

The Freethinker

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PEOPLE WHO KNOW of my interest in astronautics and in the possibility of manned space flight, will sometimes ask me what I think of the latest developments in rocketry and space science, particularly after the announcement of such achievements as Major Gagarin's triumphant orbital flight round the Earth. These same people usually appear surprised at my apparent casualness and lack of excitement. After all, they know me as a long standing member of the British Interplanetary Society and as an enthusiast for space travel long before even the first jet plane got off the ground. I ought to be elated at each new Russian success; I should go about with that "I told you so" expression, as the rest of the world looks with surprise and awe at each fresh spectacular manifestation of man's conquest of space. The truth is that I am neither surprised nor elated. A father can hardly be surprised that his child grows up instead of remaining a child. To those who, like myself, have watched the slow but logical development of the early theories from the V2 rocket to the latest manned orbital vehicle, there is a feeling of inevitability about the unfolding of each successive stage in the development of space flight.

When my interest in space travel was first aroused back in the early nineteen thirties, I discovered that the basic mathematical theory had already been formulated by that "father of modern rocketry", Professor Hermann Oberth. It took World War II and the (German) desperation born of impending defeat to translate the ideas of Oberth and his early colleagues into something resembling a true liquid-fuelled rocket—the V2.

Subsequent developments in rocketry (i.e. after 1945) are now sufficiently well known. Whether or not a Major Gagarin would have circum-orbited the Earth in 1961 had not the world been polarised by two great powers each striving for military supremacy is a question future historians might answer. They say necessity is the mother of invention. I personally doubt that the space sciences would have reached their present stage of development without the stimulus of inter-continental rivalry. In the slow moving peaceful years before 1939 it was more than the British Interplanetary Society, or anyone else would do to convince the then British Government of even the possibility of interplanetary flight!

The Next Step

What is the next step in space? If efforts were co-ordinated on a world scale, without the duplication and waste of time and money inevitably associated with the present military set-up, it would be possible to predict each succeeding step with some assurance. According to the "classical" theory of astronautics developed by Oberth and his followers, the next step after achieving reliable manned orbital techniques is the construction of a "space station". This is conceived as a minimum structure fabricated in space by parts ferried up to it from the earth by rockets. Such a station would function as a

sort of half-way-house, making possible more ambitious expeditions to the moon and nearer planets through the use of specially station-constructed "space ships", using methods of propulsion suited only to near gravity-free conditions.

However, the precise intentions, and the methods to be used in realising the intentions of the major contestants for interplanetary honours are shrouded in military secrecy.

Since the Russians have consistently demonstrated an ability to build and launch rockets of greater weight and power than many in the West thought possible, I should not like to say it would be impossible for the Russians to

build and launch say, a massive three- or four-stage rocket with sufficient power to complete a circum-lunar mission and return to Earth—without the aid of an orbiting space station.

Hazards

I have, of course, been asked many times if I would like to go to the Moon. My answers to that question have varied with my age. As a youth I would have jumped at the chance. Today I prefer to leave the honours to someone else. I have no desire at my age to be hurled into an orbit inside a metal capsule at a bone-crushing acceleration, even for only a few minutes. Nor am I completely happy about the effects on the unshielded human body of the penetrating cosmic rays—probably much more penetrating at high altitudes than at sea level where they are still of considerable intensity. Sterility comes to all of us in time. I have no wish to hasten the process by making an ill-timed and hazardous journey into the void!

Ticket To Venus

Space travel will be an occupation of the young man or woman for some time to come, just as long distance flying was in the pioneering days of Jim Mollison and Amy Johnson. Today giant jet propelled airliners convey hundreds of passengers over greater distances in a few hours and with every comfort. Fifty years from now, if giant space ships, adequately protected against every hazard of space from meteorites to cosmic rays, are capable of lifting themselves gently and slowly out of the Earth's atmosphere and conveying passengers under artificial but normal gravity conditions to the planets, with a standard of comfort equivalent to that obtainable on a modern ocean-going liner, then I shall seriously consider buying a ticket to take my first look at Venus. I am assuming, of course, that in the next fifty years medical science will have made as much progress in prolonging active life as certain other sciences have made in shortening it.

That, as another Russian, Professor Elie Metchnikoff, hoped more than half a century ago in *The Nature of Man*, the scientific study of old age and of the means of modifying its pathological character will make life longer and happier.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Space Travel

By JACK GORDON

The "One True Church"

By F. A. RIDLEY

A FEW WEEKS AGO I gave an interview (in a non-secularist context) to a most intelligent and progressively-minded representative of that lively newspaper, the *South London Press*. In the course of this interview, I was asked the point-blank question (in connection with my Freethought activities) if I was to return to religion—the suggestion came from the interviewer, Mr. Maurice Landergan—which Church would I choose? I replied the "Old Firm, the Roman Catholic Church", adding, as far as I remember, that if I want religion, I prefer it wholesale rather than retail. I may add for the benefit of any scandalised readers, that the founder of THE FREETHINKER, the late G. W. Foote, once expressed a similar point of view (a fact related to me by his son-in-law, Mr. Ash) while Charles Bradlaugh himself actually came very near to expressing a similar choice in his famous prediction that the future lay between Rome and Reason not, presumably including any other form of Christianity.

I must however, state that I was rather astonished to note that the interview was subsequently displayed rather prominently under the somewhat sensational heading, "If Freethinker went back to religion, he would be a Roman Catholic". In view of this heading and of the current propaganda drive of Rome in this country, I expect to receive shortly, an invitation to speak for the Catholic Evidence Guild, or even to become a Jesuit. If so, I hope that it is still superfluous to assure my readers that I shall decline both offers, with (or even without) thanks.

In the Britain of 1961, for any sceptic who "goes religious", the effective choice is still between Rome or else one of the numerous Protestant sects which nowadays range from such highly respectable Churches as the Churches of England and Scotland (if one can accurately describe Anglicanism as a *bona fide* form of Protestantism) to such current religious aberrations of the human intelligence as Jehovah's Witnesses or the Latter Day Saints (if, that is, the Mormons also can accurately be described as Protestants—a knotty theological point).

I do not regard Protestant Modernists like the late Dean Inge or the present Dr. Albert Schweitzer as *bona fide* Protestants at all or indeed, as Christians, except in a merely verbal sense. It is indeed a most convincing proof of the intellectual bankruptcy of (Protestant) Christianity when a man like Schweitzer can seriously be regarded as a genuine Christian, despite his thesis that Jesus was a deluded revivalist preacher obsessed by his belief in the immediately coming end of the world, a thesis which, I may add, appears to me to have much to recommend it. Modernists, both Protestant and Catholic are only Christians in name, a name presumably assumed for sentimental motives, where not purely hypocritical or mercenary in character. In reality, Modernism is merely camouflaged Rationalism. A Christian is one who believes the doctrines of Christianity in their historical traditional form. The Catholic form taken by these doctrines depends upon the infallibility of the Church, whilst Protestantism logically depends upon the infallibility of the Bible, God's unerring "Holy Word". The essential choice before the Christian convert is the choice between these two.

Classical Protestantism understood all this perfectly. The 17th century English Protestant writer Chillingworth, expressed it tersely in his famous aphorism: "The Bible and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants". For the past three centuries, controversy has raged around

this slogan and, in the course of it, Roman Catholic apologists have subjected both it and the belief which it summarises, to a *critique* which is not only ingenious, but is on the whole, convincing.

For historically, if the modern study of Christian origins discloses anything at all clearly, it is that the Christian Bible (i.e. the New Testament) was a product of an already existing Christian Church and not, as the Protestant belief obviously implies, its cause. (Similarly the Old Testament was the product of the earlier Jewish Church.) All the books of the New Testament and very particularly the Gospels, were the product of the Catholic Church, and owed to it their eventual selection to the inspired canon of the New Testament, e.g. if the Epistles of Peter are in the New Testament and the Gospel of Peter is out of it, this choice was solely due to the Church. It was the Catholic Church which first wrote and then selected, the canonical books of the Christian Bible which later was to become the religion of Protestants. (The first writer to mention the Four Gospels, was the Catholic Bishop, Irenaeus, c.180.) Upon which ground alone, I consider that my subsequent statement that the Roman Catholic Church is more logical than its Protestant competitors is accurate. There are also other grounds for this statement, such as the obvious one that an infallible Revelation is useless without concurrently an also infallible interpreter—in Roman theology, the "infallible" Pope, who has no Protestant counterpart.

The Catholic critique of Protestantism is often extremely clever, but unfortunately for its proponents, it is too clever, for it carries logic to a point where it becomes self-contradictory. The Bible must be accepted upon the authority of its author, the Catholic Church, for it is only upon the authority of the Church that we can learn to recognise that the Apocalypse (which to the uninitiated looks—as it has actually been described—like "John's Nightmare") is inspired whilst the greatest secular writings of Plato or Dante, are not. Even more fundamentally, we are bidden to accept the Virgin Birth of Jesus and to reject that of Krishna, again only because the infallible Church has guaranteed only the infallibility of the Gospels. Catholic theology is unambiguous upon this point; it is sufficient to quote the famous dictum of St. Augustine, "I would not believe the Gospels but for the authority of the Church". Here, obviously, we have arrived at the demonstration of a perfect circle. The infallible Roman Catholic Church alone guarantees the unerring character of the miraculous narratives of the Bible, and these alone guarantee the divine authority of the Church. Here again, we have logic, but logic run mad; a perfect circle, but concurrently a vicious circle.

In the light of the above, I can only assure the readers of the *South London Press*—I trust that it is not necessary at this time of day to reassure similarly the readers of THE FREETHINKER—that, much as I often admire the skill that went to its construction, I have no intention of entering this vicious circle. I am afraid that I shall remain unrepentantly in the ranks of its Freethinking critics. *Verb sap!*

—NEXT WEEK—

THE GREATEST OF ALL MYSTERIES

By H. CUTNER

Challenge to a Cardinal

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

RECENTLY I DISCUSSED in these columns the relationship of "sin" to the secular concept of society. What I said is vividly illustrated by a public address from the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Godfrey. As reported in *The Times*, the Cardinal unleashed the dogs of holy war on modern penal reform in language and ideas so archaic and so ill-informed that only a Roman Catholic cleric could have been responsible. Though the stuff was puffing by expert standards, the fact of its origin demands a reply; after all, though misguided and misleading, His Eminence is a prominent public figure.

He said, "... first eliminate the idea of sin and make a person his own lawmaker in moral issues . . . the criminal glories in the possession of . . . so-called mental aberration which destroys in him all sense of responsibility . . . he has sinned with complete free will . . . the confession of guilt was followed not by psychological treatment but by a heavy penalty. Punishment is not merely a deterrent; it is meant to redress a broken relationship between a man and God". It would seem impossible to crowd into so small a space such a mass of distortion and of puerile medieval rubbish. His Eminence is surely still living in the 13th Century.

It is plain self-evident nonsense to talk now of free will as a universal attribute of man; as we inherit grades of intelligence—presumably HE is superior to the diocesan charlady—so we inherit grades of social and moral responsibility. Has HE never heard of moronic, backward or mentally-retarded children? Has he never heard of the perfectly sane concept in Scottish law of "diminished responsibility"? For nearly two thousand years our society has practised Christianity, and the deplorable results are there for all to see. It has failed as, in view of its historic brutality, it was bound to fail. The whole savage doctrine of retributive punishment, based on universal free will, is now rightly replaced by planned investigation of why people commit crime, and the consequential plan of prevention never even remotely adumbrated by the divinely inspired clergy. But as the Christian habit of crime still persists, it must be punished, but in such a way that moral reform is promoted instead of the resentment that causes recidivism. Retributive punishment is not a deterrent; not less than 75% of convicts are in prison for a second or further term. HE's penology is not only superannuated and otiose, but pernicious and excessively costly in relation to the poor results obtained.

Now I want particularly to put to HE some results of his Canon Law-Sin system as adumbrated in his address. We already know of the excessive criminality of Roman Catholics generally; they take a canonical way out of their sense of guilt, if any, through the confessional, which I presume satisfies HE as sufficient punishment; to me it is extremely poor both as punishment and treatment. It simply promotes further transgression. Divine grace and faith in the blessed sacraments are terribly poor substitutes for proper respect for the civil law.

But what I want to deal with is the attitude of Canon Law to offences by the clergy which, here where I live at least, have become quite a favourite hobby with gentlemen of the cloth. I understand from acknowledged authorities that, in such cases avoidance of scandal takes precedence over condign punishment, the administration of which the Church arrogates to itself, and thus impu-

dently withdraws prosecution of the offending clergy from the lay courts. This high-handed imposition is everyday practice in Australia. (Of course in Eire, Spain and Portugal the lay courts are grovelling agents of the Church.) But even in cases where no indictable offence is in question, but simply breaches of trust, pilfering of public money in a semi-legal way, the Church will not tolerate overt criticism in Parliament or Press; it resorts to blackmailing methods.

Let us look at some concrete cases. In this State of Queensland the Roman Catholic hierarchy by an infamous political pact, secured legal exemption from payment of taxes on its vast properties; the most barefaced swindle in local history. Lourdes and Fatima are demonstrably scandalous and dishonest. The late Monsignor Tiso, when dictator of Slovakia pitilessly supplied Jews to the Auschwitz ovens; fortunately the civil government was able to hang him without interference from the Vatican. The late Stepinac plotted with the notorious assassin Pavelich to murder thousands of Serbs and Roman Catholic priests were photographed in the act of murder. Again, Tito had the power to punish and he did. Stepinac's name will stink for generations in Yugoslavia. But in Britain or Australia or France or Spain or Portugal, he would have gone free. I suppose before he died he went to confession, and then to the right hand of God.

A few years ago in France, where seduction of girls in the confessional is not uncommon, a woman, one of the many mistresses of the Reverend Père Desnoyers, Curé of Uruffe, a small town in Eastern France, told him one night that she was pregnant by him. He made her kneel and confess her sin to him and then he murdered her and then, as reported in *Le Canard Enchaîné*, he disembowelled her and baptised the foetus, his child. Found guilty by a civil court he was handed to the Church authorities who sent him to a monastery. He is now free and acting as chaplain to a prison. At least he will have personal knowledge of the psychology of major crime!

I know of at least four cases of attempted rape by priests, one of whom used to use the confessional to recruit girls for his immoral purposes. In two cases the crime apparently went unreported because of parental pressure on the girls. In another the police, under pressure from the Church, were instructed to take no action. In the fourth case, the priest was put up to the magistrates, but the case got no further for obvious reasons. I was Coroner's pathologist when I was asked to go through a police file concerning the death of a nun, head of a convent, and near deaths of two other nuns; acting in the same capacity when the first died. I concluded all were poisoned by arsenic and I further indicated how to trace the murderer; it was one of the other nuns. As the Attorney-General, the Senior Magistrate, the Coroner, the Chief of the Police, the Head of the CI Branch and most of the judiciary were all Catholics, nothing was done to bring the murderess to justice.

In a northern town, a Catholic solicitor was accused in the lower Court of embezzlement of money, later known to have been sent to the local Roman Catholic bishop by Mussolini for subversion of Italian migrants in the district. To avoid scandal to the Church, the further proceedings were squashed.

I could quote numerous instances of seduction of
(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

According to Mr. Michael Redington, ITV's religious producer, 7,000,000 viewers see his "About Religion" programme every Sunday, and the mystery to us is why don't we meet them everywhere or anywhere? We do not mean just meeting one who has only *seen* the programme, but one who, as a result of the jazz, the talks, the discussions, and the sermons, becomes an out-and-out believer in orthodox Christianity. Why is it that though "co-operation from the Churches has been tremendous", the results in conversions appear to be utterly negligible?

Then there is Mr. Perry Jones who is responsible for the "Sunday Break", whose view is "that the Christian faith has nothing to fear from frank and unrigged discussion". Well, well. Mr. Jones knows, or ought to know, that really *frank* discussion on the radio, or on TV, about Christianity is literally barred. Would Mr. Jones allow anyone to tell a bunch of teenagers, for example, that there is not a scrap of evidence for the *historical* existence of Jesus, or for that matter, Paul and Peter? What would be the reactions of the 7,000,000 viewers to such an anti-Christian bombshell?

Some cuttings from a Canadian reader giving reviews of the New English Bible make interesting reading—though it is difficult to say whether the reviewers are Roman Catholics, Protestants, or just don't-care-ites. Like nearly all reviewers, they compare the new translation with the Authorised Version, and they give grudging praise only to the new version because of its "intelligibility" as compared with the older version. One reviewer felt that new translators were "handicapped at the outset in relation to the A.V.", which is of course quite true. But the question as to whether it will bring a huge rush of converts is *not* tackled. And of what use is a new Bible translation if it fails to bring them in?

We do not as a rule care to discuss the adventures in marriage of well known film stars, but the break up of the last of Miss Betty Hutton's four marriages had one interesting feature. It was the *only* one which had been a *church* marriage—and it lasted barely four months! So here was a marriage which had had the blessings of the Church, to say nothing of the blessing of God Almighty, and it fizzled miserably out. The reader can find out the moral for himself.

In our younger days a halfpenny or a penny put into the collecting-box in church and chapel was gratefully received by the incumbent; but later, in most cases, the minimum was a threepenny bit, and later still a sixpence. But we now note—with sorrow—that the humble tanner is, according to the Rev. K. Scott, vicar of Midsomer Norton, Somerset, "an insult to God". What will pacify the Almighty is a minimum of two shillings or half a crown, but "five shillings and ten shillings should be usual". The Lord obviously must be very hard up.

We are always being told that the *only* way to treat the young hooligans who do malicious damage to cinema and theatre seats, that it is only youths' high spirits, is the Christian way. Bring 'em to Christ Jesus and all will instantly be well. The Rev. D. Davey, vicar of a Liskeard church, has had to close down the St. Martin Youth Club which was specially "designed for members of the church" because of the costly damage resulting from "broken windows, door handles, coat hooks, chairs, and card

tables". The club's subscriptions were unable to meet the cost of all the damage. Here then is a typical example of the power of Christ and Christian moral influence. Could "blatant infidels" be or do worse?

Then there is the "fire bug" who stealthily goes into a church, and sets fire to the altar, the pews, and other valuable belongings. It would be a safe bet to claim him as a thorough believer in "true" Christianity even when he was committing his "sacrileges and blasphemous acts". We note the name of a Roman priest who would absolve any fire-bug under the seal of the confessional. He is Fr. Hooper of Oxford—but of course, any priest would absolve any criminal if only he would go to confession. This would prove that the thug is a Christian!

Though some of us have unbounded admiration for the late Sir. A. Conan Doyle as a superb story teller, we must not forget that he was a sturdy believer in the existence of those dear little people of our childhood—fairies, pixies, and the like. From a report in the *Sunday Dispatch* (April 9th), we learn that his ghost, spook or spirit—call it what you will—is "playing pranks" with the lift of the house he used to live in, in Devonshire Place. The lift is always going wrong, but only when patients use it; and the seven doctors who share the house now tell their patients to use the stairs instead. All the seven doctors and the liftman are sure it is Sir Arthur's ghost who is responsible, and not mechanical faults; so here are eight people who can now be added to the number of notable Spiritualists who believe in spooks.

CHALLENGE TO A CARDINAL

(Concluded from page 131)

married women, theft of trust funds, non-payment of lawful debts by priests and bishops, but to use HE's words in reverse, ". . . Treatment (Catholic hierarchical treatment, of course) takes the place of punishment".

This is a monstrous indictment of the Catholic Church's idea of crime and punishment, and of its still more monstrous substitution of Canon Law for ordinary, clean, human law in the minds of its dupes. And the Cardinal's address is striking proof that the Roman Catholic concept of "sin" is pernicious; its opposition to scientific investigation and treatment of offenders in accordance with their degree of responsibility, is anti-social, and its arrogant claim to juridical immunity for murderous, lecherous or swindling priests completely and criminally contrary to all ideas of the equality of all citizens before the Law. It is clear that the medieval obscurantism inherent in the Cardinal's address has blinded him to his "duties and obligations as a citizen to his family, his neighbour, his nation and his Maker" (Cardinal Godfrey). For the clergy and for its devout and wealthy dupes, the Church is its "Own lawmaker in moral issues" (Cardinal Godfrey). No wonder Catholics form so large a proportion of crooks and criminals!

WITHOUT COMMENT

The formerly drought-stricken Karroo and North-West Cape, where prayers were recently said for rain, is now suffering from the worst floods in living memory.

Scores of dams have burst, railway lines and roads have been washed away and usually arid towns like Kenhardt, Brandvlei and Loxton are feet deep in water, with inhabitants making for high ground. The vast Smartt Syndicate Dam near Britstown, which held back 14 miles of water, burst on Thursday, adding to the misery and destruction. And because of the burst dams, the aftermath of the floods will be a grievous water shortage.

Two lives so far are known to have been lost and the damage will take 20 years to repair.—*The Sunday Times*, April 2nd, 1961.

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

London (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER and L. EBURY.

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North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: MESSRS. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

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

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, April 30th, 11 a.m.: E. ROYSTON PIKE, J.P., "Mill's Representative Government (published 100 years ago)—Then and Now".

Notes and News

"I HAVE PRACTICALLY got to the time when nobody will care two hoots about what I have to say," said Dr. Geoffrey Fisher on his return from Africa (*The Guardian*, 18/4/61).

After reading his comments on the successful Russian manned space flight, we hope the Archbishop is right in his self-assessment. "The only people who are impressed by this space business" he said, "are people who have nothing better to think of, poor fellows."

★

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS must inevitably remain a rather shadowy organisation, but its so-called "12 Traditions" and "12 Steps" do provide some illumination, and we are not altogether happy about what we see. "For our Group purpose"—reads the 2nd Tradition—"there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express himself in our Group Conscience". And the Steps bear a strong resemblance to Oxford Group practice. First, is the admission of powerlessness over alcohol, then the belief that "a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity". There follows "a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him"; "a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves"; an admission "to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs"; a readiness "to have God remove all these defects of character"; and a humble asking "to remove our shortcomings". Later comes an emphasis on "prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him [again in italics], praying only for knowledge of His will

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

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for us and the power to carry that out". A former member of AA tells us he found the group confessional becoming increasingly religious—and increasingly nauseating—as the weeks went by. ★

LATEST NEWS from our Canadian correspondent, Joseph Da Sylva, concerns Jacques Godbout, young Freethinking editor of the magazine *Liberté*. Interviewed over the radio after the Montreal Congress (see page 135), Mr. Godbout mentioned among other disabilities, that an unbeliever can't be a witness before a civil tribunal in the Province of Quebec, if he declares his unbelief. One not only has to believe in God, but also in "punishments and rewards after death". A Judge of the "Sessions of the Peace" (criminal law), Judge Coté, former Secretary of the Province under Premier Duplessis, a lawyer who had never had any serious practice, declared in the press that Godbout was ignorant, subversive, etc., that he was in fact all wrong; that all anybody who didn't believe had to do was to make a "solemn declaration", according to the Canada Evidence Act. The next day, *La Presse* contained a lengthy refutation of Judge Coté by Judge Roger Ouimet of the Superior Court (civil law), and press and radio have echoed with the controversy. Mr. Da Sylva cites Article 324 of the Code of Civil Procedure conclusively: "Before any witness is admitted to be sworn, he may be examined by either of the parties as to his religious belief, and he cannot take the oath or the affirmation, or give evidence, if he does not believe in God, and in a state of rewards and punishments after death". ★

WILL NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY members please note a typographical error on the Annual Conference Agenda recently received? The Conference will be held in the Conway Hall on *Sunday*, May 21st, not Saturday. ★

SUSSEX BRANCH of the National Secular Society has been experiencing difficulty in finding a suitable—and regular—meeting place. Two previous restaurants in Brighton refused repeat bookings after one meeting; the Arnold House Hotel went one better and cancelled a booking for Sunday, April 16th on the previous Thursday, when local papers, as well as THE FREETHINKER had advertised the meeting. Branch Secretary Frank Pearce managed to get a room at the Co-operative Hall, but then had hastily to re-advertise. However, Mr. Pearce finally had the satisfaction of a good meeting addressed by Mr. J. W. Barker of Kingston. ★

"PURELY SENTIMENTAL, but I must write you," said Mr. Robert F. Turney of Rickmansworth, Herts, on hearing of the death of William Ash, the First World War shop manager. "I only knew him in the old offices in Farringdon Street, but we became good friends", he continued. "His profession of a jeweller displaced by the war, he stepped in to help Chapman Cohen, and indeed he did . . . Ash was a very live man, and an extremely likable one." ★

FAITH WAS DEFINED by Ambrose Bierce in *The Cynics' Word Book*, as: "Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge of things without parallel".

The New Weather-Forecasting

By W.H.D.

"The unfavourable climatic conditions which prevailed over the British Isles during the Easter holidays will persist throughout the whole of the approaching Summer."

THAT IS A MOST DEFINITE, unequivocal forecast without any of the usual modifying adverbs—perhaps, possibly, probably, etc. Moreover, it was made without scientific deduction from meteorological charts. A much simpler method was used.

Who made it? I did. Mind you, I claim no credit for it. It is based on information given gratuitously by the vicar of a church in a south-coast town who, last year, told us that neither sun-spots nor nuclear bombs were responsible for the disastrous weather of the summer; the blame for all the rain must rest squarely on the shoulders of those who were misusing the Sabbath day.

That being so, and since the huge majority of people are likely to "misbehave" on Sundays this year as they did last, the forecast is a pretty safe one. One simply cannot visualise all the millions of motorists, cyclists, hikers, golfers, cricket and tennis players, anglers, gardeners, and seaside trippers abandoning their usual Sunday sports, hobbies, and pastimes. Therefore, we're in for another wet summer.

Just a moment, I hear you say—what about the "Little Summer" we had before Easter? Were we all behaving ourselves on Sunday as this neo-meteorologist would have us behave? Definitely not, though the gardeners and cricketers may claim they weren't offending; but that was only because their sinning season hadn't started. That lovely spell of Midsummer weather in March can be accounted for in one of two ways. Kindly take your choice:—

(i) It was provided specially for the five percent of the population who *do* know their Sabbath duty, and was not intended for sinners like you;

(ii) It was merely an enticement, a bait to lure you back through the strait gate on to the narrow path, and a promise of further wonderful weather in store for you if you swallowed the bait.

Now, before you can appreciate this new form of weather forecasting, you will doubtless have to re-orient your ideas concerning "cause and effect". For example:—By 7.30 p.m. on Good Friday the mixed saloon of the big pub on the corner was packed with people. Probably four-fifths of them were teenagers, some of whom looked as if they could not truthfully have answered "yes" to the prominently displayed notice on the counter: RU18? (Except for the question-mark, it looked like a pre-1914 motorcar number). My visits to pubs are very rare nowadays, and the number of youthful drinkers surprised me. Answering my inquiry, a "regular" told me: "Oh, no, it's not like this every night. Tomorrow, Saturday, with cinemas and cafes open, there'll be none of these young 'uns in. But they've nowhere else to go tonight".

One might digress here to consider how far this state of "having nowhere else to go" is responsible for the much-publicised increase of juvenile drinking. But let's stick to the weather. It was raining steadily outside, and you—a mere layman—would say that some, at least, of the teenagers were inside because of the rain outside. How wrong you are! To understand the basis of this clerical forecasting, you must understand that it was raining outside because the teenagers (and the others, including myself) were inside, misbehaving by drinking on

Good Friday—a sort of super-Sunday!

If rain is a punishment for wrong-doing, what about the other forms of unpleasant weather? You must consult the expert: I'm by no means certain. On a summer night a few years ago a violent thunderstorm over the city where I live resulted in several buildings being struck by lightning. The only severe damage in my neighbourhood was done to the tall spire of the church on the avenue, which surely should have been inviolable. The church authorities seemed doubtful about that, however; for after the damage had been made good, they decided to rely upon something more than faith to prevent a repetition. They fitted a brand-new lightning-conductor.

Then there is the knotty problem of variations in the weather over the country. On Easter Monday, the TV showed us some of the horse-racing at Kempton Park. It was a miserable scene of rain and mist. Even the Queen standing with her racing manager in the paddock didn't look happy about it; and her horse seemed less so. It was fractious in the parade ring, and later refused to make any serious attempt to race in such vile conditions, and finished nearly last. And I, who had broken the rules over and over again the previous day, sat watching it all with the Spring sunshine streaming in through the window.

But perhaps my punishment was still to come. No sooner had I arrived in York the next day than it began to snow, and went on snowing until there was a covering of nearly two inches and the destination boards of the service buses were completely obliterated, much to the confusion of suburban shoppers. Now, I had left fine weather behind me, and it seemed grossly unjust; for one can hardly imagine a more religious city than York, with its Minster towering above everything, churches by the dozen, and an Archbishop's palace a mile down-river. Why! the place is simply bursting at the seams with Christianity. Even Jews avoid living there, and have done so ever since Richard I's pogrom of eight centuries ago. But I was glad to get away and back to where the weather was reasonable.

And so you see there are many snags about this brand of weather forecasting, so many that I have reluctantly decided that it is altogether too difficult a subject for me. Should you, however, have become sufficiently interested as to require further information, may I suggest that you consult its inventor—the vicar of St. Jude's, Southsea.

Pick of the Paperbacks

The True Believer by Eric Hoffer (New American Library, Mentor Books, 4s.) deals, in the words of the preface, with "some peculiarities common to all mass movements—be they religious movements, social revolutions or nationalist movements". These movements are not, of course, identical, but Mr. Hoffer convincingly shows that "they share certain essential characteristics which give them a family likeness".

In some ways the book recalls that fine little work by the late Oscar Levy, *The Idiocy of Idealism*, though it searches more deeply for the reasons for fervour and fanaticism; into the causes of the frustration which "can generate most of the peculiar characteristics of the true believer". Mr. Hoffer considers the appeal of mass movements, the potential converts to them, the propensity for united action and self-sacrifice, and how such movements

begin and end. He provides a wealth of historical examples from which he legitimately generalises but rarely over-generalises. Here is an excerpt:—

To be in possession of an absolute truth is to have a net of familiarity spread over the whole of eternity. There are no surprises and no unknowns. All questions have been answered, all decisions made, all eventualities foreseen. The true believer is without wonder and hesitation. "Who knows Jesus knows the reason of all things." . . . An active mass movement rejects the present and centres its interest on the future. It is from this attitude that it derives its strength, for it can proceed recklessly with the present—with the health, wealth and lives of its followers. But it must act as if [it] had already read the book of the future to the last word. Its doctrine is proclaimed as a key to that book . . . There is no hope for the frustrated in the actual and possible. Salvation can come only from the miraculous, which seeps through a crack in the iron wall of inexorable reality. They ask to be deceived.

And here is a passage to "give us pause":—

When we debunk a fanatical faith or prejudice, we do not strike at the root of fanaticism. We merely prevent its leaking out at a certain point, with the likely result that it will leak out at some other point. Thus by denigrating prevailing beliefs and loyalties, the militant man of words unwittingly creates in the disillusioned masses a hunger for faith. For the majority of people cannot endure the barrenness and futility of their lives unless they have some ardent dedication, or some passionate pursuit in which they can lose themselves. Perhaps this is over-generalising, but certainly there is much to be learnt from *The True Believer*. Mr. Hoffer is continually thought-provoking, the kind of writer that Freethinkers (men with "wonder and hesitation") will highly value.

Diderot, of course, ranks as high as anyone in Freethought eyes, though mainly for his philosophic works. Until lately, *La Religieuse* was for me the name of a novel that John Morley had said was "full of power; it abounds in phrases that have the stamp of genius, and suppressed vehemence lends to it strength". Having now read it in translation (*Memoirs of a Nun*, Bestseller Library, Paul Elek, 3s. 6d.), I can agree with these comments of Morley. But, though resentment must be at its very basis, I can't agree with Morley that "it is fatally wanting in the elements of tenderness, beauty, and sympathy".

However, each reader must decide that for himself. It is a remarkable and no doubt accurate description of lesbianism in a convent ("The portraits we feel to be to the life"—Morley again) as well as a condemnation of the practice of placing unwanted daughters into convents. It is also an argument for normal social life as opposed to cloistered celibacy. And though Alan Hull Walton is at pains to tell the reader that Diderot was a sceptic not an atheist ("not at all the same thing") his preface is otherwise informative. C.McC.

From Canada

I DON'T WANT TO APPEAR OVER-OPTIMISTIC [writes our Canadian correspondent, Joseph Da Sylva] but I must admit that the Foundation Congress of the Mouvement laïque de langue française (French Language Secular Movement) held in the Social Centre of Montreal University on Saturday, April 8th, surpassed anything I had hoped for. First of all the hall was crowded (even the opposition paper, *Montréal-Matin*, 10/4/61, put the number at over 600) with people sitting on the stairs. Second, everybody was there: Arabs, Jews, Protestants, Catholics and Freethinkers; labour leaders, students, newspapermen, teachers, lawyers, artists, radio and TV personalities, etc., with their womenfolk. And if I were asked to give the average age, I would say it was around 25. One of the most colourful figures was the headmaster of an independent school, which he runs without any aid

except from fees paid by the parents.

It was obvious that the temper of the meeting was anti-clerical. Any remark that raised an accusing finger at the Church of Rome was applauded. And although a "liberal" Catholic, Mr. Gérard Pelletier (editor of *Le Devoir*) tried his best to get the meeting to drop the word "laïc", the audience understood the game he was playing. I think he tried three different titles: "Mouvement Démocratique", "Ligue pour l'équité de l'enseignement", and another. The Church is worried, and knows that "laïc" recalls the fight of the French Laics against clericalism. It doesn't want its French-Canadian subjects to take that road. But every attempt was defeated and, what's more, the word "association" was changed to "movement" at the suggestion of a labour leader, as "association" (in French) sounds too much like "assis" (sitting down), whereas movement was life, dynamic. *Le mouvement, c'est la vie*. I personally think it was a good change.

Officers were elected as follows: Maurice Blain (President), Miss Judith Jasmin and Dr. Jacques MacKay (Vice-Presidents), Pierre Leboeuf (Secretary), Gilles Rochette (Treasurer), and Jean-Marie Bédard, Jean Lemoyne, Jacques Godbout and Jacques Guay, Committee members.

And I must add that the three main speakers were very good. M. Blain, a lawyer, was scholarly, while Professor Marcel Rioux of Charleton University and M. Lemoyne (art and literary critic) were strong and openly anti-clerical. The applause revealed that the audience was willing to go much farther than immediate aims. It's only beginning.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, April 19th. Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Ebury, Hornbrook, Johnson, McIlroy, Mills, Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Trask, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths), and the Secretary. New members were admitted to Bradford, Marble Arch and North London Branches which, with 4 Individual members made 11 in all. Mr. Ebury handed over the usual £5 monthly donation from North London Branch to the Building Fund, together with an extra £5 from one of his members. Humanist Council minutes were before the meeting. Letter from the Secretary to the Station Master at Euston inquiring about a Legion of Mary hut was approved; a reply was awaited. Sir Lionel Heald had stated in *The Times* (17/4/61) that Charles Bradlaugh had refused to take the oath in the House of Commons. The Secretary had written correcting this but another longer letter had been printed. The important thing was that the statement had been corrected. Marble Arch Branch indoor season report was read and appreciation was expressed, especially to Mr. McIlroy for his work in organising. It was agreed at the suggestion of Mr. W. Miller (Birmingham) that inquiries be made regarding the possibility of an NSS banner. Wales and Western Branch report from Mr. Shipper and correspondence from Mr. C. Smith (Manchester) were noted. Manchester College of Science and Technology Branch proposed constitution was agreed. A committee of 3 was appointed to arrange for a "Bradlaugh House" nameplate to be put on the building. The next meeting was fixed for Wednesday, May 10th, 1961.

CORRESPONDENCE

HENRY GEORGE

Mr. Cutner is not quite fair in his attack upon Henry George. George's religious belief has no more to do with the theory of the Single Tax, than had the fact that Malthus was a parson and believing Christian with his Theory Of Population.

PAUL VARNEY.

How badly Mr. Cutner showed up over Henry George! Alas that he should feel that atheist economists are the only ones who can have sound views about taxation.

(DR.) RICHARD HOPE

On reading Mr. Cutner's article on Henry George (*THE FREETHINKER*, 7/4/61), I notice that neither Henry George nor Mr. Cutner is omniscient but I don't suppose that either of them ever claimed to be so.

Like Mr. Cutner, I believe that there is no evidence to prove

that Christ ever existed but, unlike Mr. Cutner, I am not prepared to accuse Henry George of making statements about Christ which he never did. Mr. Cutner, besides being grossly unfair has committed the fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi*. Here are my reasons for saying so:

(1) The proposition "that Christ taught simple truths" does not mean that *everything* that Christ taught was true, and this could be said of Mr. Cutner. Nor does it follow that Henry George believed everything that (the supposed) Christ taught. In fact, he did not believe, as Mr. Cutner implies, in the doctrine: "Sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor". Henry George believed in the exact opposite. Here are his words (Book 10, Chap. II, page 348):

"To learn to rely on charity is to necessarily lose the self-respect and independence necessary for self-reliance when the struggle is hard. So true is this, that, as is well known, charity has the effect of increasing the demand for charity, and it is an open question whether public relief and private alms do not in this way far more harm than good."

(2) The last paragraph of Chapter III (Book 10) contains 133 words, the last 65 of which Mr. Cutner quotes as the "conclusion we have just reached". He omits the first 68 words which any reader will see at a glance is the real conclusion of the argument dealt with in the chapter. Here it is:

"The law of human progress, what is it but the moral law? Just as social adjustments promote justice, just as they acknowledge the equality of right between man and man, just as they insure to each the perfect liberty which is bounded only by the equal liberty of every other, must civilisation advance. Just as they fail in this, must advancing civilisation come to a halt and recede."

(3) Whether we admit or deny that the Jews are a race is not only a question of history, it is a question of definition but, in any case, it is not the real point at issue. The thesis which Henry George is out to prove is that association is more powerful a factor than heredity and he cites the fact, which Mr. Cutner admits, that it is the Hebrew religion which has everywhere preserved the distinctiveness of the Jews.

It is quite clear that Mr. Cutner is ignorant of the law of rent and its corollary the law of wages, otherwise he would not be so jubilant over the "remarkable proof of the justness" of his judgment. Here is the first part of the passage he scorns:

"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."

The operative term here is the "increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and power". Its validity may be tested by an appeal to facts:

Is it not true that under conditions where population is sparse, land has no value and that just as men congregate together, the value of land appears and increases as association grows greater? Is it not true that increases in population and restrictions on the use of land are factors which increase the value of land? Do not these factors exist now? Is it not true that land has become the property of a portion of the community and has given rise to inequality? Are there not now two distinct classes: landowners and tenants? Who has the greater power?

Here is the second part of the passage:

"Wages and interest tend constantly to fall, rent to rise, the rich to become very much richer, the poor more helpless and hopeless, and the middle class to be swept away."

Here again, let us appeal to facts:

Is it not true that land being necessary to labour, and being reduced to private ownership, the benefits which inventions and advancing civilisation bring are in the long run intercepted by increases in land rents? Is it not true that wages as a proportion of the total current production are determined by the position of marginal land? Is this not also true of interest? Is it not true that marginal land is being forced lower and lower? and that, therefore, the proportion of current production which goes to rent is getting higher and higher in relation to the proportion that goes to wages and interest? Is there not now a great gap between the very poor and the very rich in every large city in the world? Compare just the Metropolitan income of the Duke of Westminster from the 600 acres situate about Victoria Station, Buckingham Palace and extending from the Thames to Hyde Park ("Snipe were shot there in 1822") with that of any worker in London's slums.

Mr. Cutner, obsessed by the term Welfare State, where, presumably, we have never had it so good, seems to be unaware that there is an ever-growing national debt which works out at

about £547 10s. for every man, woman and child in these Isles, that the hire purchase debt is approaching £1000 million, that thousands of young married couples are living with their in-laws because the price of building land is too high—yes, in one case, £6,000 for one tiny building plot! Who is getting this "Welfare"? Is it Prince Charles who draws an untaxed, unearned income of £10,000 per annum from some of the land rents of the Duchy of Cornwall? Our "Dear little Green Isles" are dear in more than one sense.

In conclusion: The world-wide struggle for the ownership of the natural resources and the power which it gives to its owners over the rest of Mankind has been going on for thousands of years and has at last culminated in a position where the whole of civilisation is on the brink of annihilation. On this Earth, the madhouse of the Universe, millions of people are worshipping the new God of Security: The Great Deterrent. Most of them are wearing blinkers which prevent them from observing that Africa is now afire, that a quarter of the population of the world in China is on the march, that 1917 changed the whole political, economic and religious structure of the Russian Tyranny and separated the world into two camps, that at any moment one or two woolly-minded top level politicians or some intemperate militarist in the Pentagon, a little tired of life, may press a button and this civilisation will rattle back into barbarism!

W. HARTLEY BOLTON.

CONSISTORY COURT

It was perhaps unfortunate that Mr. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright should have chosen the case of the Balham vicar as a basis for denunciation of consistory courts (14/4/61). Better have cited the group of artists of Digswell, Herts, who, in response to a notice in the vestry of the parish church, objected to plans for building an extension to the 12th century building. The consistory court for the St Alban's diocese "was sympathetic but awarded costs of £137 against the artists" (*Reynolds News*, 9/4/61). One of the artists, Ralph Brown, said: "The court was almost medieval. We have no right of appeal. The whole thing is a legal farce".

ROBERT DENT.

OBITUARY

RUPERT L. HUMPHRIS

I have just had news of the death of my old friend, Rupert Humphris. He died in Rochford General Hospital, Essex, on April 9th. His end must have been very sudden. Only the other day I had a letter from him dated "Evening of the 7th", and there was no inkling in this that he was at that time other than well.

Rupert Humphris's life was not a very happy one. The early failure of his marriage after the First World War was the beginning of many years of lonely existence. I came to know him some twelve years ago through correspondence in what was then *The Literary Guide*. He disagreed with my views on sex-relations outside marriage and wrote to me care of the editor to say so. This was the start of a regular flow of letters between us, and occasional meetings. Whenever I was in the South of England he was delighted to welcome me to his little home and put me up for as long as I could stay.

A retired bank cashier, Rupert had few friends. I am happy to have been one of them. Lots of people who didn't know him were inclined to think him an embittered man. And perhaps he was. But I knew him as a very independent spirit, utterly fair in his dealings, generous sometimes to a fault, warm of heart and quick in sympathy, with a endearing touch of old-world courtesy. Son of a vicar, Rupert for the greater part of his life was nevertheless a freethinker and a regular reader of our journal. He didn't believe in God or in any of the creeds. "Life for me," he told me not long ago, "is entering the shadows, and I desire and look forward to only sweet oblivion." I am sure my good friend, many of whose wishes in life remained unfulfilled, will in death have had this one granted.

Under the terms of his will, his bungalow becomes the property of the Family Planning Association, to whom he also leaves his money.

G. I. BENNETT.

The death occurred, at the age of 63, of Menas Theodore Jordan, a keen socialist and secularist, after an illness lasting 8 weeks. "Mark" Jordan was born in Greece, and the well-being of his native land remained his constant preoccupation after his marriage and settling down in England. He was a hard worker in the causes he held dear, and had the unflinching support of his devoted wife, to whom we send our deep sympathy.

A Secular Service was conducted by the General Secretary of the National Secular Society at Mortlake Crematorium on April 20th.