that is, the police came. Eddie Fislinger, the speaker defended, is a fundamentalist. "Whatever difficulties he may have had with philosophy, Latin, and calculus, there had never been a time since the age of twelve when Eddie Fislinger had had difficulty in understanding what the Lord God Almighty wanted, and why, all through history, he had acted thus or thus". He tells Elmer that Ingersoll recanted on his deathbed, and says in that typical inane way that is so

well known to all of us: "Jever study a kernel of wheat? Swonnerful! Think a wonnerful intricate thing like that created *itself*? Somebody must have created it. Who? God!" Eddie, indeed, is the type who makes one ironically exclaim with Jim Lefferts: "You bet I believe in the old bearded Jew God! Nobody but him could have made all the idiots there are in the world!"

I suppose it may be said that fate conspires to make Elmer Gantry a preacher. Things might have gone differently had he not attended the Annual Prayer Week service at the Baptist church, had he not been "packed in between his mother and a wheezing fat man", and not been stirred by "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder" and "Shall We Gather at the River?" But, having been brought up as he had, having "in fact, got everything from the Church and Sunday School, except, perhaps, any longing whatever for decency and kindness and reason": his future was pretty well determined.

Could he endure it to be away from them, in the chill void of Jim Leffert's rationalising, on that day when they should be rejoicing in the warm morning sunshine by the river rolling to the imperishable Throne?

Apparently not: particularly if there were a profitable future in it! Still, it must be admitted that he had the gifts. Was it not only ten minutes after his own "experience" that he made his first "conversion"? He might have to turn to Ingersoll for inspiration ("Love is the only bow on life's dark cloud. It is the Morning and the Evening Star . . .") when he failed to find it in the Bible, but after all he did "kind of change it around". Anyway, it certainly worked, not once but again and again: and if it was necessary to lie about where he got it from, to say it came to him while he was praying, that was surely better than saying he got it from an infidel!

Mizpah Theological Seminary bores him, but gives him professional training and an elegant vocabulary. So that:

He knew eighteen synonyms for sin, half of them very long and impressive, and the others very short and explosive and minatory—minatory being one of his own best words, constantly useful in terrifying the as yet imaginary horde of sinners gathered before him.

And the horde didn't remain only imaginary. Not once he had met the enchanting evangelist, Sharon Falconer. Sharon, who tells him: "Oh, I hate the little vices—smoking, swearing, scandal, drinking just enough to be silly. I love the big ones—murder, lust, cruelty, ambition!" Sharon, for whom he is prepared to give up his minor vices, but who, alas, puts too much trust in the Lord God

of Hosts, and perishes in the tabernacle fire. Elmer has more sense than try his faith that far, and is the only one of Sharon's gospel-crew to escape from the flames. He even manages to rescue "at least thirty people who had already rescued themselves".

Elmer Gantry, in short, is an opportunist—and successful. He is ruthless, callous, even in love, where his attitude is contrasted, for instance, with the devotion of Lulu. And here it should be said that, although Sinclair Lewis is a splendid satirist, and especially brilliant in his religious satire, he is also tender, humane and understanding. These qualities are apparent in *Elmer Gantry*, and they give the work its extra depth.

Perhaps the finest of his studies is of the lonely Bruno Zechlin, Ph.D. of Bonn, S.T.D. of Edinburgh, the stammering, stumbling, bearded Professor of Greek, Hebrew, and Old Testament Exegesis, "one of the dozen authentic scholars in all the theological institutions of America". Lewis uses his satire in Zechlin's favour ("and incidentally he was a thorough failure") and then blends it with tenderness in what is for me an unforgettable picture:

Before ever he had taken his theological doctorate, Zechlin had felt that it was as impossible to take literally the myths of Christianity as to take literally the myths of Buddhism. But for many years he had rationalised his heresies. These myths, he comforted himself, are symbols embodying the glory of God and the leadership of Christ's genius. He had worked out a satisfying parable: The literalist, said he, asserts that a flag is something holy, something to die for, not symbolically, but in itself. The infidel, at the other end of the scale, maintains that the flag is a strip of wool or silk or cotton with rather unæsthetic marks printed on it, and of considerably less use, therefore of less holiness and less romance, than a shirt or blanket. But to the unprejudiced thinker, like himself, it was a symbol sacred only by suggestion but not the less sacred.

After nearly two decades he knew that he had been fooling himself . . .

When a sceptical student seeks his advice about certain doubts, it is not for three months that Zechlin can admit that he is an agnostic, "and not for another month that atheist would perhaps be a sounder name for him than agnostic".

*Elmer Gantry* is worth reading for the moving, tragic portrait of Dr. Bruno Zechlin alone, short though it is, but there is much, so very much, more.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### VACCINATION AND INOCULATION

I regret to find that in a letter in THE FREETHINKER, (28/10/60), Mr. Adrian J. Hillier says, "I served without the benefit of Vaccination or inoculations and I spent . . ." (time in various theatres of war where epidemic disease is often serious).

I find this nothing to write home about; on the contrary, your correspondent's failure to take advantage of the benefits of nearly a century of medical research was extremely foolish and dangerous not only to himself but to others whose inoculation-immunity may have run out. I gather that Hillier contracted no infectious disease. This was due not to a "good constitution" or to his fine independent freethinking spirit or even wholly to chance but in part to the fact that inoculation had abolished the potential reservoir of disease in his environment; his mates had submitted to a procedure of tested efficacy in preventing disease and death. In the Boer War three times more troops died of Typhoid than by enemy action: but in World War I, I remember than in an Army circular it was announced that of the 4 million troops under the British flag on the Western front late in 1918 there were only 4, repeat four, cases of Typhoid. This was due to inoculation. Tetanus formerly a scourge of armies was practically eliminated in World War II.

The extremely striking results of preventive inoculation in abolishing communicable and infective disease can be found in any war history. Had all Hitler's mates refused vaccination and inoculation they could easily have started an epidemic which in turn could have destroyed much valuable man-power. When I

was in Moscow in 1936 every second oldish person in the streets showed old Smallpox marks; after national compulsory vaccination, there were only 2 cases of Smallpox in the Soviet Union in, I think, 1938.

If Mr. Hillier has any conscientious objections to vaccination and inoculation he should keep out of the armed forces in future; manpower is too precious to waste in wartime. Freethought which defies superstition is laudable and constructive but if it defies verifiable scientific truth as expressed in beneficent disease prevention procedures, both in respect of individuals and of communities exposed to epidemic outbreaks, it is deplorable and dangerous, and vastly more so than usual on the part of a freethinker who should know better and at least do a bit of rational thinking. (DR.) J. V. DUHIG.

### A DEFENCE OF SHEEN AND LUNN

Dr. Duhig pretends to know a great deal about his targets. I happen to know Bishop Sheen quite well. Incidentally, he has never converted me. I have read most of his forty books, in some of which I discovered some devastating critiques of Whitehead's theology. I knew him when he was a Professor of Philosophy at one of our leading universities (Catholic University of America), and I couldn't help admiring his clear and forceful mind. He never impressed me as being a clown, even though he failed to convert me, or I should say, to bring me back to the old fold, since I, too, am an apostate.

And Sir Arnold Lunn, another undeserving victim of Dr. Duhig's superficial evaluation. Perhaps I should remind Dr. Duhig that Lunn, challenged by Professor Joad in a public debate in print, came out victorious, while at the same time, he published a book as an answer to Professor Haldane which was received by the most impartial critics as an outstanding defence for the Catholic cause. It would be better to remind Dr. Duhig that Professor Joad, after that memorable debate with Lunn which took place in 1933, published a book called *Recovery of Belief: Restatement of Christianity*. This was exactly in 1952. I advise Dr. Duhig that in future he either sticks to generalisations or selects targets that he can easily hit without any risk of refutation. BEN SABIA (USA).

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