

# The Freethinker

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WHEN, ON JULY 4TH, 1776, the Declaration of American Independence went out to the world from Philadelphia, a truly splendid document was given into the hands of mankind. The lofty beauty of the prose, coupled with the revolutionary force of its contents, had an impact that haunts us to this day. The author was Thomas Jefferson, then 33 years of age. Next to Thomas Paine, his life and work is more endeared to Freethinkers than probably that of any other man of his period. "In the Declaration the foundation of the USA, is indissolubly associated with a theory of politics, a philosophy of human rights which is valid, if at all, not for Americans only but for all men", says Professor Carl Becker in his study, *The Declaration of Independence*. But possibly the finest compliment, came from the Rev. Frederick A. Ross, Christian pro-slavery apologist. He wrote in the 1850's his *Slavery Ordained by God*, from which Becker quotes: "All this (e.g., 'that all men are born equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights'), every word of it, every jot and tittle, is the liberty and equality claimed by infidelity".

**Separation of Church and State**  
Shortly after the signing of the Declaration, the young Jefferson hurried back to his home-state, Virginia. There he did fundamental legislative work for three years, and for us his most important achievement was his drafting of the *Bill for Establishment of Religious Freedom*. The Bill not only separated the Church from the State in Virginia, but laid the basis of this principle for the whole of the USA; a principle which is increasingly being assailed today, mainly by Roman Catholics. In the preamble, Jefferson stated:

Civil and ecclesiastical rulers, being but fallible and uninspired, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, establishing and maintaining false religions over the greatest part of the world through all time. To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical. Our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions—they are natural rights. Truth is great and will prevail . . .

And the Law itself, short and to the point, confirmed:

We enact, that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested or burdened in his body or goods, or shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess and by argument maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities.

"The Bill," said Jefferson, "is to protect within its mantle, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo, and infidel of every denomination." It was a Bill not only of religion, but also of racial toleration. Alas, it did not affect the Negro slaves, of whom Jefferson owned many! And he had to take Tom Paine's rebuff when he said: "Where Liberty is, there is my country". Paine replied: "Where Liberty is *not*, there

is mine". But in 1778 the Bill to outlaw importation of slaves—long advocated by Jefferson—was at last passed. He was justifiably proud of his work in the Virginia Legislative Assembly. So much so that, although he was twice elected President of the USA, only these words (upon his instructions) appear engraved on the obelisk over his grave at Monticello: "Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of American Independence—of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom and Father of the University of Virginia".

## Versatility

From 1779 to 1781 Jefferson was governor of Virginia, and it was a particular trying time, for the

war with Britain strained the material and man-power resources to breaking point. The revolutionaries, as is well known, were decisively sustained by Paine's *The Crisis*, that tremendous tonic of liberty. The surrender of the British army of Lord Cornwallis to Washington towards the end of 1781, found Jefferson at Monticello, free to devote himself to pursuits of his many intellectual talents in philosophy, astronomy, geometry, applied science, law, music, architecture, ancient history, etc. He was, with Benjamin Franklin, the most versatile man born in America. Both were deists, and made deism "respectable". There he wrote his *Notes on Virginia* giving vent to his horror of the evil of slavery.

In May 1784, Congress appointed him Minister Plenipotentiary in Europe. In France he witnessed the tragedies of bad, wasteful, monarchical government. "Of twenty millions of people in France . . . there are 19 millions more wretched, more accursed and ground to powder than the most conspicuously wretched individual in the whole of the USA," he wrote home from Paris. In fact, "Europe was hell." He urged Americans travelling in Europe to visit the royal courts, so that they might be impressed with the extravagant, wasteful, absurd and often vicious so-called nobles. He wrote some stringent passages in the Thomas Paine manner on this and similar subjects. He hated most monarchs as the enemies of liberty, justice, peace and toleration—his 4 maxims. And when he crossed from comparatively prosperous Holland into poverty-stricken Germany, he observed: "The soil and climate are the same, the governments alone differ. With the poverty, the fear also of slaves is visible in the faces of the Prussian subjects".

While across the Atlantic the American Constitution took shape, Jefferson's influence was exercised by many letters warning against any monarchical form of Government which had still a considerable following (Adams, Hamilton). The best schools for republicanism, he said, "are London, Versailles, Madrid, Vienna and Berlin. If any of our countrymen ask for a King, give them Aesop's fable of the frogs who asked for a King". He advised, that a *Bill of Rights* should be perpetually incorporated within the Constitution.

In April 1789, Washington became America's first

## — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

### Thomas Jefferson

(Died 4th July 1826)

By WALTER STEINHARDT



President, and later that year Jefferson sailed back to take up the appointment of Secretary of State. After a Vice-Presidency under his rival, John Adams, he became the third President from 1801 to 1809. 1803 saw his memorable purchase of Louisiana Territory, when he increased the size of the USA, by one million square miles, without the loss of a drop of American or any other blood. The price paid to Napoleon was 15 million dollars, a large sum then, when the average wage was 10 dollars a month, but it was a phenomenal "bargain" and a triumph for the President. It was in 1802 that Thomas Paine was a warmly received Presidential guest. The two men appeared on the streets of Washington arm in arm, and American "society" was outraged. They called Paine the President's "blasphemous crony", fit for the gallows, but the President recognised Paine's greatness.

After the end of his second term of office, Jefferson returned home where he lived another 17 years as the "Sage of Monticello", keeping in touch, by a vast number of letters, with friends and learned men of various countries. He remained always anxious to keep and strengthen the "wall of separation", and in 1813 he wrote to Alexander von Humboldt: "History furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government". His last great work, of course, was the founding of the Virginia University. For six years he worked tirelessly on this project, and 1825 saw the opening with Jefferson the first Rector. He died on July 4th (the "Glorious Fourth") 1826.

What part do his ideas play in the American mind today? we may ask. With the possible exception of Lincoln, Jefferson is still the best personification not merely of liberal Americans but of educated Americans generally. They cherish their "Jeffersonian Heritage", and his name is invoked more frequently than that of any other historic American leader, including Lincoln. The index of Max Lerner's *America as a Civilisation*, contains no fewer than 42 page references to him, against 21 to Lincoln and 39 to F. D. Roosevelt. True, sometimes authors go to absurdities in summoning his name. Dumas Malone, Professor of History, Columbia University, assures us repeatedly (as if this was necessary) that Jefferson, had he been alive to-day, would have had little patience with Fascists and presumably less with the Communists. In a radio play, written by Milton Geiger, Jefferson is cross-examined by a Soviet Commissar in front of the "Tribunal of the Posthumous Committee of Revolutionary Activities" and, with the vigorous assistance of Franklin, demolishes the fiendish "Red". For sheer childishness, this play, *The Democrat and the Commissar* (performed in 1952) would be difficult to beat. But this was only one of thirteen Jefferson radio plays, and the others were of rather higher standard. In *Danger of Freedom*, purporting to portray Jefferson in 1801, an opponent declares him "to be an agnostic and infidel or worse". After which, the author, Morton Wishengrad, allows a spirited defence of Tom Paine and *The Age of Reason*. We are never allowed to forget, though, what a great and ardent anti-Red Jefferson was!

It is only natural, that the liberals of the USA should cite Jefferson in their alertness to preserve the separation of Church and State, freedom of the press, etc., and it is generally recognised that Jefferson put religious freedom first of all freedoms.

His famous "I have sworn on the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man", is quoted often in every quarter, yet the patriotic *Pageant of America*, a semi-official publication by Yale University Press, tries to tone down Jefferson's

part in the establishment of religious freedom. "The successive memorials of the 'Hanover Presbytery'" it states, "had stated these principles well before Jefferson drafted his Bill. James Madison—a devout Christian—bore the brunt of the contest and did most to determine its final outcome". It is interesting to read this pious book's opinion of the Deism of the time:

In the closing years of the 18th century, the moral and religious life of America touched its lowest ebb. Infidelity and atheism became fashionable. Bibles, testaments and revelations, Christian and non-Christian, were denounced and ridiculed as products of falsehood. The shallow Deism of Hume seemed to emancipate humanity from any standards other than momentary desire. (Book 10.)

And because of his *Age of Reason*, Paine is made the chief culprit for the alleged decay of righteous and noble American morals. A few pages before, though, the same book reproduces a number of vivid drawings depicting the most gruesome public floggings of one group of Christians (Quakers) by another (who happened to be in power at the time).

Jefferson's home, Monticello, near Charlottesville, Albemarle County, Virginia, is kept as a National Shrine. Since 1923 it has been the property of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, which restored and preserved the house and gardens as they were in his day. Visitors from many countries come to pay respects to the memory of a truly great American, and more so, to one of the foremost citizens of the world.

#### THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

In his opening remarks at the Annual General Meeting of the NCCL on June 10th, 1961, the Chairman, Mr. Malcolm B. Purdie, laid particular stress on the fact that before the next AGM, Britain may very well be committed to the Common Market, and the political implications of this would make our thinking on Civil Liberties a European rather than national question. The General Secretary, Mr. Martin Ennals, reported on the work of the NCCL throughout the year, especially its representations before the Mental Health Review Tribunal. Delegates and observers were outraged to hear that on several occasions throughout the year the windows of the Council's office were broken by the enemies of Civil Liberties.

The following motions were carried unanimously or by overwhelming majorities:—in favour of racial equality; protecting the rights of British Territories in South Africa; improved relations between police and public; the establishment of panels of patients' representatives and hostels by the Ministers of Health to care for the mentally sick; trial by jury for those offences, at present tried by Magistrates' Courts, where prison sentences can be given; extending Legal Aid; ensuring the right to picket; equal pay for equal work; safeguarding employees' rights in such white collar undertakings as banking; protesting at telephone tapping; certain sections of the 1936 Public Order Act; the use of passport photographs and other liaison between the police forces of Great Britain and other countries in non-extraditable investigations; on the disappearance of many national and local papers; the statutory position of Consistory Courts; the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act; and certain cases of censorship, including the banning of the Family Planning Association poster by the British Transport Commission.

All interested in the work of the Council were urged to do all in their power to publicise its activities and increase its individual membership.

D. H. TRIBE.

#### WITHOUT COMMENT

Alterations and improvements to the George Hotel, High Street, Poole, costing £12,000, will be officially opened later this year —by a bishop. He is the Right Rev. John Phillips, Bishop of Portsmouth, son of a former rector of Poole, and a personal friend of the new landlord, 51-year-old Mr. Ewan S. Shaw. Mr. Shaw said he wanted someone like a Bishop to perform it in order to mark the emergence of the George as a high-class hotel and restaurant.—*Western Gazette* (19/5/61).

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# Atheism and the Industrial Revolution

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN ONE OF HIS ESSAYS, the French scholar Ernest Renan, remarked that the first *individual* human beings were found amongst the ancient Greeks, prior to whom he added, there were only gregarious flocks of human sheep grazing under the tutelage of "Sons of Heaven" and divinely appointed shepherds. Whilst a few scattered sceptics may of course have flourished—or more likely failed to flourish—in obscurity during the long ages prior to the initial appearance of Greek culture, there does not appear to be a record (or at least, none has survived) of any significantly critical movement in any earlier age. Hence the ancient Greeks (or Hellenes as they always styled themselves), may be regarded, with at least substantial accuracy, as the "founding fathers" of scientific and of critical human thought. And certainly the mental power possessed by such men as Democritus, the first, and from a materialist angle perhaps the greatest, of the great Greek thinkers who substituted atoms for gods in the creation of the Universe; and as Aristarchus of Samos who, seventeen centuries before Copernicus (who may actually have got the idea from him), first advanced the heliocentric theory and tried to estimate the correct size and distance of the moon; can only be described as absolutely phenomenal. Particularly since the ancient Greeks never possessed anything beyond a very rudimentary technical culture. As a modern Russian writer has noted, the dominating tragic sense of frustration which forms, so to speak, the bedrock of the classic masterpieces of Greek tragedy arose ultimately from the basic disharmony between their advanced intellectual and their primitive technical culture.

Throughout the long pre-industrial era which stretched from the dawn of history up to the technical revolution that began in England about 1700, the basic material culture of even the most civilised races, was agriculture. Trade and commerce were always a minority pursuit even amongst the most advanced states such as ancient Athens, or medieval Florence, and it appears to be a basic law of human sociology that an agrarian society is always (at least I cannot think of any exceptions), a religious society. Agriculture always depends upon the continued beneficence of natural forces or, in religious phraseology, on the Will of Heaven. It is at least quite certain that all the major agrarian civilisations of Asia, Europe and of pre-Columbian America, were all bound up with, and were concurrently dominated by religiously-inspired cultures. In medieval Europe, the elaborate cathedrals arose in the midst of, and were created by, the pious hands of an overwhelmingly agrarian culture. In Africa, where the agrarian techniques have always been extremely primitive, the concurrent religious—or rather animistic cults—have also been of a correspondingly elementary nature. In agrarian societies in which the uniformity of nature is reflected in the traditional outlook of human thought, scepticism is looked at askance, and heresy represents the supreme crime. It was in medieval (i.e. agrarian and pre-industrial) societies that Ages of Faith were found, and amongst whom religious conservatism organised such ruthless repression of novel and "dangerous" thoughts as are recorded in the annals of the medieval Inquisition. Contrarily, it was in the towns and above all, in the trading centres of the classical and medieval worlds that critical thought and religious scepticism first made their appearance. As the Greek conservative *par excellence*, Plato,

once shrewdly noted, the proximity of the sea provokes mental restlessness and arouses the desire to seek out the new horizons that beckon so alluringly in the distance. It was in cities, usually sea-faring cities, like classical Athens and Alexandria or medieval Florence and Venice that the seeds of human scepticism were sown. Freethought did not begin in the countryside.

Pursuant upon the line of reasoning set out above, one would not expect to find, and one does not in fact find, any mass-movement of rationalistic content at any period prior to the last two centuries, during which the Industrial Revolution has made its way from a primarily local (originally English) standing to a currently world-wide one. The heretics of earlier ages were usually few and scattered individuals whose only safety from persecution lay in their own insignificance and obscurity. This was particularly so with regard to the more extreme forms of religious heresy, around whom no mass movement ever assembled. Prior to the post-industrial French Revolution at the end of the 18th century, no mass movement of Deism had ever arisen, and prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917, no avowedly atheistic régime had ever been established. Hence, incidentally, the frenzied hatred which in particular, the Vatican has consistently displayed towards that régime. (Most earlier revolutions were usually associated with religious movements). In brief, scepticism in a pre-industrial age represented merely lonely thinkers or isolated groups, who inhabited the religious underworld, one periodically illuminated by the fires of the stake. It is only with the advent of the Industrial Revolution that Atheism has been able to become a mass movement.

The last two centuries since the inventions of the pioneers of the Industrial Revolution, has witnessed a steady growth and expansion of an industrial civilisation founded upon scientific knowledge and techniques, at the ultimate expense of the immemorably ancient agrarian cultures of mankind and of their religious shadow—one might almost say, Siamese Twin. Show me an agricultural people, and I will show you a religious one! Beginning in this country in the wake of the English bourgeois revolution (mid-17th century), the Industrial Revolution first spread over Europe in the 19th century and is now spreading over the world in our own. Wherever the Industrial Revolution establishes itself, it needs must find and train workers who are technically competent and acclimatised to the deterministic thought of science in place of the illiterate peasantry brought up to revere the capricious forces of Nature. For whereas probably 90% of the human race were illiterate (and semi-starved in a scarcity economy), nowadays, universal literacy and a universal Welfare State are (failing an Act of God—or more probably a nuclear act of man), now historically inevitable, probably within another couple of centuries. This sociological phenomenon features the Industrial Revolution versus the gods—all of them! And again, failing some nuclear catastrophe, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is the gods who are on the way out. For, whereas in the 19th century it was only Christianity, the traditional creed of the lands where Industrialism originated, that was undermined, nowadays, this social evolution embraces all the former "backward" (pre-industrial) lands, and all their traditional religions. It would probably be no exaggeration to say that

(Concluded on next page)



## This Believing World

Playing cards and going to see "play acting" was once considered by all good Methodists the straight and wide path to Hell, and we are glad to report that they have now added "Bingo" to the enormous sin of pleasure-hunting. Bingo used to be a game lots of children played years ago called "Lotto", and in the army, "Housey-Housey", the children winning nuts, and the soldiers mostly losing money. And now it is a delightful pastime with money prizes much enjoyed by housewives. However, Methodists who have had to give up in disgust searching for good Christian people playing cards, or going to the theatre, are now turning to the "ruined homes" and the "evil of gambling" perpetrated by Bingo.

★

It appears that lots of people want to play it on—oh, horror!—a Sunday, and Methodist parsons are viewing this devilish crime "with concern", especially as it is proposed to open Sunday cinemas for the game. Well, whatever good Methodists do about it, Bingo has come to stay, just like playing cards, the theatre, and even an occasional night out in the local pub. Somehow or other, the people at large have always preferred to sin this way than follow Jesus and his Methodists. Especially Methodists.

★

We have always enjoyed reading about "a spiritual pilgrimage from Agnosticism to Belief" especially if the Agnostic hasn't the slightest idea of what Agnosticism really means. The latest example is a book (*Return to Belief*) by a half-French wife of a Cambridge don, Yvonne Lubbock (Collins, 21s.). From it one gathers (from a review in *Psychic News*) that she "drifted into Agnosticism more out of intellectual laziness than anything else" which is a splendid way of finding out all about it. However, Mrs. Lubbock then "adopted" various Oriental religions—just what we should expect from an Agnostic!—then began a search for the meaning of "existence" in the course of which she found out that you must believe in God to believe in psychic phenomena. After a course of Aristotle, Aquinas, Kierkegaard, and Hegel, she went straight into the arms of "the Mother Church".

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We doubt whether Messrs. Collins would have published her book if the "spiritual pilgrimage" had taken her to downright unbelief, in spite of the great names of Aristotle, Aquinas, Kierkegaard, and Hegel, all of whom really shirked the issue by enveloping their "arguments" in a plethora of words. We have an idea that that is where Mrs. Lubbock also excelled. In any case, it is possible that she was first nurtured in "the Faith" and really never left it.

★

The new Archbishop of York tells us in the "Daily Mail" that "he is far from satisfied with what the Church is doing on Television"—we get "too much discussion", especially by "people who don't know enough about the Christian faith", and "not enough ramming home of the Christian message". Dr. Coggan should apply for the job of religious Director of both the BBC and ITV, get rid of Westerns and particularly "play-acting" and give us six solid hours of the Christian message every day. All faithful Christians will be delighted to trot out four pounds every year for such divine programmes.

★

On the question of marriage (which, being a sex subject, appears to worry our pious clergy more and more), Dr.

Coggan would not allow divorced persons to get married in church again. This, in spite of the fact that "our Lord" does allow divorce according to Matthew 19, 9. But of course here the Archbishop no doubt would argue that we do not understand the passage. However, what we must do—and this is certainly true if future archbishops are to keep their jobs—is "to make Christianity a seven-day-week religion and bring it back into the home and the school". The curious thing is that in actual fact Christianity is compulsory in our schools! Has Dr. Coggan never visited a school?

### CONSOLATION

THE STUDENT was perturbed. One of the masters had mentioned that some philosophers had maintained that if there was no God men would have been driven to invent Him. Of course Father Blank had simply been trying to underline the necessity of God; but . . . but what if clever men had invented Him?

"My child," the student's confessor said seriously, "you come from the country. Surely there you have seen a bird rending some small creature, or you have heard a hare cry out like a child when a weasel begins to drain him of blood, or . . . But it runs through creation: one wretched beast preys on another in fear and anguish."

The old confessor smiled moistly at his young penitent. "Do you understand?" he asked smugly. "No more doubt, eh? Don't you see He must exist? for do you not think that clever men could have invented a better God if they had put their minds to the job?"

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

### NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, June 14th, 1961: Present, Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chair), Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Ebury, Johnson, Mills, Mrs. Ebury, Mrs. Venton, and the Secretary. Apologies from Messrs. Corina, Griffiths, Hornibrook, McIlroy, Tribe and Mrs. Trask. New Members were admitted to North London Branch which with Individual members made 9 in all. It was reported that Manchester College of Science and Technology Branch had distributed leaflets at Billy Graham meetings. Benevolent Fund Sub-Committee of Mrs. Venton, Mr. Barker and Mr. Griffiths and Conference and Standing Orders Sub-Committee of Mrs. Venton, Mr. Griffiths, Mr. Johnson, Mr. McIlroy and Mr. Tribe were elected. Following Conference resolutions, letters of support had been sent to Kenneth Robinson, MP, and Sydney Silverman, MP, and had been acknowledged. So too had resolutions sent to the Colonial Secretary (re racial policy in Africa) and the Minister of Education (on sex-education and secular education). A protest sent to the Portuguese Ambassador about his country's policy in Angola had not been acknowledged. Some details on adoption had been received from the Home Office and HMSO publications would be obtained. Glasgow and Manchester Branch matters were dealt with, and Humanist Council and National Council for Civil Liberties reports given. A Roman Catholic petition to Coventry City Council against a Family Planning Association clinic was noted and action considered. The Secretary's letter to Coventry Public Health Committee was approved. Suggestions for leaflets would be put before the next meeting. This was fixed for Wednesday, July 19th, 1961.

### ATHEISM AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

(Concluded from page 203)

generation to say that more atheists and sceptics have been made during the last fifty years than during the previous fifty thousand. In fact, so obvious has now become this mental phenomenon that even (as we indicated recently in this paper), the worldly-wise Vatican has now set up a Chair of Atheism, to study seriously what it had previously denounced as a mere aberration of lunatics only fit to be hastily burnt. As we then remarked, Atheism has now arrived. The gods are on their way to the museums.



# THE FREETHINKER

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

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

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. Thursday lunchtimes, THE FREETHINKER on sale, Piccadilly, near Queen Victoria Statue. (Platt Fields), Sundays, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. SMITH AND G. A. WOODCOCK.

Marble Arch N.S.S. (Marble Arch), Sundays, 12 noon: MESSRS. F. A. RIDLEY, D. H. TRIBE, C. H. CLEAVER and G. F. BOND. Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE and H. A. TIMMINS.

Messyaside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

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

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

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute Cinema, Paradise Street), Sunday, July 2nd, 6.45 p.m.: P. D. MORGAN, "The Injustice of the Rates".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, July 2nd, 11 a.m.: PROF. H. LEVY, D.Sc., "The Degeneration of Intellectual Man".

## Notes and News

FIELD-MARSHAL Earl Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies on the Western Front in the first world war, was the subject of a centenary study by B. H. Liddell Hart in *The Sunday Times* on June 18th. He is revealed as a man of overriding confidence, with contempt for other soldiers and politicians, completely incapable of seeing other people's points of view. But "he had a tremendous sense of a God-given mission—to lead the British Army to victory". "The sense of a divine call easily produces a sense of divine right," says Liddell Hart, and "This enabled Haig, without apparent qualms, to push himself to the top by steps that could hardly be justified by ordinary standards."

★

"I FEEL that every step in my plan has been taken with the Divine help," wrote Haig on the eve of the Somme offensive. The opening day of that offensive, as Liddell Hart points out, was the most disastrous in the history of the British Army—"60,000 casualties for hardly any gain"—but it failed to shake Haig's conviction that "he was chosen by a higher power for a great destiny". He believed, too, rather significantly, that the spirit of Napoleon was always near him, ready to aid him. Haig was, in fact, another example of the god-chosen leader freed from normal human restraints. Lies, deceit, human sacrifice—all were permissible in the execution of the divine plan. As Liddell Hart says: "It is remarkable what a basically honourable man can do under the influence of such a religious conviction—though it is not uncommon in history".

AN AIR MINISTRY spokesman in London was unable to tell a *Sunday Express* reporter (18/6/61) how much was being spent on courses for RAF men at Loyola Hall, Rainhill, Lancs., a Roman Catholic "house of retreat", but, he said, "They are regarded as valuable training and everyone from the Air Council down is very keen. The men are always volunteers and they probably gain a lot". We find it hard to see what valuable training there is in two days' absolute silence and meditation followed by an 8-day series of lectures by Jesuit priests, though we recall that Earl Haig sometimes sought the military advice of spirits at seances. Ten days' extra leave is given to the airmen attending (450 are expected this year) and the Air Ministry pays travelling expenses and the £7 10s. 0d. charge per man for the course. The cost, we are sure, could readily be ascertained in response to a question in the House of Commons.

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THE REV. Basil Williams, Vicar of St. John the Divine, Leicester, recently condemned "get rich quick" TV programmes (*Leicester Mercury*, 6/6/61). But, as C. H. Hammersley, Secretary of Leicester Secular Society, said in a letter to the *Leicester Evening Mail* two days later, it was "a most inopportune moment" to condemn the "cult of something for nothing", for the Church of which Mr. Williams is a member has "doubled its money" on the Stock Exchange during the last 13 years.

★

ON MAY 19TH we reported that the amended preamble to the South African Constitution Bill had abolished the right of any elected Member of Parliament to affirm instead of taking the oath. We print the following correction taken from the *South African Rationalist* (May 1961) just to hand. "Although the select committee did delete the affirmation from its place just after the oath, the right was protected by a new clause near the end of the Bill. Accordingly in the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act of 1961, as finally passed by Parliament, section 115 reads as follows: 'Any person who is in terms of this Act required to make and subscribe an oath of office may in lieu of such an oath make and subscribe a solemn affirmation in corresponding form'."

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DAVID NATHAN, writing in the *Daily Herald* (16/6/61), told how the success of the Spanish film *Viridiana* at the Cannes Film Festival had angered the Roman Catholic Church and caused consternation to Franco. The film concerns the adventures of a nun, and contains two attempted assaults on her as well as a suicide and a murder, and Vatican newspapers attacked Franco for allowing it to be made. There have been, said Mr. Nathan, "charges of blasphemy and sacrilege". Munoz Fontan, Director-General for Cinema in Spain, has been sacked, and Franco ordered the negative of the film to be destroyed. Alas, it can't be found, and it is believed to have been smuggled into France.

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THE JUNE 4TH issue of *Reynolds News* was banned in Malta, and an official statement by Mr. A. Camilleri gave two reasons for the ban. It contained an article showing that "There are too many people in the world today" and a picture of two attractive girl delegates to the Young Socialists' rally at Skegness bathing in the North Sea—in two-piece bathing suits!

NEXT WEEK  
**THE "SOMETHING" THAT OTHERS  
HAVEN'T GOT**  
By PAT SLOAN



# Consistory Courts

By D. H. TRIBE

IT'S A LONG TIME since Jesus is reputed to have lived as an outcast and died as a scapegoat. So the Christian Churches may be excused for having forgotten these unglamorous details. By now they have settled down to the job of sharing the social, political, and economic fruits of 2,000 years of violence and misrepresentation, eked out by legitimate professional services.

To bear at least a semblance of legality, every government, whether secular or ecclesiastical, must elaborate judicial machinery. The Church of England has created what the 1951-54 Lloyd Jacob Commission found to be a "veritable jungle" (*The Guardian*, June 9th). It can safely be said that no organisation has ever planted a protective undergrowth more suited to its purposes.

Before last March, very few people knew anything about Consistory Courts. I suppose a general survey would have shown that the great majority had never even heard the name. Then came March, and the trial of the Rev. Dr. William Bryn Thomas. Consistory Court officials awoke to find themselves famous. This trial was hardly over when the Digswell artists featured in another Consistory Court case. It seemed that systemic infection had overtaken the body politic, and you hardly knew when a fresh boil would break out.

A great blaze of publicity swept into this netherworld of Anglican "justice". The souls of the damned scorched in the blast, while phantoms of legal abuses, that everyone thought had been safely exorcised to the limbo of grisly anachronisms by the Bill of rights, grinned at the world. Those who said that there were outrages to fundamental freedoms that couldn't happen in Britain found that with Church courts, as with God, all things are possible.

In my article entitled "Unfrocking a Vicar" (*THE FREETHINKER*, May 19th), I outlined some of the playful propensities of Consistory Courts. "Court of Star Chamber?" I gave as one sub-heading. A Detective-Inspector I have since been talking to, used this very phrase when describing these courts.

Non-Anglicans can go along, expecting to give evidence as expert *witnesses* on the architectural future of national monuments, find themselves entered as "plaintiffs", and be mulcted of costs when they lose. Prosecutors appoint Judges, and, while cases are pending, send emissaries to Defendants to persuade them to change their pleas from "not guilty" to "guilty". Judges are so horrified when Defendants have the temerity to defend themselves that they are apt to say, "It is entirely the Defendant's fault that these long and expensive proceedings have ever had to be brought at all". Not that the ecclesiastical authorities need worry about the expense, for the Defendant (or, better, the Accused) is, at the end of his unsuccessful defence, presented with the bill of costs. These are not confined to the legal costs of his Prosecutor, but include such items as the provision of shorthand writers and court officials, the hire of the premises in which the case is being tried, and even a fee for booking his own Judgment-hall. Jesus was spared this.

Uncorroborated Prosecution evidence is automatically accepted. "It is merely common sense to ask oneself why these complainants should have said the things which they have said unless what they are reporting is in fact true". Particulars of the Indictment are changed without warning before, and even during the trial. New Prosecution

witnesses appear, in the best Agatha Christie tradition, after the Defence case has rested. In fact practically anything or anyone can confront the Defendant—save a jury of his peers! How many, I wonder, arraigned before these courts, have ever been found "not guilty"?

Readers may wonder whether this saga is the précis of some literary romp by Lewis Carroll. Far from it. These junketings actually happen in 1961 statutory courts, sitting under the respectable banner of "British justice".

At the AGM of the National Council for Civil Liberties, every attempt was made to gag the emergency debate on these courts. Led by Mr. J. Desormeaux of the Christian Socialist Movement, and the Rev. L. A. D. Woodland, a group tried first the argument that we had all been so familiar with Consistory Courts for so long that they did not constitute an "emergency"; and then the line that we all knew so little about these bodies that we weren't qualified to comment.

We can understand the alarm of defenders of ecclesiastical interests when the Council raised this matter. Who can say where an investigation into Church powers and privileges at a Civil Liberties level may end? Imagination balks at the number of social and political, as well as legal scandals that may tremble before the light of day. Mr. Desormeaux laid bare the heart of the matter when he said that any attack on statutory Anglican courts could lead to an attack on the ecclesiastical Establishment itself. Murmurs of approval broke the stunned silence he had expected.

I believe that the recent Consistory Court charades have shocked the consciences of ordinary citizens. Such flagrant discrepancy between legality and justice, between pious pretension and ravaging reality, has hastened the day of reckoning for the Church of England. Many devout communicants feel that these legal scandals would find less sanctuary in a Disestablished Church. While non-Anglicans are appalled that the social and moral idiosyncrasies of a minority should be fossilised in the law of the land.

The unanimous protest of the Council reflected a national movement which will cause the Church Assembly on July 4th to consider disinterring a seven-year corpse—the Lloyd Jacob recommendations. But no one should be misled by this red herring. Though a rationale of Anglican legal administration may result, the important fact is this:—from the standpoint of individual justice, the proposed "reform" would be a step back to Medievalism. "Conduct cases"—which the Church Information Office tells me include both the Bryn Thomas and the Digswell trials—will lose their ultimate appeal to the Privy Council—the inalienable right of every citizen.

Next week, for those with strong stomachs, I propose to shed "More Light on Bryn Thomas".

## IRISH CUSTOMS RELEASE BOOK

LAST NOVEMBER the Irish Customs and Excise Department at Cork seized a copy of Mr. H. Cutner's *A Short History of Sex Worship* (Watts & Co.) sent by the Pioneer Press to an address in Co. Waterford (see *THE FREETHINKER*, 2/12/60). We are pleased to learn that the book has now been delivered to the customer, who kindly thanks us for our efforts to obtain its release.



## John Osborne's TV Play

JOHN OSBORNE'S television play, *A Subject of Scandal and Concern*, has now been published by Faber and Faber at 5s. It will be recalled from the first performance on the BBC last November, that it deals with the imprisonment of George Jacob Holyoake for blasphemy, but Mr. Osborne disclaims any pretence at historical accuracy. That we must accept. It is a pity, though, that the error has been perpetuated (on the cover) of calling Holyoake "the last person to be imprisoned in this country for the crime of blasphemy".

I still feel the subject more suited to documentary treatment but, granted his dramatic licence, I think it must be said that Mr. Osborne has done a good job. His play certainly reads well, and it might be better, next time it is produced, to have a less well-known narrator than John Freeman, or even (if Mr. Osborne will permit the alteration) to make the part spoken only, not visible. It was not Mr. Freeman's fault that his appearances seemed like intrusions: the fact remains that the part of the narrator reads better than it came over in the BBC production. It is an integral part of the printed text: it didn't seem an integral part of the televised play.

Dramatically, Holyoake's impediment of speech helps to gain the audience's sympathy. But it must not be overdone, and Mr. Osborne is careful in his instructions on this. "It must be noted", he says, "that Holyoake has intense difficulty with his speech occasionally. For example in his first line he has a considerable obstacle to overcome in the word 'pleased'. This defect must be emphasised sufficiently to appear painful when it happens, but obviously it must be exploited sparingly, and its later dramatic effectiveness must depend upon the nicest discretion of the actor and the director".

There are many good lines and, indeed, some very fine speeches in the play. We, along with Holyoake, are told by the Magistrate that:

"The entertaining of opinions is not opposed to law if people keep them to themselves. If they speak out of the way and seek to propagate them by undermining the institutions of the country, by denying the existence of God, by robbing others of the hopes set before them, it is the duty of all to prevent this."

Holyoake in his own defence, maintains:

"The intention of a libel constitutes its criminality. It is for you gentlemen to say whether I knowingly, wickedly, and maliciously offended the law. Malice is necessary to libel. Conscientious words are allowable."

"What, then, is my crime? [he asks]. For my difference in opinion with you upon the question of Deity, I offer no apology. I am under no contract to think as you do and I owe you no obligation to do so. If I asked you to give up your belief, you would think it impertinence and if you punish me for not giving up mine, how will you reconcile it with 'doing as you would wish to be done to'? I have injured no man's reputation, taken no man's property, attacked no man's person, violated no oath, taught no immorality. I was asked a question and answered it openly. I should feel myself degraded if I descended to finding out if my convictions suited every anonymous man in the audience before I uttered them. What is the morality of a law which prohibits the free publication of an opinion?"

"It must be already clear enough to you, gentlemen," he emphasises, "that I am here for having been more honest than the law happens to allow."

And he asks:

"What is blasphemy? It is said to be 'an injury to God'. Men who could not string six sentences together have told me they would defend God—men I would be ashamed to have defending me."

Holyoake's exchange with the Prison Chaplain is, I think, one of the best things in the play.

Chaplain: Well, Mr. Holyoake, how is it you did not come to prayers?

Holyoake: I am imprisoned on the ground that I do not believe in a God. Would you then take me to chapel to pray to one?

Chaplain: If you attended one the ordinances of grace it might lead you to believe.

Holyoake: Then I am sorry for you, Sir.

Chaplain: I do not think you understand us, Holyoake, it is not you we prosecute—it is your opinions.

Holyoake: Then I wish you would imprison them, sir, and not me.

I must confess a little bewilderment at the ending. Mr. Osborne's narrator speaks of people demanding from entertainments "what they call a 'solution'". I don't ask that, but I wish the significance of the chapel scene were a little clearer. What is Holyoake doing there after previously refusing to go? He himself doesn't enlighten us, merely making "an animal effort to speak" without anything happening. True, his daughter has died and his wife largely blames him for it, while his colleagues have mostly forsaken him (this is not history, remember). Even so, there seems no reason for his attendance at chapel. It is like Drummond/Darrow, in *Inherit the Wind*, walking from the courtroom with Darwin in one hand and the Bible in the other—a false note, I think. But there are not many false notes in *A Subject of Scandal and Concern*.

COLIN MCCALL.

## Just A Word

SCIENCE IS AN uncomfortable and unsettling thing. It has a nasty way of proving things people try to ignore, or discovering new facts which unsettle old beliefs. Once upon a time, people thought tomatoes would poison anyone who ate them. For a long, long while the notion went unchallenged. Until, eventually, someone decided he wanted more *proof* that tomatoes are lethal than *mere hearsay*. He tasted one—and not only survived, but discovered that tomatoes are delicious.

Not just once upon a time, but even today there are still millions of people like R. Walsh (whose letter appeared in the May 19th FREETHINKER) who do not reason scientifically about the existence of a god or gods. You don't think tomatoes are poisonous Mr. Walsh—you *know* they aren't, thanks to that daring sceptic and his scientific tomato tests. So—why not be a sceptic and test scientifically the religious truth-claims that a god or gods exist. Mr. Walsh? After all, true statements can be created only by using scientific methods. Only facts—not hearsay, not surmise, but facts! No one has ever discovered or created any new truth by reasoning religiously.

In order to be true, a theory must be meaningful. To be "meaningful" a statement must describe in a factual way—that is, there must be empirical verification. If we look up the word "god" in a dictionary we get only a verbal definition, and a verbal definition is meaningless unless it denotes the same referent (or image) to all persons. To be meaningful a noun must distinguish one thing from other things, and it is impossible to point to any agreed referent for the word god. The religious doctrine that "god exists" amounts to claiming that the word god has a referent. Of course, some religionists claim their god is everywhere, but this makes the word all-inclusive and therefore meaningless. If we can point to nothing as a referent for the word god, this also makes it meaningless. If we re-define to designate something observable by all, then god is not personal, benevolent, wise, etc., for there is no such person or thing which all men can observe.

Now—if the word god *could* be meaningfully defined, meaningful statements about god would then be verifiable, and, if true would belong to science. If unverifiable, all



statements about god are "senseless" because they cannot be tested by observations. In fact, all religious doctrines for which no method of proof can be conceived are meaningless. Like many critics of atheism, Mr. Walsh believes that all atheists deny that any god exists, but this is an error. Most atheists do not deny that a god exists because they consider the word vague and senseless. How can one deny that of which he has no conception? "If the believer cannot prove there is a God neither can the unbeliever prove there isn't", writes Mr. Walsh. Yet he would not hesitate to deny that sea-serpents, mermaids, two-headed donkeys, angels, witches, happy hunting grounds, ghosts, and the pagan gods Mercury and Venus exist.

The role of "words" in the life of man has no parallel. The sound "god" turns out to be simply an imaginary creation—a word! Indeed, when man first imagined himself, words gave him the power to imagine divinity and a power which created him. By his imagination man continues to invent new words which help transform his world into a new world which is more to his heart's desire. In effect we say: "Let us pretend that this sound is that thing or that kind of thing". What is curious is the fact that so few men have investigated the phenomena of language. Of course, to most men the word "god" is more thrilling than an explanation of why it is more thrilling.

WENDELL GIVEN,  
(Ohio, U.S.A.).

## CORRESPONDENCE

### NATURAL EVOLUTION?

Undoubtedly part of the charm of Mr. Ridley's erudition is his innocence. Nothing is so becoming in a sage. But is he not overdoing it a little when he complains that our idea of God is evolving from the definite to the indefinite, so that we have stripped our Olympians of their "parts and passions"?

Surely it is the nature of ideas to evolve from the definite to the indefinite. Are we not even now poised for an anguished Kierkegaardian leap from the definite mythology of Newton which even I could understand, into the indefinite mythology of Einstein which—though some of our sages claim to understand it—none have so far succeeded in explaining to the commonherd?

(Dr.) RICHARD HOPE.

### IRISH IMMIGRATION

After reading for years of Ulster's Protestant bigotry, from the lofty heights of intellectual impartiality, it is pleasant to read the views of your correspondent on Catholic immigration (THE FREETHINKER, June 16th, 1961). Perhaps when consciousness dawns (if not too late), the people of England will realise that "bigotry" is a small price to pay to maintain freedom in face of relentless penetration of "divine" inspiration and instruction, and might not Ulster even be recognised as the lone antagonist of the age?

JAMES HENDREN.

That was a nasty letter Mr. Soater wrote to you (16/6/61). Inaccurate as well! As an Irish immigrant I can assure you that the Irish Church does *not* like emigration. The clergy tell their flocks that Britain is "godless" and that their "faith will be in danger" should they come here. With good reason too. In this indifferent clime, religious (or any other) bigotry does not flourish. It's so easy to tell Pat Murphy that his life would be a misery without the blessings and graces, the indulgences and masses of the Blessed Church; so easy to tell him this in Ireland where he cannot reasonably deny it, being a good Catholic. But the priest won't get away with it in England! Because I can see that not only are my neighbours prosperous, but they are quite indifferent to the fact that Pope John XXIII (2nd) rattles the Keys of the Kingdom. It gradually occurs to the emigrant Catholic that his new neighbours are not so bad, and that perhaps the Church, being wrong about the temporal state of the "godless" could also be wrong about other things. He notices that families are small and discovers that humane and effective means of birth control have been denied to him, and at the behest of celibates.

In no circumstances whatever should immigration control be based on religious or political grounds. There are only three grounds for control, and they are not too impressive: 1. Health grounds—If a person is insane or has an infectious disease; 2. Criminal grounds—If a man is a criminal according to the laws

of the country into which he seeks entry; 3. Economic grounds—If, because of shortage of employment, the emigrant would be in a worse state in his new country than his home state.

The unskilled, uneducated immigrant usually is employed in those jobs—and there are a surprisingly large number of them—that are not filled by the natives in the country to which he emigrates. Building work, sanitary work, the lower grades in hospitals and the catering trades are grateful for their quota of immigrants. So, let immigration continue as it is!

P. J. MURPHY

### BILLY GRAHAM IN BIRMINGHAM

Dr. Graham in the Birmingham parish church of St. Martin on Sunday morning, June 18th, asked the crowded pews, What is life and why are we here? Neither he nor his audience seemed to know. But he was convinced that neither Khrushchev nor Kennedy would write the last chapter in history; God would do that. I believe some of the passages in the Bible, he said, because I understand them; I accept other parts on faith because I don't understand them. In the pulpit Dr. Graham, perfectly groomed and dressed, looked cool, calm and confident. His appearance was inviting, his voice clear and musical, his gestures impressive. He was quite obviously attuned to a solid respectable church congregation, with none of the football field evangelism about it.

THOS. H. R. JAMES.

### TELEPATHY

Telepathy, as one of your correspondents asserts, may be pure speculation, but its tenability is not logically disproved by citing the mix-up that would ensue if millions became aware of one another's thoughts. Hypnosis, too, would have alarming possibilities if it were a normal, automatic function common to millions. Telepathy, if it is ever substantiated, may be as rare as genius, and cannot be ruled out while man is still comparatively ignorant regarding the functioning of the unconscious mind.

W. WALKER.

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