

The Freethinker

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IN THE COURSE of his recent erudite and informative series of articles on the Chinese sage, Confucius, my valued friend, Mr. Adrian Pigott, drew attention to the fact that it was the Master who was the first, or among the first, to expound the Golden Rule, long before the commencement of the Christian era; also of course, long before the Sermon on the Mount is alleged to have first enunciated this memorable principle. As one, who in general, and in a manner consonant with the mental attitude in 1962, professes adherence to the principles of Positivism as expressed in Auguste Comte's famous "Law of the Three Stages", and as a materialist in the scientific sense that Chapman Cohen

has given to this so often misused term, I would like to make a few comments on ethics in general, and the Golden Rule in particular, from a broadly materialistic and positivistic angle, which is, I hope in consonance with the principles enunciated by the above eminent thinkers. "Primum Vivere Deinde Philosophari"

Whoever the original discoverer—that is if there ever was one—of social ethics may have been, perhaps the earliest, as certainly the clearest and pithiest exposition of this philosophy, was that of the medieval monk: *primum vivere deinde philosophari* ("first keep alive and then philosophise"). Here in essence is a philosophy later expounded in many weighty volumes; *multum in parvo*, before mankind could think or act it had first of all to eat. And, as still-surviving primitive society demonstrates, the earliest forms of social association came into existence in order to solve this initial and vital problem, since primitive man, equipped only with, at best, the most primitive tools, would have been virtually helpless single-handed against his then formidable neighbours in the animal world such as the cave bear, the sabre-toothed tiger *et al.*

Once established by the compelling force of an environmental necessity, primitive society necessarily found itself compelled to adopt a social ethic—no doubt originally a very primitive one—an ethic from which the animal world was—and to a large extent still is—completely excluded; and which, even in its human application, was for long confined to the primitive moralists' own tribe and immediate social environment. Speaking generally, such remained the generic situation down to the emergence of the first human civilisations, usually in fertile river valleys, at a period that may be approximately computed as about ten to seven thousand years ago. With the formation of the earliest civilisations, and with the accumulation of a reserve of surplus wealth over and above the needs of immediate consumption—which is the primary economic characteristic of civilised, as distinct from primitive society—the formulation of an appropriate social ethic for the smooth and efficient functioning of the new kind of civilised existence, became conscious instead of merely instinctive. With the subsequent, and by this time necessary, invention of writing, which transpired

apparently in the earliest human civilisations in Egypt and Mesopotamia, ethics ceased to be instinctive, and the ethical codes suitable to a civilised society based (as all, or practically all, the earliest civilisations were) on the division of current society into unequally circumstanced social classes and the forced labour (in the form of chattel slavery) of the majority, became formulated into written injunctions usually associated with legal or—what came to much the same thing in early society— theological sanctions. The Ten Commandments represent an ethical summary of this character; the so-called Golden Rule represents yet another and more advanced injunction in the then

current handbook of ethical instruction. Actually, when viewed in the widest perspectives of universal history, it is not in reality a matter of much consequence who originally enunciated the Golden Rule, since it is in *practice* at least, a necessity to any really civilised society. And its enunciation followed, along with the arrival of civilisation and the subsequent discovery of writing that, so to speak, made knowledge hereditary.

The Golden Rule and Materialism

Whilst, however, the enunciation of the Golden Rule was indisputably progressive in its original social milieu, when viewed from a materialist and not from an idealistic angle, it is surely obvious that it was, and to a certain extent still is, circumscribed by severe inhibitions both social and individual. Initially, in the given context of the slave societies of the ancient world, the Golden Rule formed part of an ethical code primarily designed for the servile majority rather than for the free (and privileged) minority. For example, if "Do unto others"—etc., figured prominently in the moral text books of pre- and largely post-Christian era societies, so alongside of it did the contemporary maxim, "slaves obey your masters"—a social maxim actually much more necessary in every society based on chattel-slavery (and this included virtually every ancient society) than was the idealistic Golden Rule. Actually, Nietzsche's description of Christianity as a slave religion only stated the obvious. In any predominantly servile state the prevailing religion *must* preach resignation as an ethical virtue to the servile majority. The ancient Pharaohs built their vast pyramids with slave labour. For that matter, the Roman slaves who toiled in the mines of Egypt and of Sardinia whence the Roman Empire derived most of its revenue, were not treated (even be it noted by philosophic emperors like Marcus Aurelius or Stoic millionaires, like Seneca) with any reference to "Golden" or even "silver" rules, but solely in accordance with the harsh unwritten law of slavery, Latinised by the Roman themselves as *Vae Victis* ("Woe to the conquered")—hardly a commentary on any sort of an ethical philosophy. Nor even with the eventual disappearance of slavery did the "Golden" principle of the ancient moralists come fully into its own. For ethics can only function properly in a technically advanced social order. In a

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Ethics and Materialism

By F. A. RIDLEY

scarcity economy, one in which adequate subsistence is lacking for the majority of human beings, any kind of Golden Rule, to whomsoever attributed, cannot possibly function effectively. How can starving men love one another? When viewed from the angle of a socially-minded materialism, ethics cease to be some quasi-mystical quality arbitrarily implanted in the human race—the voice of conscience and the like. Ethics, including its culmination, the Golden Rule, become a socially necessary,

socially-conditioned phase in the evolution of human society. As such, they always reflect the current state of development in that society. And as that society expands, so do its ethical concepts similarly expand. For ultimately, the creator alike of ethics and of the Golden Rule, is neither God nor Confucius (nor even Jesus), but human society itself, which ethics always faithfully reflects both in its contemporary strength and in its contemporary limitations.

Report from Poland

By JANUSZ JARZEBSKI

POLAND WILL SOON be celebrating the "millenium" — the thousandth anniversary of the founding of the Polish state. It will also be an occasion for Roman Catholic celebration of the baptism of Poland in the year 966 under Prince Mieszko. And no doubt the bishops will take the opportunity of telling the Polish people how they should increase their piety.

Lately the Church has been discussing the question of marriage. The bishops are of the opinion that it is undesirable for a couple to marry when they are very young or not sufficiently acquainted with each other. And there can be little quarrel with that. The bishops further advise that the bride and bridegroom "must be aware, above all, of one another's principles and religious convictions". Again quite reasonable. But then we learn why: "The Holy Church forbids marriage with dissidents and warns deeply and fervently against the contraction of marriages with baptised persons who have forsaken their faith. Do not wed a faithless one. What has justice in common with iniquity? Or how can light be united with darkness? . . . What guarantee of conjugal trust can one expect from a person who has broken the promise of Holy Baptism and of Confirmation and who has denied God?"

The bishops, it will be seen, compare the believer with justice and with light, and the unbeliever with iniquity and darkness. They forget that secularists and unbelievers are often morally superior to believers. The famous Polish woman, Marie Sklodowska-Curie, wife of the French Professor, may be mentioned as an example to all.

The Church in Poland, as elsewhere, insists that parents should baptise their children immediately after birth, when in fact the child is completely unable to do anything except cry. Later, when the grown-up realises that he can no longer believe in Catholic "truths" and leaves the Church, he is regarded as iniquitous. Would it not be better for the child and the Church if only adults were baptised? It would certainly be better for the child.

Of course, the Polish clergy is ultramontain, like that in Spain and South America. It opposes the separation of Church and State; it opposes the abolition of religious teaching in schools. On the other hand the Church has possibilities for development in Poland. It has 10 seminaries, its own Catholic university and 58 papers and periodicals. Before the war there were 6,500 priests, now there are twice that number. In pre-war times there were 16,000 nuns in Poland, now there are 30,000. Since 1957, religious conviction and membership of the Church have been no handicap to employment. It is the Church that creates difficulties for the state. The Church in Poland persists in its policy of regarding civil marriages as invalid.

The Church foments trouble among the peasants and urban populations; antagonises them against the govern-

ment and against secularists. The situation of the unbelieving teacher in a village or small town is particularly difficult and sometimes dangerous. All male and female devotees will be turned against him. In the Middle Ages the knights spurred their armies with the shout: "Strike in the name of God!" In Poland we might now amend this to: "Strike those who do not believe in God!" One does not need courage to be a Catholic in Poland, but it still takes courage to be an unbeliever.

But the situation is changing. Somebody once said that the Roman Catholic Church calls for tolerance when it is out of power, but condemns it when in power. In Poland the Church is intolerant, but might it not be mistaken in thinking it still retains its power?

IN ONE LITTLE town in Poland the priest has introduced a new feature into weddings. Above the altar of his church hangs a painting of the Mother of God, but sometimes the picture is turned to the wall, so that the betrothed couple see only its reverse side. This occurs when the priest believes that the bride-to-be is not a virgin. Observers report that the turning of the face of the Mother of God happens for the most part on the right occasions, when indeed the virginity of the bride is doubtful. It would be interesting to know who is the priest's informant regarding the virginity of the bride. However, the custom affords amusement for the inhabitants. Before young couples go to the altar, the locals bet on whether the picture will turn to the wall or not.

MRS. KNIGHT ON HELL

"OLD VIEWS" was the heading that the Aberdeen *Evening Express* chose for an editorial on Mrs. Margaret Knight (9/4/62). "Most people are, at least, slightly beyond the stage of the burning fire and the old man with the fork", it argued, and "Mrs. Knight should credit the community with that advance". But Mrs. Knight (in a speech in Edinburgh) was essentially concerned about the effect of the teaching of Hell on children. "No child can believe in Hell without suffering emotional or moral damage", she had said. And even if "most people" have got beyond "the stage of the burning fire and the old man with the fork", many Roman Catholic children are taught precisely that. But before the Editor of the *Evening Express* sets out to defend the Bible against Mrs. Knight he should read it. Then he would realise that Hell is not an Old Testament but a New Testament conception. Mrs. Knight's and our complaint is not—as the *Express* makes out—that young people are "constantly reading the stories of the Old Testament" but that the Jesus of the New Testament (the original Hell-fire preacher) is constantly held up as a model to the young.

Recollections of a Sinner

By HUGH ROBERT ORR

I CAN WELL REMEMBER that little church which, as a boy of eight or ten years, I attended occasionally in company with my parents and brothers. It stood by a country cross-roads, with a row of hitching posts in front and a few weather-beaten trees scattered about. But best of all, I remember the kindly old man known to the country folk as the "preacher." I can see him now, standing behind that massive fortification called the pulpit, a fringe of snowy hair extending back from his temples, and his long black coat buttoned across his expansive front and reaching down to his knees.

On drowsy Sunday afternoons, we youngsters would sit through what seemed to us an endless ordeal of scripture readings, several hymns of seven or eight stanzas each, a couple of all-inclusive prayers, and then the sermon. There was one feature in the "services" that was always awaited by us with happy anticipation. That was the benediction at the close. How earnestly I watched for any sign that it was approaching! This earnest attention on my part was often misinterpreted by my elders. They thought I was taking in the sermon. Alas, they never knew how many interesting things, other than the sermon, could be noted during that two-hour experience if you remained awake and really looked for them. For instance, the ever-present fly that buzzed in narrowing circles around the preacher's head. How many times would he sail around before attempting a landing on that smooth and inviting terrain?

The sermons I do not remember so well. Perhaps they were too doctrinal. At eight years of age, I was not greatly impressed with theological profundities. I am even less impressed by them now. The only fundamental doctrine sufficiently confusing to arouse my curiosity was the idea that man was created in the image of God and has behaved like the Devil ever since.

But the preacher did not always wade into such deep water. More often he lingered fondly over some simple parable or homely story. He was a good storyteller, with a considerable flair for dramatic effect, and many a toil-worn, sun-bronzed face in the audience responded now and then in rapt wonderment.

One of his favourite themes was the Three Cardinal Virtues—faith, hope and charity. I think it was the inclination of the preacher to pass over the first two as quickly as duty would permit—not without due consideration for fundamentals, of course, but with a rather economical measure of exegetical treatment. Then with ample consideration he would deal with the third virtue—"charity," which he doubtless rightly assumed needed generous elucidation, the members of his flock being merely human after all.

There was some mystery, it seems, about that word "charity." The preacher explained that it could as well have been translated as "love". He even named the original Greek word for it. This added to the sense of mystery, for few in the congregation had ever heard a Greek word pronounced. They liked it and no doubt felt grateful for this extra bit of edification.

The preacher said we must love our fellow men. That meant everybody—all the people in the world. I doubted if I knew even a millionth part of them. And considering those I did know, I was inclined to feel that I should have to make a few exceptions—especially in the case of the man who poisoned my dog.

Then there was the subject of "sin." The preacher always took up this subject with the air of one who must of necessity, not of choice, subject his hearers to unpleasant or even grave admonitions. But, as the Christian tradition has always held the doctrine of sin as fundamental, the good man had to be true to his calling in warning his flock of the dire consequences of sin. As I recall sin was something you committed as a result of the temptations of the Devil. The Arch-tempter was always nigh and might assail you any moment. You could not tell when. It was something like the measles. You couldn't see it coming, but it would catch up with you in good time.

Indeed, we were all sinners from the beginning. That was because we inherited a sinful nature from our parents, and they from their parents, and so on back to Adam and Eve who were tempted in the Garden of Eden and committed the first sin. It hurt me a little to think that, if I was a sinner, I had inherited my sinful nature from my parents, for they seemed to me to be good people, and I hated to pass the blame on to them.

The preacher explained that the first step necessary in getting rid of our sins was to come under the "conviction" of sin—that is, to acquire a "sense" of our sinfulness. Now this constituted a real problem for me. I felt sure that I did not have the "sense of sin" and I was at a loss as to how it was acquired. Since no one could be saved unless he had developed this requisite, I felt my case was perhaps hopeless. Possibly it would be necessary for me to commit some wicked deed.

I have seen a professional evangelist spend the first two or three weeks of a religious revival campaign in sermons calculated to bring his hearers under a "conviction of sin." If, after the third week, a poor mortal had not acquired it, the consensus was that he was too hardened in sin to be aroused by anything less than a tornado, or a death in the family, or some other direct manifestation of God's impatience.

Medieval writings of the Church fathers indicate that a saint was a person with a highly developed sense of sin—the more highly perfected this sense of sin the greater the saint was in saintliness. When the sense of sin reached its peak as a psychosis, the saint was practically ready for heaven—or the insane asylum.

Now of course sin could be pardoned, and I was taught that if I believed and confessed Christ as my saviour, I would thereupon be forgiven of all my sins—notwithstanding I would still remain a sinner, as were all human beings, saved or unsaved, by virtue of their being children of Adam.

But I was yet to encounter an even greater problem. It was bad enough to regard myself, my parents my playmates and all other people as sinners. It was even worse to learn, as the preacher proclaimed, that there was one sin which could not be forgiven. It was called the "unpardonable sin". God either could not or would not wipe it off the record. If you ever committed that sin, you were sunk for sure. Just what this sin was no three persons I ever knew were able to agree. Sometimes it was called the "sin against the Holy Ghost." This did not explain much to me about the unpardonable sin. And when I asked what was the sin against the Holy Ghost, the definition was reversed and I was told that it

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Whether Unity in Christendom will ever be achieved in spite of or because of Anglican bishops and Scottish Presbyterians meeting the Pope, exchanging presents, and talking about the weather, is a secret locked in the bosom of Almighty God. But there isn't a scrap of Unity at the moment in Gordonstoun, the school where the Prince of Wales is to finish a part of his education. It appears, according to the *Daily Mail* (April 13th), that "a religious row" has broken out there, and one of the governors, Dr. Barrow, "has threatened to resign". There is to be a full time Church of England chaplain appointed instead of a Church of Scotland one. This has aroused the ire of Dr. Barrow who as a good Christian, wants a Church of Scotland minister appointed.

★
In fact, Dr. Barrow has lashed out—not with due Christian humility — "As a Scotsman" he stormed, "I regard this appointment as an insult to my Church . . ." Alas, we find that there has always been "trouble at Gordonstoun" over joint Communion services between Presbyterians and Anglicans — no doubt because the Lord would prefer prayers in Scotland to be in a genuine Scots accent instead of that of an English Southerner. But one can appreciate here why "Unity" anywhere in Christendom is, oh so very, difficult to achieve.

★
We just love to record miracles performed by prayer, and the latest (*Daily Mail*, April 19th) is that of a boy in a ship on the way from Australia to Southampton who was taken ill and flown to the Children's Hospital in London. All the passengers on board the ship prayed for his recovery there and, as the doctors could find no trace of illness, though his case was diagnosed as one of cancer by "specialists", he was discharged. This is almost if not quite as lovely a miracle of healing as the thousands — or is it millions? — which occur every day in England alone. But we doubt if it will appear in medical statistics.

★
Dear, Dear! We find not from blatant infidels and unbelievers, but from earnest and life-long supporters of spiritualism like Mr. Barbanell, that "much harm is being done to the Movement by Spiritualists. The enemy is within the gate". In truth, he insisted that "things are not as good as they ought to be in Spiritualism". And what is one reason for all this decline? Well, "Look at the jealousy among mediums!" Its enough to disrupt any Great Movement. It's a Terrible Blot. And the remedy? Could not White Eagle, Laughing Flower, Red Hawk, or any of the other 9837 Guides kick out the offending Mediums?

★
We note — not without amusement — that Miss Wynne-Tyson, who is (we believe) an authority on Mithras, has written another book on "the Return of the Goddess" in which, no doubt finding it impossible to make Jesus a Woman — the Greatest Woman the World has ever seen — she depicts Jesus as "combining the Male and Female elements in himself", though the "female element" is higher than the male. It is this part of him which she calls "the Goddess", and it is just as true as calling the other part "the God". As for one of the other Bible heroes, we find Moses is called "dull-witted"; while Augustine as "rather stupid". Even "Christian theologians" come in for similar hammering for she calls Origen's self-mutilation "edifying"!

★
There are plenty of similar "expositions" in her book, so we must not be surprised that she believes in "reincarna-

tion". Does she believe she was a Queen, a Princess, or a great General in her former life? So far, believers in reincarnation never believe that they were slaves, kitchen-hands, thieves, or prostitutes in their glamorous existence before. They always were part of the "Establishment" whatever it was!

RECOLLECTIONS OF A SINNER

(Concluded from page 131)

was the unpardonable sin! I never made any headway in getting the matter clarified.

Fortunately I never lost any sleep over the question, although I often wondered if I myself might have at one time or another committed the unpardonable sin. Naturally the thought was not a pleasant one. I have since reflected that, from the theological point of view, there may have been a certain disadvantage in the fact that you could not know precisely what the unpardonable sin was. For, not knowing, you would naturally be alert to avoid committing any sin whatsoever lest you should commit the one for which there was no forgiveness. You wouldn't dare utter a profane word. You wouldn't dare covet your neighbour's farm, or his ox, or his automobile, or his wife. You wouldn't steal or lie or murder anyone. You wouldn't do any work on the Sabbath day but would be in your church pew where you ought to be. In fact you would scrupulously avoid all wickedness, forego those amusements not specifically sanctioned by the clergy, and you would try to be content with getting what meagre enjoyment you could out of the rest of life, knowing all the while that you still might be committing the fatal sin that would send you to hell in spite of anything that could be done about it in heaven or on earth.

And what if you should ever become convinced that you had already committed the unpardonable sin! Can you imagine your state of mind in that extremity? Desperation would be no word for it. Suicide would offer no escape, for that would only hasten the horrible fate awaiting you.

Well, there are two things you could do about it. You could allow yourself to brood over your dire and irremedial circumstance until in the end you went insane, which would be at least a temporary escape enjoyed by many who have taken their orthodox religious teachings too seriously. Or, knowing that it was all up with you, and that nothing would now make any difference one way or another, you could decide to cut loose and have a hell of a good time all the rest of your life. In the interests of health, sanity, and happiness, the latter course. I believe, would be the best for most of us.

[Reprinted from *Progressive World* (USA), March 1962.]

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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INDOOR

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, April 27th, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, April 29th, 11 a.m.: DR. J. A. C. BROWN, "The Psychologist in Industry".

Notes and News

WRITING IN THE *Sunday Pictorial* (15/4/62), Dr. John Heenan, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool set out to explain the "fuss" over the Vatican Council due to begin in Rome on October 11th. This Ecumenical Council, said Dr. Heenan, "is going to affect millions of people who are not Catholics". "Nothing on this scale has happened, in history", he said, and "No man can foretell the effect of this Council on the Church and all the World". "Even those who have rejected God will be on the Council's agenda", said the Archbishop. "The Church will think of militant atheists not with hatred but with compassion". Which at least will make a change.

A LITTLE COMPASSION would not have been out of place at the Roman Catholic school of Our Lady of Lourdes at Farnworth, Lancs., where the parish priest, Father James Melvin, ruled that seven-year-old Denise May could not be May Queen because her parents were divorced (*Manchester Evening News*, 11/4/62). Denise's name was picked from a hat, causing what Father Melvin described as "an embarrassing situation". If Denise were the queen, he said, "we would be publicly condoning her parents' divorce, which would be in direct conflict with the Church's teaching on divorce". The sins of the fathers . . .!

"AM I WRONG to find this shocking?" asked the *Evening Standard* film critic, Alexander Walker (5/4/62). He was referring to the new film by the Spanish director, Luis Bunuel, which takes its title, *Viridiana*, from the name of a "palely beautiful, sentimentally bigoted novice

(Silva Pinal) who first learns all isn't as Providence ought to will it when her lonely widower uncle tries to seduce her". "But the dark awfulness of the film commences", said Mr. Walker, when the beggars break into a mansion, and "an orgy begins which you suddenly realise is sacrilegious". "They slaughter a lamb and turn it into stew. They revel to the soaring music of Handel's *Messiah* on the gramophone. A leperous footpad capers about strewing feathers, a common symbol of the Holy Ghost. Suddenly a barnyard fowl crows. And instantly the beggars at the long table are frozen into impious postures that parody Christ and the Disciples in Leonardo de Vinci's famous fresco of The Last Supper". "Startlingly effective" but "undeniably blasphemous" in Mr. Walker's view.

"IT MAY sometimes happen", said *The Trinity Light*, bulletin of the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady at Deptford (8/4/62), "that through unavoidable circumstances Catholic children have to attend non-Catholic schools". "By the Law of Nature, parents have the obligation and right to safeguard the religious and spiritual education of their children. This is recognised by Section 25(4) of Part 2 of the Education Act of 1944, and by other 'Conscience Clauses' . . .". The bulletin then told parents how to withdraw their children from "any non-Catholic act of instruction or worship" and added: "If you are not sure how to word your request in writing to the Head Teacher, you should seek the guidance of your Parish Priest". It is a pity that the same "Law of Nature" which gives parents "the obligation and right to safeguard the religious and spiritual education of their children" doesn't always give them the intelligence to write a letter on the subject.

WE HEARD recently of a university entrant who, when asked to comment on a particularly ironic passage from Gibbon, revealed himself as an unconscious mythicist by referring to the "crucifixion".

WE ARE PLEASED to print this week, our first Report from Poland by our new correspondent in Poznan, Janusz Jarzebski. We are sure readers will welcome news from behind the perhaps no-longer-quite-so-iron curtain, and we hope that Mr. Jarzebski's article will be the first of many.

A WARNING from St. Ignatius's Church, Stamford Hill, London. We must be careful, said the *Weekly Newsletter* (6/4/62), "not to look on relics as emblems of charm or of good luck: as a horse-shoe or a rabbit's foot or a like object is foolishly thought to bring luck. It would be superstitious to treat relics in this way".

IT WAS not known, we said last week, whether Leander H. Perez, the rich Louisiana Roman Catholic segregationist had been threatened with excommunication. Apparently he had, and it was announced on April 16th that he, along with Mrs. B. J. Gaillot, President of Save Our Nation Inc., and Mr. Jackson Ricau of the Local Citizens' Council, "by flagrant disregard of his [the Archbishop of New Orleans'] fatherly counsel have incurred the spiritual penalty of excommunication of which he warned them in his 'personal and confidential' letter of March 31st, 1962" (*The Guardian*, 17/4/62). Mrs. Gaillot's comment was: "His Excellency has no right to make that official without notifying me first. His accusations are false and the Vatican will have to intervene".

“History Begins at Sumer”

By P. G. ROY

OUR CIVILISATION BEGAN in what Breasted termed the “Fertile Crescent”, stretching from the Nile valley, through Canaan, to its eastern horn between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. This is mainly a broad belt of steppe extending to the Iranian highlands where winter rains are sufficient to provide pasture for sheep, and even to water precarious crops of corn.

Permanent settlement was possible only beside a river or a perennial spring. Agriculture is largely dependent upon irrigation; the digging and maintenance of irrigation channels in predominantly arid regions are social tasks of even greater importance than the erection of defence ramparts. The community as a whole must apportion the precious water supply, the control of which represents a social power.

Ancient settlements have been discovered at Silak in West Iran; other sites stretch as far northwards up to Anau in the oasis of Merv in Russian Turkistan.

Since 1950 it has become possible to date quite accurately archaeological deposits, based on the amount of the radioactive isotope C14 still left in organic matter that has ceased to absorb fresh supplies from the atmosphere. An unexpected antiquity of over 7000 years has thus been attributed to the earliest farming settlement—the oasis village of Jericho in the Jordan valley. The next oldest known village of neolithic barbarians is Jarmo in Kurdistan radio-carbon-dated to only -4750. Preserved specimens of their grain already show unmistakable signs of domestication, and in domed clay ovens flour was baked into bread. Next in order of radio-carbon age are encampments on the shore of a now dry lake in the Fayum depression (-4300); but they are not necessarily older than Silak I on the Iranian plateau, Anau in Turkmenia or Byblos on the Phoenician coast. All these settlers had learned how to build vessels out of clay and convert them into pots by firing. The prominence of female figurines, modelled in clay or carved in stone, ivory or bone, representing the creative principle, testifies to the beginning of some form of ideology.

The first settlements in Lower Mesopotamia may have taken place in the first quarter of the 4th millennium BC, where the first shrine was erected to Ea, the water god, at Eridu. A peasant-village culture followed called the *al'Ubaid* (after a site near Ur) introduced by Iranians from the East and gradually modified through blending with immigrating Semites from the West. Its predominantly Semitic civilisation was brought to an end by the invading Sumerians from the North. Their agglutinative language (as exemplified by the Turki languages), in connection with their syllabic script (similar to Japanese) appears to point to Mongol origins.

The fusion, both ethical and cultural, of the Sumerian conquerors with the vanquished but urbanised settlers produced a civilisation which already showed occasional traces of metallurgic beginnings for the whole of Western Asia. A largely pictographic and ideographic script was invented, which gradually developed into a conventionalised and phonetic system of writing by impressing cuneiforms into soft clay. Thus these amazing people, although not the oldest in history, became the first to leave written records. Professor S. N. Kramer, of the University of Pennsylvania, therefore called his book on deciphered Sumerian tablets, *History Begins at Sumer* (Thames & Hudson, London 1958).

The oldest inscriptions unearthed so far are from the third millennium BC and are in all likelihood written in the Sumerian language. By the second millennium the Sumerian system of writing, in its later conventionalised form, was borrowed by practically all the cultured peoples of Western Asia, and when eventually the Semitic Accadians became the dominant stratum of the population of Sumer—the Sinear of the Bible—the cuneiform signs acquired, besides their phonetic (Sumerian) value, a vernacular (Semitic) pronunciation. In this way, Accadian (originally the language of Arabic tribes) became, for centuries, the medium of commercial and diplomatic correspondence throughout the Near and Middle East. By the time of Alexander the Great, however, Accadian ceased to exist as a living language and was supplanted by that of the Aramaeans—desert nomads and traders who came to occupy the so-called Syrian Saddle to the North East of Mesopotamia. From about the 8th century BC onwards they began to filter into the Babylonian-Assyrian empires. Eventually Aramaic also displaced Hebrew as the mother tongue of Palestine during the period the gospel narrative deals with. With the 6th century BC the decline of Hebrew set in and after the Maccabean period the literary as well as the spoken language of the Jews was Aramaic.

The literature created by the Sumerians left its impress on the Hebrews, who borrowed from this source when composing their Biblical texts. Naturally it had not been a direct influence, for the Sumerians had long ceased to exist before the Hebrews became civilised; it was rather a second-hand impact via the neighbouring Canaanites, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Hurrians and Aramaeans. If we follow Professor Kramer back to the first texts in history, we can only be surprised to notice how little, in all this space of time and progress, the Bible stories advanced beyond the cuneiform models.

The Sumerian universe, An-Ki (Heaven-Earth), was created when Lil—that is air, spirit or *pneuma*—lifted the sky above the earth, with the primeval sea (chaos) as a prime cause and “prime mover”. The heavenly bodies or gods were living beings, manlike in form yet super-human and immortal. Called up to manage the complex universe, they must of necessity be stronger and far more effective than ordinary humans. First of all, however, they had to be immortal to maintain the world as a whole in being. Every god was in charge of a particular component of the universe which he had to run in accordance with old-established laws and regulations. This led to ranks, for the god of ditches and dikes, for instance, could not be expected to equal in importance the god in charge of the Earth as a whole. The gods of the four basic elements (heaven, earth, water, air) were creative deities who made their plans, uttered “It shall be” and pronounced the respective names (divine words have creative power), whilst the lower deities did the actual work.

The goddess Nammu, written with the pictograph for (primeval) water, is described as the Mother-Who-Gave-Birth to heaven and earth, that is the Heavenly Twin An-Ki who had to be separated by En-Lil, the Air-God; the union of En-Lil with his mother Ki (earth) sets the stage for the organisation of life on our planet. With An, god of Heaven, she begot the Great Mother Goddess Nin-Tu (the Lady who gives birth), later called Nin-Hur-Saa or Nun-Mah (Exalted Lady). Further great deities

are En-Ki, Lord of the Netherworld and Wisdom, and Inanna, his daughter, Queen of Heaven and Love, the tutelary goddess of Erech. The goddess Nan-She of Lagash, who "knows the oppression of man over man", was conceived as judging mankind on New Year's day, just as Jahveh does between the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement.

The Scriptural books of Proverbs and of Job were antedated by Sumerian texts by several centuries; so is the conception of Paradise in the "Land of Dilmun", the pure, clean and bright garden of "the Living", which knows neither sickness nor death. After the introduction of irrigation (cf. Gen. 2, 6), Nin-Hur-Sag causes eight mysterious plants to grow; their fruits are so tempting that En-Ki cannot resist but wants to taste them all. For this the Great Mother curses him; he thereupon falls ill and is near his death. In the nick of time an intermediary succeeds and placates Nin-Hur-Sag's wrath. She

"... seated En-Ki by her pudendum:
My brother, what hurts you?"

She asks him eight times and eight times he tells her what part of the body aches him, whereupon the Great Mother calls into being eight curative deities. When En-Ki answers that his ribs hurts him, the goddess Nin-Ti is created. In this name Nin=Lady, but Ti can have the meaning of both "rib" and of "causing to live". It will be remembered that, according to Genesis, Eve was created out of a rib, yet in Hebrew this most ancient of literary puns has lost its point.

(To be continued)

What is the Catholic Church?

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second of a series of simple, yet factual statements on topical problems, prepared by the National Secular Society in response to requests. It is intended that each one should be issued as a leaflet.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH is what outsiders call the Roman Catholic Church, because its headquarters are in Rome. And it wasn't built in a day. The word "Catholic" means universal, and shows the basic policies of this denomination. World conquest!

Millions of Catholics throughout the world are simple, pious people who want only to worship their own God in their own way. Some of them, in the name of Jesus or the Virgin Mary, do praiseworthy social work for others. But this does not hide the fact that the Catholic Church is controlled by men who are chiefly international diplomats and power politicians.

The most dangerous thing about the political influence of this sect is that it hides under the cloak of religion; and its religious forms and practices provide an ideal setting for political control. Its "teaching" role, its Church schools, its pulpit, and its pastoral letters make the spread of political instruction and instructions an easy matter; while the confessional, which hears, among other sins, "sins of disobedience", is a useful device to find out if these instructions are being carried out.

Throughout the centuries the Catholic Church has not hesitated to use its political influence to the utmost. In our own day examples spring to mind from Sicily, Kerala, Malta, and Australia. In Britain you only need to go to Liverpool or Glasgow to see the same technique working.

The leading Catholic spokesman in this country and century was Monsignor Ronald Knox. In his writings Father Knox made it quite clear that Catholics seem to be tolerant and broadminded, as a matter of policy, where they are in the minority. But they are quite convinced

that they are the only people who have the "truth", and will not hesitate to use any means within their power of spreading their own ideas, and suppressing the ideas of others, which they call "heresy" (see *The Belief of Catholics*, by Ronald Knox, published with the official Imprimatur by Sheed and Ward, Chapter XVIII).

When Fascism and Nazism were the dominant forces in Europe, the Catholic Church made concordats (treaties) with their leaders, and hoped to use them to destroy what it calls "Atheistic Communism". When these horses let it down by losing the Second World War, it jumped at once on the bandwagon of Christian Democracy, and looked to America to launch a Crusade on its behalf. With the late Senator Joseph McCarthy at the reins, things looked hopeful: but they somehow petered out. So it has done a deal with the Communist powers behind the Iron Curtain, where, despite its propaganda in the West, it enjoys freedom of worship and in some places even State-aid.

The present Pope, John XXIII, is, as an individual, far more genial and democratic than his bleak, princely predecessor Pius XII, friend of Fascism. At his election he was rather damned with faint praise as a "stop-gap". But his surprising affability, energy, and good health have made his followers realise at last how lucky they are to have him. Non-Catholics must not forget, however, that he is first and foremost a Pope, and denounces Atheism, Communism, Socialism, and cultural freedom whenever the need arises.

One of the most unpleasant things about the Catholic Church is its dictatorship of the mind. Catholics are not allowed to read certain books, such as the Protestant Bible; or go to certain places, such as Protestant churches. In Catholic countries the Church maintains, or tries to maintain, a strict censorship on books, plays, films, and other means of communication. And in Italy, for example, it wields enormous financial power through ownership of banks and commercial concerns of all kinds. In Protestant countries Catholic Action has infiltrated the executives of trades unions, publishing houses, library committees, radio and television organisations, Foreign Ministries, and other strategic places.

So far we have said little about Catholic worship as such. In one sense, this is a matter for Catholics, and for no one else. But some points must be made.

The official Catholic practice of magic and cannibalism (in the Mass), and the unofficial practice of idolatry are not ornaments of so-called civilised countries. Sundry claims for the authenticity of relics, weeping statues, and miraculous fountains are nothing but (we wish we could use some gentler words) barefaced fraud. Most serious of all is the effect Catholic teachings have on the less stable members of their flock.

Whenever statistics have been taken, Catholics are shown to have worse crime records than non-Catholics. This cannot just be chance. There's something about the diminished sense of personal responsibility, the ready-reckoned tables of penances, and the handout and (peace to Luther!) the continued selling of indulgences that don't help people along the "straight and narrow" of this life, though the Church promises that it will help them through the strait gait to heaven.

Catholic teaching—in their own schools, of course—deals with every subject in a slanted way, and breeds a basic intolerance. Not surprising then the protest at, followed by the banning of, a Family Planning Association poster on the London Underground. And that's another major issue—the unreasonable Catholic attitude to birth control, in the face of the world's population problems.

THEATRE

Rockets at the Mermaid

If you have young sons—or daughters—take them to the Mermaid Theatre, London, now. They are sure to enjoy Fred Hoyle's play, *Rockets in Ursa Major*. Moreover, if you are "with it", you will enjoy it too. Of course, if you go to criticise the play's "construction" in a purely dramatic sense, you will find it deficient, but Professor Hoyle's aim was surely not to write a space-age *Peter Pan* that would be revived interminably. He set out, I imagine, to give the youngsters something to delight and excite. Indeed, this is confirmed by his introductory note on "Brinkmanship: a word to the very young" in the programme, where he refers to the great voyages of discovery in the past, and ends: "So much has yet to be done on this brink of new discoveries. Which of you will be sailors, I wonder, and who will write the songs and stories?"

To my mind this is an admirable approach. And with the co-operation of scientific consultant Colin Ronan, MSc., FRSA, director Peter Duguid, and designer David Myersough Jones, the author's space adventure story is vividly presented on this large open stage. But *Rockets in Ursa Major* is more than an adventure story. Its imaginative flights (in both senses) are tempered with scientific wisdom, and it has touches of beauty, not only in the film sequences of the Earth, Venus, and the erupting Sun, but in the astronauts' thoughts about their home planet.

The Mermaid programme, always interesting—and free—this time contains selections from a children's poetry competition on space travel. The standard is remarkably high, and in his appreciation of them, David Holbrook links the imagination of the scientist with that of the poet. Imagination, he says, "seems to me the chief quality to encourage in children, even if they are going to be scientists and technicians when they grow up". Imagination, yes, but also a sense of reality; and who exemplifies both better than Professor Fred Hoyle?

As a postscript, those youngsters who are taken to the Mermaid restaurant may have a special meal with a sweet named after Yuri Gagarin or John Glenn or a sparkling "moon rocket".

C.McC.

Marble Arch Branch Social

After a most varied and successful series of weekly meetings at the Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, the Marble Arch Branch of the National Secular Society held an equally successful social at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, on Saturday, April 14th. The President, Treasurer and Secretary of the Society were present, along with representatives of South Place Ethical Society. And among those who have recently lectured to the Marble Arch Branch, we noticed Mr. Christopher Brunel, Mr. Richard Clements and Major Christopher Draper. Professor Hyman Levy regretted his absence owing to an out-of-town engagement.

The happy atmosphere owed a great deal to the Branch Chairman, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, Secretary Mr. W. J. McIlroy, and Treasurer, Mr. W. Shannon (who provided the music), and to Mr. R. Sproule, who was responsible for the first-class catering, and Mr. F. Jones, who saw that everybody got a fair and generous share. But it was, above all, the MC, Mr. D. H. Tribe, who brought out the sociable side of even the most reluctant of us. Where does he get all his ideas from, by the by— or his energy?

For once, then, that much abused phrase, "a good time was had by all", was most applicable, as was shown by the many requests for another social soon.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

- English in a Nutshell by J. E. Thompson.
 Arithmetic in a Nutshell by J. E. Thompson.
 Things Worth Knowing by J. E. Thompson.
 Stiff backs, all at 1s. 6d. each, plus 4d. postage.
 The Children's Dictionary by S. Johnson, D.Sc.
 Look and Learn by S. Johnson, D.Sc.
 Both at 6s. each, plus 10d. postage.
 The Human Body by Cyril Bibby and Ian T. Morison, 2s. 6d., plus 4d. postage.
 Blackie Easy to Read Books. (Hard backs) at 1s. 6d. each, plus 4d. postage.
 Blackie "Join up the Dots" (Hard backs) at 2s. each, plus 6d. postage.
 Blackie "Picture Puzzles" at 2s. 6d. each, plus 6d. postage.
 Very large stock of Ladybird Picture Books for Children, 2s. 6d. each, plus 4d. postage.

CORRESPONDENCE**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

I frequently read Saturday's and Sunday's church pages in the local papers, and it is not hard to discover that every trick in the book is being used to lure back those who have wandered off the religious path. We are told that we have religious freedom. This sounds very nice, but as far as I can make out, those who call themselves Freethinkers, Humanists, Agnostics, Atheists, etc., are never represented on the religious pages. The position is no better on radio or TV. Yet, assuming the irreligious to form 5 per cent of the population, they should surely have 5 per cent of the space provided for religious expression in the press and 5 per cent of the time allowed for it on the air.

F. N. (California).

CHRISTIAN UNITY

Some Atheists are inclined to scoff at the idea of Christian Unity. I think such derision is foolish and premature. The Papacy recognises that a perfect union of Churches is a miracle beyond the power of God, but it aims to promote a unity of purpose by directing Christian energy against "Godless Materialism". Materialism has been denounced from Christian pulpits everywhere, and from Colin McCall's article on Billy Graham (THE FREETHINKER, 30/3/62) it can be seen that Catholic Actionists may find anti-atheist hate in other denominations. I would, predict, then, a united Christian front against Atheism, with the latter made synonymous with Communism by continuous propaganda.

L. MURRAY.

DIFFERENT ASPECTS

I am very pleased with Adrian Pigott's letter (13/4/62).

For over 50 years as a reader of THE FREETHINKER I have read many views which I have not agreed with, but have never protested provided it has been written to forward the cause of freethought.

Most of us see different aspects of the fight against unenlightenment.

W. MAYBANK.

FREEDOM'S FOE: THE VATICAN. By Adrian Pigott. Illustrated. Price 3/-; postage 6d.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SEX WORSHIP. By H. Cutner. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK (11th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 5/-, postage 8d.

AGE OF REASON. Thomas Paine's masterpiece with 40-pages introduction by Chapman Cohen. Cloth 5/-; postage 7d.

THE THINKER'S HANDBOOK By Hector Hawton. Price 5/-; postage 7d.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE. 18 of Chapman Cohen's celebrated pamphlets bound in one Volume. Indispensable for the Freethinker. Price 5/6; postage 8d.

CATHOLIC ACTION: THE POPE'S PROPAGANDA MACHINE. By Adrian Pigott. Price 6d; postage 3d.

FAMILY PROBLEMS AND THE LAW. By Robert S. W. Pollard. Price 2/6; postage 6d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED (Third edition). By Chapman Cohen. Price 5/6; postage 7d.

MEN WITHOUT GODS. By Hector Hawton. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF GOD. By Grant Allen. Price 3/6; postage 8d.

THE CULTURE OF THE ABDOMEN. By F. A. Hornibrook. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE LIFE OF JESUS. By Ernest Renan. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION. By Lord Raglan. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

JESUS, MYTH OR HISTORY? By Archibald Robertson. Price 2/6; postage 5d.

THE MEANING AND VALUE OF FREETHOUGHT

A 7-inch Gramophone Record by Chapman Cohen, 18s. 6d. including postage and packing.