

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXI—No. 14

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH represents a unique political creation to which I cannot recall any precise parallel in modern political history. For at the Conference Table are represented both European, Asiatic and African States at very different stages in human culture and political experience. From this, as everyone knows, arose several difficult and dangerous problems, of which the apartheid policy of the Union of South Africa was perhaps the most important and certainly the most publicised. It would, I imagine, be true to state that most of the readers of this paper would hold the view that the morally iniquitous and biologically unscientific racialist theory behind the practice of apartheid, dis-

qualifies South Africa *ipso facto* from the membership of any democratic cosmopolitan society founded upon the basic principle of political and, at least potential, mental racial equality. The National Secular Society, in consonance with its avowed principles, has no belief whatsoever in the *Herrenvolk* principle, anyhow or anywhere. We do not subscribe to the principle of "Chosen Races" whether in the Old Testament, *Mein Kampf* or in the present Union of South Africa.

Religious Apartheid

There is, however, and we feel it to be our duty to go on repeating this as long as the necessity arises, one field quite apart from the vexed question of racial relations, where the principle of what is, in effect, apartheid still continues, and that is in the sphere of religion. We have brought up this matter before in connection with previous Commonwealth Ministerial Conferences, and this is not the last time that we shall raise this important question. For we must point out that the religious set-up both in Great Britain itself (the Metropolis of the Commonwealth as is indicated by the recent Conference), and with respect to the official Head of the Commonwealth which is still the British Monarchy, is based upon the open assertion of a kind of religious apartheid. All religions within the world-wide Commonwealth are not "equal before the Law". For the essentially medieval principle of State Churches, particular religious organisations which enjoy a position of privilege in the eyes of the law, and to which the Monarch must by law belong, obviously constitutes what I have termed above, a religious version of apartheid. In the professedly democratic British Commonwealth, there are still, in the sphere of religion, "first class" and "second class" citizens in respectively, the Established and non-established Churches, the former of which (in both England and Scotland) possess privileges denied to the latter. What is this but the assertion of the basic principle of apartheid applied to the ecclesiastical sphere?

A Triumph for Secularism

Actually, the British Commonwealth of Nations represents a triumph for Secularist principles. For here we have a whole congerie of nations at the most varied political and cultural levels belonging to what has been

termed, the same club; whilst similarly, in the sphere of religion, we have lands which have adhered immemorably to widely divergent and opposing faiths, yet meeting on harmonious terms without a trace of religious bigotry. For, in London the representatives of Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Pagan States, sat side by side with the sole objective of discussing secular problems, adhering exclusively to this terrestrial state of things and without any preoccupation either with the theological principles that divide them, or still less, with the eternal damnation which most of these creeds have at one time or another, pronounced against each other's adherents. For example, it would surely have been rather

difficult to have imagined a pious Christian, as Mr. Macmillan is reported as being, sitting side by side on the most amicable terms with the leader of a Muslim theocracy like Pakistan in the Ages of Faith and the Crusades. Even an officially Secular State like India, can fit into this easy-going scheme of things, notwithstanding that its highly respected leader, Mr. Nehru, is himself a self-confessed Agnostic.

Abolish the Christian Monopoly

In this inter-racial, inter-religious federation of all sorts of nations, the present Christian monopoly represents an absurd medieval anomaly. Why should the head of the Commonwealth have to be a Christian, or for that matter, have to belong officially to any religion at all? If the leaders of the nations which make up the Commonwealth can have Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Agnostic leaders, why has the titular head of the Commonwealth (and all future heads, plus their relations) always got to be a Christian? Particularly when, as in this case, Christians form a minority amongst the nations who compose the Commonwealth. To add insult to injury, the specific Christian Churches which are established in the British Metropolis, and to which the Monarch and her family are bound to belong by law, represent comparatively small minorities even amongst the Christian population of the Commonwealth; a fact which was admitted recently by no less a person than the incoming Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Ramsey. We must emphasise once again that the position nowadays is as ridiculous from a statistical, as from a philosophical, standpoint. When summarily considered, it works out to the absurd conclusion that in an inter-racial, inter-religious federation, a privileged position is reserved for a minority of a minority. The two Established Churches in England and Scotland, represent together probably a not very substantial minority amongst the Christian population of the British Commonwealth, who themselves are also in a substantial minority in comparison with the citizens of other faiths. I have no exact figures before me, but I would say that the present Defender of the Anglican Faith has certainly more Hindu and Muslim subjects than she now has Christian ones. We will not here pause to inquire whether the

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Secularism and the British Commonwealth

By F. A. RIDLEY

number of total unbelievers does not in actuality, surpass the members of any of the creeds professed in the Commonwealth; perhaps even than all of them combined.

Down With All Forms of Apartheid

Here is a problem for the Prime Ministers to consider at future meetings when, incidentally, the addition of further non-Christian Dominions will have added to both the incongruity of this situation and to the urgent need for remedying it. Down with all forms of apartheid, religious ones included! Abolish the present position of

privilege enjoyed by the Established Churches! Let the head of the Commonwealth be as free as her subjects to join any religion or none. The British Commonwealth is already a political entity founded upon essentially Secularist principles apart from religion. By the year 1966 when the National Secular Society will celebrate its centenary, we hope to see the Secular principle embodied in the total separation of Church and State and the application to the entire Commonwealth of our basic Secularist principles.

Henry George

By H. CUTNER

READERS MAY REMEMBER that I promised Mr. W. Hartley Bolton (THE FREETHINKER, 4/11/60) to look into Book X of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and give him my opinion of it (for what that opinion is worth). When, many years ago, I tried to read the book, I was repelled by its colossal ignorance of Malthusianism and—this is very rare with me—I did not finish the work.

Convalescening after a recent illness, I did my best to read Book X, but here again my difficulty was to wade through page after page of generalities—some of which I agreed with of course, but which do not make an iota of difference one way or other. He calls the "current theory of human progress" insufficient, meaning the theory current in 1879; but surely nearly all sociological theories believed in 80 or 90 years ago are mostly dead as the proverbial mutton?

He begins Chapter IV by "The conclusion we have just reached harmonises completely with our previous conclusions". And what is the "just reached" conclusion? Here it is:—

Political economy and social science cannot teach any lessons that are not embraced in the simple truths that were taught to poor fishermen and Jewish peasants by One who eighteen hundred years ago was crucified—the simple truths which, beneath the warpings of selfishness and the distortion of superstition, seem to underlie every religion that has ever striven to formulate the spiritual yearnings of man.

After reading this undiluted nonsense, I can only congratulate myself that I never tried to finish reading *Progress and Poverty*. The idea that the "One" gave us some "simple" truths in "political economy and social science" once for all about 1,930 years ago—truths taught to "poor fishermen and Jewish peasants" proves how little Henry George knew what he was talking about.

One of the "simple" truths enunciated by Jesus was when he said to an enquirer, "Sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor"—the great economic idea behind this wonderful truth being that the poor fully deserved all they were given for nothing. But surely to sell something to somebody else implied riches on the part of the *buyer*, so he also had to sell and give to the poor and this could be done indefinitely—or could it? Personally, I don't know anything so utterly silly as this simple truth.

As for the "social science" of Jesus—did he not teach?

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

But Henry George's knowledge of history was quite on a par with his claim about the simple truths given us by "One". For example, he tells us, "Had not the Christian Church existed when the Roman Empire went to pieces, Europe, destitute of any bond of association, might have fallen to a condition not much above that of the North American Indians, or only received civilisation with an Asiatic impress from the conquering scimitars of the invading hordes . . .". The Christian Church certainly

existed at the time of the invading hordes, but gave us that dreadful period known as the Dark Ages, the blight of which almost killed every scrap of Greek and Roman culture for nearly 1,000 years.

Or let us take what George says about the Jews. He claims that "the Jews have maintained the purity of their blood more scrupulously and for a far longer time than any of the European races . . .". That is, he obviously believed that the Jews were or are a race—though there are black, brown, yellow, and white "Jews" in the world. These people have always inter-married in spite of fearful Talmudic injunctions, and the "purity" of their blood is quite a myth. However, let us agree with at least one statement by Henry George when he says that "it is the Hebrew religion—and certainly religion is not transmitted by generation but by association—which has everywhere preserved the distinctiveness of the Hebrew race." It is true that the various rituals and prayers of Judaism have kept "Jews" together, but there is no "race"—and probably there never was. The white European Jew is not descended from the brown Israelites who at one time inhabited Palestine. These people were in all probability almost wiped out in the two wars waged by them against the Romans. The modern white Jew is descended from converts made by a few proselytising rabbis in the early centuries of our era. (Incidentally, the various "races" who are now doing their best to populate the new country of Israel prefer to call themselves Israelis.)

George heads one of his chapters, "How modern civilisation may decline", and quite naturally points out that "a civilisation like ours must either advance or go back: it cannot stand still". And he adds,

What has destroyed every previous civilisation has been the tendency to the unequal distribution of wealth and power. This same tendency, operating with increasing force, is observable in our civilisation today, showing itself in every progressive community, and with greater intensity, the more progressive the community. Wages and interest tend constantly to fall, rent to rise, the rich to become very much richer, the poor to become more helpless and hopeless, and the middle class to be swept away.

Shades of Marx and Engels and their *Communist Manifesto*, and the gentle art of prophecy! When I wrote in a previous article that Henry George and most of the sociologists of his day were completely out of date, that most, if not all their prophecies, were and were bound to be hopeless nonsense, I had not come across this remarkable proof of the justness of my judgment. It is not his fault that he was quite unable to foresee what would happen in the near future, but it is a pity that his disciples do not know when to remain quiet about him.

Most of *Progress and Poverty* is just dead in these days of a (more or less) beneficent Welfare State and the remarkable growth of world-wide industries and agriculture. It is a sheer waste of time to argue anything about him. And he made it all worse by his appallingly silly jibes (I can't call them arguments) at Malthusianism.

Perhaps Mr. W. Hartley Bolton will now leave him in peace.

Intemperate Bigotry

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

SOME MATERIAL IN THE FREETHINKER lately has made me wonder. The pioneers of Freethought started the modern resistance to dictated thinking and to compulsion by dictators, most particularly on religious and doctrinal matters. Though Freethought should apply to all thinking, custom has restricted the word to the religious field; the term Freethinker, at least when I was a boy, was used as a term of abuse as Atheist is used today. I have always understood the word in this restricted sense and have written to our journal almost solely as an opponent of supernatural religion in general and of the Catholic brand in particular. I do this because I understand that to be the real function of the journal and because I think organised religion, again especially the Catholic, forms, as a whole, the wickedest system of falsehood, extortion, persecution, tyranny and injustice the world has ever known.

Recently (16/9/60) in the correspondence columns a writer refers to a certain kind of thinking, which I am proud to say includes mine, as bigotry and intemperate speech. The Oxford Dictionary defines "bigot" as a person obstinately and unreasonably wedded to a creed, opinion or ritual and "bigotry" as the condition of a bigot, obstinate and blind attachment to a creed, etc. I think, on this, that your correspondent's statement is a gratuitous affront to many of your contributors. I was born a Catholic. Over 40 years ago I left the Church in disgust with its dishonesty, its greed and its emphasis on futile ritual in fancy dress at the expense of conduct, and over that 40 years of collecting irrefutable evidence, my disgust has been justified and enhanced immeasurably, so that to say I hold my opinions unreasonably and blindly is false. I cannot possibly then be brought within the scope of these authoritative definitions, though I make no secret of my opinion that religion, especially the Catholic, which has a most abominable record of fraud and murder, which promotes crime and social discord, which drains untold wealth away from desirable and necessary community purposes and which, above all, cannot produce one shred of evidence for the truth of its doctrines—its God; its Jesus; its Resurrection; its Miracles; its sacraments; its theophagy; its human parthenogenesis; its mathematical monstrosity of the Trinity; its crude rubbishy Transubstantiation; its meanest of all swindles, Purgatory; its Heaven and Hell; its grovelling petitionary prayer; for all of which there is not a tittle of any evidence. I say religion is such an evil there can be no other opinion about it than that every effort should be made to destroy it, and no language is too strong in which to denounce this vast edifice of fraud and imposture. It may be said there are many good religionists in the secularist sense, but my reply is that the example of China and Russia shows that they would probably be as good or better anyhow without religion; their heredity and environment were such they could not be otherwise. Even the frauds of religion cannot corrupt them.

Now in controversy certain stock pejorative words are constantly trotted out by people who feel a nasty chilly wind from forcibly expressed arguments they cannot meet; one such word is "intemperate" and I fail entirely to see why strongly expressed opinions are necessarily wrong. If such methods hurt, the obvious reply is for the injured party to produce an effective answer or change his views to conform more strictly to the demonstrable truth. To me, the man who relies on criticism of this kind is sadly short of ammunition and I not only ignore him but

despise what is essentially an evasive trick on his part.

So let me be a little more intemperate. I would like to ask then of what earthly use are people who make a living out of religion? What can they give human beings that they can get in no other way? Only the spurious solace of a lie. Of what earthly use is Pope John; was Pope Pius, who helped bring Hitler to power; Mgr. Tiso, who deliberately sent Jews to Auschwitz specifically for extermination; Cardinal Stepinach, who arranged the murder of tens of thousands of Serbs; Anglican Bishops and Archbishops who are paid thousands a year for burbling pious, platitudinous rubbish now and again, and the hordes of priests and parsons whose "work" is equivalent to the cube root of minus zero? Echo answers, none of any real human consequence.

I want to see religion destroyed because I want to live on terms of respect and equality with, for example, people who are now my Catholic neighbours, but who hate me and whom I, in turn, do not entirely trust because of the dangerous anti-social doctrines and practices their Church teaches them. What they may say in a given situation may be much more an article of Catholic faith than a statement of fact. I want to see all hatred, fraud and falsehood destroyed, but so long as religion persists there will be, at the same time, a vested interest in making that impossible. Deliberate Catholic segregation, a fear phenomenon, alone makes free and happy intercourse between citizens impossible, because that religion is arrogant and shameless in its demands on public patience and the public purse.

I wonder if those who openly profess a feeling of tenderness for the Christian religion are entitled to valuable space in our journal? Such stuff is futile and should be sent to religious papers. Unless they can give us some evidence for the truth and usefulness of that organisation, I am afraid they are wasting their time; they certainly waste mine as well as my patience. I will reward any convert to Christianity through THE FREETHINKER with an imitation diamond-encrusted solid gold and platinum shield valued at 3½d.

As a doctor who has spent his life amongst the sick, the poor, the unhappy and the unfortunate, I want to see all people happy. Unless we destroy organised religion that is impossible.

Ecrasez l'infâme!

As a postscript, may I say that the form of "intemperate" language I object to is personal abuse of an opponent; in THE FREETHINKER I have had this only twice, once from Fr. Paris, so dear to one of your correspondents.

FROM MAURITIUS

A few weeks ago you mentioned Mauritius, my home island. It may interest readers of THE FREETHINKER to know that Mauritius is a priest-ridden country. All sorts of religions flourish there, the strongest being of course the Roman Catholic. The people are very superstitious. Due to overpopulation there is widespread unemployment. The people live in squalor and abject poverty, and the majority of Mauritians can hardly read or write. Some years ago a weak attempt was made to introduce Birth Control, but as you may guess, the Roman Catholic clergy and the Catholic M.P. of the island defeated this attempt. So the population goes on increasing bringing in more poverty. In fact Roman Catholic religious could not care less about the economic and social problems Mauritius has to face so long as they can preach in comfort and security.

About two years ago a law was passed prohibiting the entry of Communist literature into the island. The law having been passed, the Roman Catholic priests can afford to live in comfort and security.

A MAURITIAN FREETHINKER.

This Believing World

That it would come at last we were sure for here we have the Rev. R. Ratcliff, finding his congregation dwindling, inviting two guitarists and a drummer to "swing" his hymns at a special evening series of services at St. George's Church, Chichester. The result was outstanding for his congregation now has been doubled. Mr. Ratcliff also "uses brisk modernised versions of the Scriptures", adds the London *Evening Standard*, "but not 1961 teenage jargon". The Holy Word in jargon . . .!

★

Another innovation is discussions in the church hall, though how effective are Mr. Ratcliff's replies we do not know. In general, questions asked by people in a church hall take for granted almost everything in the Bible. Very few, if any at all of the questioners, know anything of Bible criticism, especially from the standpoint of modern scholarship; and of what is called Church history they are equally ignorant. We wonder how Mr. Ratcliff would stand up against a well read Freethinker?

★

Even in such a hotbed of Romanism as is Eire, the Catholic hierarchy is greatly disturbed at the failure of its education—an education limited almost entirely to what the Church says or believes and little else. The Archbishop of Dublin, according to a long article in the *Irish Times* last month, has sent out the usual "Lenten Pastoral" to tell Catholic parents exactly how "to secure a fully Catholic education for their children, and the prohibition on Catholic pupils frequenting non-Catholic schools or universities".

★

The Archbishop appears to be particularly against Trinity College, Dublin, against which his Church has a statute "which forbids Catholic youths" going there—under pain of "mortal sin". Irish legislators must "face the fact that Trinity College, Dublin", angrily declares the Archbishop, "has never been acceptable, and is not now acceptable to Catholics". It is non-Catholic, and takes in Catholics and non-Catholics equally, and is therefore violently opposed on that score, if on nothing else, by the Church in Eire—which appears to be also hostile to "unity". Nothing matters so much as "unyielding insistence on the integrity of the Faith". This Lenten Pastoral shows what would happen to education in Britain were the Roman Church in power here. Thank heaven, it isn't.

★

Nothing like being practical. The Vatican has ordered Sister Ornella Brocci, aged 52, to go on an international Mission to save the wealthy—no doubt sure that they could use the wealth of the rich to far better advantage. Although the lady has spent her life in a convent, she now knows all about "immorality, drugs, and drink, in high society", and she is going to attack the "aimless rich" for all she is worth. She is to be helped in this noble work by an English girl, and an Oxford professor, and she hopes to wipe up all the rich sinners in London, New York, Paris, and Rome. But what if the three missionaries themselves find "sin" more attractive than Rome? It would be truly awful . . .!

★

Needless to add, of course, that the New English Bible is still getting all the publicity possible—most of it free. It engaged the BBC's Sunday morning critics the other week who naturally did their best to boost it because it was the New Testament, but who were by no means enamoured of its modern English. Some other critics consider that its English is just modern "journalise" but they

all hope that this will make people read it. The curious thing about this reading the Bible is that on the one hand critics enthusiastically praise the Authorised Version for its wonderful poetry and reverence, and on the other hand bewail its "unintelligibility". But is making the New Testament intelligible going to make people believe in miracles, angels, devils and a "place" called "Heaven"?

Footnote on Burton

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

FOR TWENTY YEARS AFTER his magnum opus was published, Robert Burton went on writing it. The first edition of *The Anatomy Of Melancholy* totals some 310,000 words: the second edition confronts the reader with some 400,000 words.

Burton did not add to his text in order to change but simply to augment. Only rarely did he attempt to sharpen an idea or improve the style of a passage. The statement that love is a "Tragedy" was, in later editions, modified to the more thoughtful proposition that love is a "Tragic-comedy": but, as a rule, the extra words merely admitted further slices from the thirteen hundred authors whom Burton paraphrases or quotes.

The book, then, is really a store-house rather than an original composition. Anything and everything was inserted—anecdotes, sermons, medical advice; and a contemporary fashion for melancholy gave Burton a selling title for a work which might have been less profitably called *The Anatomy Of Man*. Certainly the publisher profited by the popularity of the title, and they say he "got an estate by it".

The emotionally weighted diction and the rhetorical colour may still find some admirers, while others may be interested to trace in the "exuberant amplification of Senecan style" an influence on Sterne and John Ford. But the chief value of this enormous tome now is that it gives us a comprehensive picture of 17th century thought. Had it been an original work, it might not be so useful; but the truth is that one can read a library in Burton's book.

This is particularly so as Burton did not select his facts to present an individual viewpoint. He was an expert sitter on the fence, a man who accepted the new world of the Renaissance without giving up the old. And this is why I think freethinkers might like to be reminded that *The Anatomy Of Melancholy* offers some amusing "dipping". The history of the struggle for rational thought is illuminated when we find Burton solemnly recounting a theory that palm trees can be mutually enamoured, and promptly setting beside such a fantasy praise for the latest scientific cult of the botanical garden.

Very little is known of the author. He was born in 1577 of "worshipful parents"; and he graduated at Oxford where he spent his life as librarian and tutor and vicar of a church in the suburbs. Some commentators hold that he finally committed suicide in 1640 to verify his own astrological prediction of his death. As a further comment on the educated clergy of the time, we may care to chuckle over the fact that Burton liked to cheer himself with visits to the Bridge-foot at Oxford, where he would listen to the bargemen swearing and "set hands to his sides and laugh most profusely".

But in praise of Burton we must remember that he remarked that man's melancholy is due to man's unreason. As an Oxford fellow, Burton could not marry; and it has been proposed that he compiled his mighty work as physio-therapy, as a cure for melancholy and unreasonable position as a clergyman. In all, it is no wonder that the subject was limitless!

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

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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.

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Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, April 9th, 6.45 p.m.: G. H. TAYLOR, "The Population Explosion".

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Empress Hotel, Tyrell Street), Sunday, April 9th, 7.30 p.m.: A Lecture.

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, April 11th, 7.15 p.m.: RONALD LIGHTOWLER, "Meat Hunger in Man, Natural or Unnatural?"

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, April 9th, 6.30 p.m.: C. BRADLAUGH BONNER, "Three Martyrs—Oldcastle, Servetus and Bruno".

Marble Arch Branch N.S.S. (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, W.1), Sunday, April 9th, 7.15 p.m.: J. BURGESS (Catholic Evidence Guild), "The Catholic Church and the New Testament".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, April 9th, 11 a.m.: DR. W. E. SWINTON, "New Heavens and Old Gods".

Sussex Branch N.S.S., Sunday, April 9th—Details from F PEARCE, 25 Farm Close, Upper Portslade, Sussex.

Notes and News

IN VIEWS AND OPINIONS on March 10th, Mr. Joseph Da Silva referred to the new Association Laïque de Langue Française of Canada. He sends us now the Agenda of the Foundation Congress of this Laic Association of French-Speaking Canadians to be held in the Social Centre of the University of Montreal on Saturday, April 8th. The Congress will be opened by M. Maurice Blain, provisional President, and the morning session will include an address on "Laïcité, Démocratique et Enseignement" by M. Marcel Rioux, followed by a general discussion. In the afternoon the main subject of discussion will be the "neutral" school. A constitution will be adopted and officers elected. We send our fraternal greetings to the new Association and wish it a successful conference.

★

EPISCOPALIAN BISHOP James A. Pike's suggestion that some Christian scripture is mythological rather than historical (THE FREETHINKER, 17/3/61), "though held by many Protestant theologians", has caused quite a disturbance, said *Time* (17/3/61). But, it continued, the issue "has its counterparts in Roman Catholicism". Al-

though "cautious" in comparison with Bishop Pike, "the new view of the Gospels is highly unsettling to Catholic conservatives and so widespread among college students, laymen's discussion groups and seminarians that it has provoked a well-modulated blast by a leading theologian".

★

THE "MIDRASH" THEORY, as this new version is called, regards "the Gospel narrative of the birth of Jesus—including such episodes as the angel Gabriel's announcement to the Virgin of her miraculous conception, and the beloved story about the journey of the Wise Men from the East" as "dramatic" or "legendary". Father Francis L. Filas, SJ, Chairman of the Department of Theology at Loyola University, Chicago, has opposed the idea which, he said, caused "shock and surprise" among "priests, nuns, college students, and even the general public".

★

THE SAME ISSUE OF *Time*, in its obituary of Sir Thomas Beecham, recalled a little hymn book circulated free of charge to advertise Sir Thomas's grandfather's invention, the famous pills. One quatrain ran:

Hark! the herald angels sing,
Beecham's Pills are just the thing.
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
Two for man and one for child.

★

THE PREMIER OF BARBADOS, Dr. Hugh Gordon Cummins assured members of the House of Assembly on March 15th, that "it is the determination of this Government to prosecute the disendowment of the Anglican Church very vigorously and forcefully, as soon as it can" (*Barbados Advocate*, 16/3/61).

★

ACCORDING TO Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, Principal of Jews' College, the distress of the modern world derives from the fact that man's growing mastery of natural processes had made him independent of God (*The Jewish Chronicle*, 17/3/61). Without the vision of God which religion alone can supply, said the Rabbi, in the Second Annual Foundation Lecture of the Yavneh Organisation at the University of London Union, man loses his sense of stability and security, grows cynical or neurotic, and finally lapses into "a fit subject for a psycho-analyst". For support, Dr. Epstein turned to the ever (religiously) reliable, Jung who, among all his patients in 35 years had not had one whose problem, "in the last resort, was not based on the lack of any religious outlook on life". And not one had been entirely cured who had not "first regained his religious outlook". Beware then reader! Don't be fooled by feelings of sanity! The road of atheism is the road to the psychiatrist's couch.

★

A NOVENA at Christ the King Church, Dublin, may have been spiritually rewarding for Mrs. Margaret Fleming and her daughter of Cabra, but it was less so in more mundane matters. During their half hour's absence, reported the *Dublin Evening Mail* (13/3/61), "the house was ransacked and £40 which was hidden in a statue of the Child of Prague were taken".

THE YEAR'S FREETHOUGHT

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American Secularist Leader Interviewed on TV

(Concluded from page 103)

COATES: I understand that President Roosevelt personally endorsed your candidacy. Did he know that you were an atheist?

OLSON: I don't know whether he did or not.

COATES: You don't recall ever having discussed that with him?

OLSON: I never discussed the matter with him.

COATES: How do you explain the fact that your stand on religion was unknown to most of the public in the state of California?

OLSON: It was not an issue in the campaign—what your religion was or was not.

COATES: If you had been asked by the press what your religion was, what would you have said?

OLSON: I think I would have told them the truth.

COATES: And how would you tell them the truth?

OLSON: I would have said I am a secularist.

COATES: Isn't it possible that many people would have considered secularism a religion that they didn't know about?

OLSON: That might well be, so many of them don't think about anything but religion.

COATES: Well, wouldn't it have been nearer the truth to say that you were an atheist?

OLSON: No it wouldn't, because people are supposed to know what secularism is. We have a secular government, and the founders of our secular government were some of them atheists and they founded a secular government, but we hardly have one now because the churches are interfering in governmental affairs.

COATES: As governor of the state of California, do you feel that the bill providing released time in the public schools for religious training is a good thing? Even though you are opposed to religion don't you feel that it's a constitutional privilege to embrace religion if we so choose? What would released time mean? Wouldn't it mean that the pupil could take advantage of it for religious training if he wants to, and if he doesn't want to he isn't released from school?

OLSON: That is just putting released time into the school curriculum so that the pupil can study religion instead of spending that time studying the educational programmes of the public school, which should have no religious element in its curriculum.

COATES: When you were sworn into office as governor of the state of California, you were legally required to use the words "So help me God", were you not?

OLSON: No legally, no.

COATES: Well, it is customary though not a legal requirement, then?

OLSON: Yes, it is customary. The president of the United States says it and he puts his hand on the Bible while saying it—then in some instances he prays afterward.

COATES: How did you avoid using the words "So help me God"?

OLSON: I just told the member of the Supreme Court who came to swear me in as governor that there was no use to ask me to say "So help me God" because God couldn't help me at all, and that there isn't any such person, and I will have to just say "I will affirm".

COATES: Now did the press or anyone else notice this omission?

OLSON: I don't think so. At least I didn't hear about it.

COATES: Did the fact that you are an atheist in any way influence the appointments that you made as governor?

OLSON: No, it didn't, because I didn't inquire into the attitudes with respect to religion on the part of anyone who I thought was competent. I was governor of all the people of the state and I did not discriminate in that respect.

COATES: In terms of practical politics, Governor, do you think that it's possible an atheist might get himself elected president of the United States just as you were elected governor without the public being aware of it?

OLSON: It is sure to be sometime, but it may not be in my lifetime or yours.

COATES: Obviously from the way you talk you are against fanaticism of any type, yet you recently campaigned against the adoption of the phrase "In God We Trust" as the official motto of California. How can you feel that such a motto is harmful?

OLSON: Such a motto is untrue. We don't trust in God.

COATES: Very many of us do.

OLSON: I know they think they do, but they don't really trust in God because they trust for their welfare and their security in their government. For their safety they trust in governmental control for law and order.

COATES: You don't think that the majority of people do trust in God?

OLSON: I think a majority of the people believe in God and pray to God and think they trust in him.

COATES: What is the harm in the motto?

OLSON: The harm is that it is a violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States to pass any act respecting religion.

COATES: What kind of response was there to your campaign against adopting the motto "In God We Trust"?

OLSON: I had a wonderful response. And, furthermore, I want to say that when that act passed the lower house of the legislature unanimously and then went to the Senate committee, I went before the committee and gave my reasons for opposing it, saying that the motto is not true and that God is a myth anyhow. A majority of the committee, who were Catholics, recommended a "Do pass", but the Senate rejected it by a majority vote. The campaign accomplished that much.

COATES: Governor Olson, have you attended any church services since you became an adult?

OLSON: No—no.

COATES: And have you read the Bible?

OLSON: Have I read the Bible! I've read that Bible through all the way from the first myth down to the last one.

COATES: Your mother must have read the Bible, at least the Book of Mormon, which is based upon the Bible.

OLSON: May I say something more about the Bible? I don't see how anybody can read the Bible and believe it's the word of God, or believe that it is anything but a barbarous story of a barbaric people who were so ignorant that they lived terrible lives. The Bible itself is the most obscene book that was ever published.

COATES: I started to say a moment ago that obviously your mother had read the Bible, and I'm sure that you have a definite moral code. That code didn't come from thin air. Isn't it possible that you inherited your sense of

morality from a religious mother?

OLSON: My mother would have been just the same kind of woman if she had never believed in religion. So would any other good person. They would be good without any Bible.

COATES: You have never felt the need of some higher authority to turn to in time of crisis?

OLSON: No.

COATES: Psychologists—at least some psychologists—say that we all have an emotional need to believe in immortality. Have you ever felt that need?

OLSON: Not at all. I don't believe in immortality either.

COATES: How old are you, sir?

OLSON: Eighty-two.

COATES: You have no fear of death?

OLSON: I am not afraid of death.

COATES: Do you think that it is possible that you might change your mind about that shortly before you die?

OLSON: Not a chance.

COATES: Governor Olson, in an address before the United Secularists of America, the organisation which you head, you said that the exploitation of superstition is the stock in trade of all organised religion. Did you mean to

imply by that all the great religious leaders of all time were phonies?

OLSON: Well, I think the religious leaders of all time were exploiting religious superstition to build up their churches and for their profit.

COATES: You can't find it in your heart to believe that some of them—perhaps most of them—were sincere people?

OLSON: Oh, yes, they could have been fanatical enough to be sincere.

COATES: In a talk before the Humanist Society of San Francisco you said that religion upholds the status quo and therefore blocks social progress. You are also aware, I am sure, that religion has promoted social progress.

OLSON: I wouldn't say that religion has promoted the social progress of mankind. I say that it has been a detriment to the progress of civilisation, and I would also say this: that the emancipation of the mind from religious superstition is as essential to the progress of civilisation as is emancipation from physical slavery.

COATES: Well, Governor Olson, I want to thank you very much for talking with me. It was a pleasure to see you again.

A New Deal for Suicides

By FRANK MAITLAND

A BILL TO MAKE SUICIDE no longer a crime in the eyes of the law has been discussed in the House of Lords and is on its way to the House of Commons.

The Lord Chancellor told the Lords:

"Wherever and however we may place the motives of those who take their own lives in the scale of human values, I think we can agree that they have little or nothing in common with what we should nowadays generally characterise as criminal intent . . . The suicide has put himself beyond the reach of punishment; the existence of the offence in our criminal law has not proved an effective deterrent to others, as over 5,000 suicides a year are known to the police in England and Wales. And the continuing criminal character of the conduct does nothing but add to the distress and pain of the relatives and friends of the deceased."

Viscount Kilmuir went on to say that it was estimated that, besides the 5,000-odd attempts at suicide which came to the notice of the police every year, a further 25,000 attempts were made and concealed because of the social and criminal stigma.

These are startling figures, which point to a very bad state of affairs in our society. How is it that all these people find life so intolerable, so insupportable, that they can no longer face living? Quite apart from the genuine psychological cases and those who are mad anyway, what a mark this is against a so-called Christian society! Where do the consolations of religion come in? What has happened to the loving kindness and charity towards men that the Gospel allegedly preaches?

In the debate in the House of Lords, only one Bishop had the courage to speak—the Bishop of Carlisle, who supported the Bill, but wanted it amended

to make it crystal clear that suicide, even when legally permissible, is still a dreadful offence against nature."

After appealing for some kind of organisation to help those in such a state of despair as to contemplate suicide, as did Lord Silkin, the Bishop ended by saying he wished

to guard that view of life which regards life as a mystery, a wonderful and sacred thing which has been given to man by other than himself."

Lord Denning, reviewing the law on suicides, said that for nearly a thousand years suicide had been regarded as

the most heinous of felonies, the felony of self-murder. The suicide was denied burial rights, and up until 1824, suicides were buried at cross-roads with stakes through their bodies, and even after 1824, until 1882, suicides had to be buried at night.

... and ever since 1882 up to this day, according to the law of the Church of England, a suicide is not entitled to Christian burial."

Quoting Blackstone, Lord Denning said that

"to commit suicide was invading the prerogative of the Almighty by rushing into His presence uncalled for."

The other aspect of suicide was that a suicide's goods were forfeited to the crown. This was abolished in 1870, but one form of forfeiture existed, on monies on insurance policies. (On this point, he received an assurance from the Lord Chancellor that the Life Offices Association were satisfied that the interests of the assured would not be adversely affected by the Bill).

Lady Wootton reminded the Government that barely three years ago the Home Secretary refused to change the law on suicide because "as a crime" it had "its roots in religious belief". She welcomed their change of heart.

Lady Wootton said:

"The early Christians were, I think, very much disposed to suicide; and perhaps they were so disposed through excessive rationality. They assumed that by an early departure from this life they could escape not only its miseries, but also its temptations, and that they would thus equip themselves with a clean passport to the blessed state of the next world. It was, I think, because of this tendency to favour suicide that St. Augustine felt himself called upon to discourage the practice; and it was he, I think, who first described it as 'a detestable and damnable wickedness'. Indeed, St. Augustine went so far as to say that even those virgins who attempted to commit suicide to save their virtue should not do so, since chastity was a virtue of the mind and will rather than of the flesh. Suicide then became a crime, as well as a sin."

In fairness to the Churches, it must be said that the Suicide Bill in good part arises from the recommendation of the Church Assembly Board for Social Responsibility that suicide and attempted suicide should cease to be crimes. And in fairness to the secular arm, it should be said that suicide has never been a crime in Scotland and

in some other countries.

After pointing out that high suicide rates marked

"... areas of social disorganisation and lack of cohesion. For that, it is not so much individuals but society which is responsible."

Lady Wootton spoke of the tragedy of the young committing suicide. More than half of the suicides known to the police are persons under 40, she pointed out.

"More than 180 are attempts made by persons under 17 and, most tragic of all, eighteen attempts were made last year by people under 14. Even of the actual successful suicides, a score were made last year by persons under 17."

Clearly, the fact that suicide has been a crime and a sin has not prevented many thousands of people from trying to end their lives. It is a very welcome thing that the Government and the Church have decided to lift the threat of damnation, the punishment of prison, the stigma of crime and sin, and so will relieve the person harassed to death from these added worries. But the problem of the personal and social conditions which turn people to suicide remains.

In this problem, we freethinkers can lend a hand, not only by steady help and kindness towards those around us whom we know to be in distress, but by our daily attitude to life, by our daily cheerfulness, willingness to help and kindly behaviour to all. We never know when a touch of kindness, a "passing the time of day" with a stranger, may help to lift someone in trouble out of depression, may remind them that, after all, life is worth living. We should never forget that our faces look best when they are wearing a smile. Above all, we must never forget that the basis of all that we stand for is *this life* and it is our bounden duty to try and make this life good for all.

CORRESPONDENCE

HARRY EDWARDS

I saw in your paper recently that some students are interested in Harry Edwards. May I tell them my experience?

A great friend of mine was going blind and, as she had faith in him I took her down to Surrey for treatment. But she only got worse. A woman I know went to him for arthritis. She is now bedridden.

A. MUSKRATT.

GENESIS AND THE BIG BANG

Mr. F. A. Ridley's article on "Genesis and the Big Bang" was most interesting, especially the first paragraph, which reveals the way translators of the Bible have carefully covered up the fact that the word "Elohim" does not mean "god" but "gods". I should like to add that they also conveniently glossed over another important detail, that this word is both masculine and feminine! On reading Mr. Gardiner's book *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, I stumbled upon the interesting fact that all primitive deities were either completely feminine or, in later ages, predominantly bisexual—you see these first gods had to be, in order to be the master creators of life! Indeed the Bible itself (apart from the unique instance of god humbling himself to get down upon his knees and puff on dust to create Adam!) states repeatedly that he (and/or she) created man—and presumably woman in his very own image! This demonstrates clearly that "Elohim" had to be hermaphrodite in order to create man in his likeness! In passing I should like to mention also, that Mr. Gardiner's book gives some admirable arguments that Christianity was so successful in Europe because of its many resemblances to the European pagan religions. For example, the Druids accepted the goddess Mary because she was like their "white goddess", the Romans similarly because she resembled their white goddess of corn, Ceres, who, to cap it all, in earlier times was the Mother Earth, the giver of all life, thus again resembling the Blessed Virgin, who gave birth to the 2nd Adam, Christ, the hope and renewer of life!

JOHN CHRISTOPHERS.

JESUS

Surely, Mr. Ratcliff's opinion on the unimportance of a historical Jesus Christ is shared by many independent thinkers. But from my viewpoint I sense great danger in a peripheral approach to "The Greatest Story Ever Told". Unless the idol is destroyed the trimmings will come and go. The Apostles' Creed will

vanish when the false saviour is destroyed. In fact, the core, i.e., the historical Jesus Christ, must be exposed as a gigantic fallacy from which Mankind must extricate itself.

The "Christian" Bible instructs as follows—"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He? They say unto Him, the Son of David, He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying the Lord said unto my Lord". St. Matt. 22: 42, 43, 44.

Furthermore, the historical mentalities ought to ponder the following: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am". St. John 8:58—and—"The letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life". 2 Cor. 3:6. In other words, the story behind the story is of paramount importance. Mythology can indeed be instructive if we perceive the hidden truth. When Jesus Christ is "seen" as representing the Spirit of truth (and not as a man divine—human or what have you) we may make tremendous evolutionary strides in progress, otherwise, I fear, we are like the religionists, bogged down in dogmatic chit-chat.

SONJA BIERSTED.

WHY

The question raised in This Believing World in your issue of March 24th—"Why will eminent Christians constantly bracket Secularism . . . with Communism?" is an interesting one. Another interesting question is "Why did THE FREETHINKER recently publish an article by a well-known Communist on the forthcoming abolition of crime in the USSR, just at the time that Mr. Khrushchev was accusing the Ukrainians of stealing half the corn crop?"

W. E. NICHOLSON.

[The answer, we're afraid, sounds rather tame at a time of spy-trials: we thought Mr. Sloan's article was interesting.—ED.]

OBITUARY

William Ash, who has died at the age of 82, was a close friend of Chapman Cohen, and a valued help during many years of struggle in running this paper. Mr. Ash was content to remain in the background, but his work was very much appreciated by fellow Trustees of THE FREETHINKER. A Secular Service was conducted by the General Secretary of the National Secular Society at Golders Green Crematorium on March 20th, 1961, in the presence of Mrs. Ash and her niece, to whom we send our deepest sympathy.

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