

The Freethinker

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THE DECISION by the United States Supreme Court on June 25th, 1962 that an official prayer composed by the New York State Board of Regents for daily use in all state-supported schools is unconstitutional, will be greeted with approval by Freethinkers everywhere. It is a reaffirmation of a fact often forgotten in the twentieth century, that the American Revolution of 1776 was a product of the "Enlightenment". American law and political tradition continue to owe much to the English common law, but in one particular area, the revolution marked a decisive break. It disestablished the Church of England, and the very first of the first ten Amendments to the American Constitution — the American "Bill of Rights" — proclaims that the national Congress may make no law "respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof".

The Bill of Rights
The "Bill of Rights" limited for the time being only the national government, and certain individual state governments retained an officially favoured religion for some years. The Congregational Church remained the established Church of Connecticut until 1818 and that of Massachusetts until 1833. It was the Fourteenth Amendment, added to the Constitution in 1868 (in the midst of the revival of American nationalism which followed the American Civil War), which in effect extended the "Bill of Rights" to the individual states. Not only the National Congress, but the individual state legislatures were henceforth to be debarred from depriving any citizen of the United States from his equal rights under the law.

The New York State school prayer was challenged in the courts by five parents (two Jews, one Unitarian, one Ethical Culturist, and one unbeliever) and when the case finally reached the Supreme Court on appeal this year, it was on the basis of the First Amendment as supplemented by the Fourteenth, that the judgment was made. "It is no part of the business of Government to compose official prayers for any group of American people to recite as part of a religious programme carried on by the Government", declared Justice Black, who wrote the decision of the court. "When the power, prestige, and financial support of Government is placed behind a particular religious belief, the indirect coercive pressure upon religious minorities to conform to the prevailing officially approved religion is plain".

The Court's Ruling
In reading the 15-page opinion, Justice Hugo Black agreed with the five parents that the use of the public school system to encourage prayer is wholly inconsistent with the constitutional bar to any "law respecting the establishment of religion". "There can, of course," he said, "be no doubt that New York's programme of daily classroom invocations of God's blessings as prescribed in the regent's prayer is a religious activity". Justice Black said it is a matter of history that this very

practice of government-established prayers was one of the reasons why many early colonists came to America to seek religious freedom. By the time the United States Constitution was adopted, he continued, "there was a widespread awareness of many Americans of the dangers of a union of church and state".

The First Amendment, plus the Fourteenth Amendment, provides that any "government in this country, be it state or federal is without power to prescribe by law particular form of prayer in carrying on any programme of governmental sponsored religious activity".

Justice Black said nothing could be more wrong than

the argument that barring religious services of prayer in public schools indicates hostility towards religion or towards prayer. "The history of man is inseparable from the history of religion". "And perhaps it is not too much to say that since the beginning of history many people have devoutly believed that 'more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.' . . .

"It is neither sacreligious nor anti-religious to say that each separate government in this country should stay out of the business of writing or sanctioning official prayers and leave that purely religious function to the people themselves and to those the people choose to look to for religious guidance".

Other Opinions

Justice William O. Douglas wrote a separate, concurring opinion saying "once government finances a religious exercise it inserts a divisive influence into our communities."

"The First Amendment", Justice Douglas said, "leaves the government in a position not of hostility to religion but neutrality. The philosophy is that the atheist or agnostic—the non-believer—is entitled to go his own way".

Justice Potter Stewart, in his six-page dissent had this conclusion:

"I do not believe that this court, or the Congress, or the President has . . . established an 'official religion' in violation of the Constitution. And I do not believe the State of New York has done so in this case. What each has done is to recognise and to follow the deeply entrenched and highly cherished spiritual traditions of our nation".

The decision has aroused widespread criticism in the United States from such diverse individuals as former Presidents Hoover and Eisenhower and Cardinal Spellman, while Mr. George Andrew, a Southern Democrat Congressman, who fought against the Supreme Court ruling on racial integration commented: "The've put the Negroes in the school and now they've driven God out".

"God got but one vote", said the conservative *St. Louis Globe Democrat* (26/6/62), and deplored "this modern trend in rendering the Constitution a Godless instrument of utter secularism".

The Cardinal declared himself "shocked and frightened" by a decision "which strikes at the very heart of the godly tradition" he saw at the basis of American education.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

U.S. Supreme Court and School Prayers

—WALTER L. ARNSTEIN—

The decision does indeed strike at the roots of what some people have called a post-World War II religious revival in the United States, but what may be more appropriately defined as the growth of "religiosity". This is the pervasive feeling that religion *as such* is a good thing—that it is desirable to have "faith"—but that the dogmas of that faith should be left deliberately vague. And some of the critics of the Supreme Court decision emphasise that the New York State prayer was so general and so "non-denominational" in tone that no one could take offence: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country".

Individual Congressmen have spoken of impeaching the judges of the Supreme Court and of amending the Con-

stitution, but it is unlikely that either event will occur. The furor will doubtless take some months to die down, though it is instructive that President Kennedy himself has defended the Supreme Court. His Church must have wished otherwise, but the President urged his fellow Americans to "support the Constitution and the responsibility of the Supreme Court in interpreting it". The decision, he observed, in no way debarred any American from praying at home or attending church. It merely emphasised, in the words of the influential *New York Times*, "that how one prays is too personal . . . a question to be decided by government officials or in fact by anyone but the individual without constraint". The decision is a bold reaffirmation of the traditional American doctrine of separation of church and state.

Some Thoughts on Mechanistic Materialism

By JOHN BOWDEN

IMPLICIT in the statement of historical materialism in the Communist Manifesto and explicitly affirmed by doctrinaire Marxists is that ideas play no part in scientific and social progress. Ideas are merely passive reflections of the external world and all progress is mechanically determined.

I have a stock question which I invariably put to those Marxists who deny the potency of ideas. It is this: "Have the ideas of Karl Marx influenced the sociological and economic thought of the past century?" This question fairly puts the doctrinaire Marxist "on the spot". To be consistent he should say "no"; but that would be to fly in the face of all experience. It is clear that Marxian concepts *have* made a great difference to the outlook of sociologists and economists and to very many other persons.

The conceptions regarding mental processes held by the mechanically-minded Marxists are identical with those of the Behaviourist school of psychology, which affirms that the contents of our minds are merely the sum of received impressions. But this is a negation of dialectical materialism, which affirms that the product of a combination is *more* than the sum of its parts. Here again the mechanist Marxist is "on the spot". If he persists in his assertion that ideas are merely the reflection of external factors he denies his basic philosophy; if he consistently applies that philosophy he must concede that new ideas may and do arise in the mind as the result of a synthesis. And to say that a new idea can exist without gaining expression is palpably absurd.

One can cite numerous examples of the tremendous impact of ideas on the world. The invention of the steam engine transformed the economic and industrial — hence the social — life of the world. But the idea of the steam-driven engine came to James Watt when he was idly watching the movements of the lid on a kettle of boiling water. The idea of printing by movable type was responsible for the spread of knowledge on an unprecedented scale and gave a tremendous impetus to intellectual progress. The idea of evolution resulted in a reorientation of scientific thought, especially in the fields of biology and anthropology. Charles Darwin has placed it on record that the idea of Natural Selection as a factor in evolution came to him suddenly. He was walking in his garden pondering over the facts he had gathered during his voyage in the *Beagle*. Suddenly he connected these facts with matter he had read in Malthus's *Essay on Population* and the idea of Natural Selection was born. There had occurred a new mental synthesis.

If ideas are the mere reflection of events occurring in the external world then there could never have been any pro-

gress, intellectual or social. The only changes possible would be purely automatic changes in response to changes in the external environment. Abstract thought would be impossible; the idea of natural causation could never have arisen and there would have been no science. Take the case of Newton and his theory of gravitation: all that his immediate experience could tell him was that unsupported bodies fall to the ground. He also knew that centrifugal force exerted by whirling bodies tends to make them fly outwards. He merged these two ideas and applied them to bodies moving in outer space.

All mathematical formulae are the result of abstract thinking. Mathematics is in fact, all abstraction from the symbols used to the most abstruse calculus.

We know that intellects vary: some people — those with low-grade minds — are little more than automatons. But there always have been people capable of reasoning, people in whose minds ideas are *synthesised*, when ideas are grouped and studied in their interrelations. Of course the external world came before man; this external world is therefore primary. We may put it this way: stimuli from the outer world create ideas; ideas react upon and transform the environment. There is *interaction*.

To deny that ideas can be causal is to deny the principle of causality, which affirms that causes give rise to effects *and that effects in their turn become causes*.

Affirmation of the causal nature of ideas is not a denial of materialism. Ideas are *determinants*; and anything that operates as a determinant comes within the scope of the materialist philosophy. Russia is the country which is exploiting ideas to the full, and in that country dialectical materialism is the official philosophy!

We may note in passing that Marxist abstract ideas of "surplus value", "social labour" and the like could never have been formulated if man's thoughts merely mirrored events occurring in the outer world. And, of course, we could never have had the materialist conception of history.

At the other pole of thought we have the philosophic idealist, who believes ideas are primary and that all progress is initiated by ideas arising spontaneously in the mind. *Mutatis mutandis*, we can put the *same* question to the philosophic idealist that we put to the rigid materialist: "If the external environment does not influence thought, why do you get up on the platform and enunciate your ideas, seeing that once expressed they form part of the environment of your hearers?"

The foregoing is for the most part critical of the rigidly mechanical idea of the historical process held by doctrin-

(Concluded on page 220)

The Superior Infidel

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

THROUGH the generous kindness of a London friend, I have been able to read Mr. Emmett McLoughlin's *Crime and Immorality in the Catholic Church* recently reviewed in these columns by Mr. Colin McCall. It exposes the appalling corruption of the Catholic body and its hierarchy and clergy and if anybody ever thought I exaggerated about Catholic criminality and dishonesty they should read this book and realise how moderate I have been. Of course, McLoughlin knows the disreputable story right from the inside as a priest for so many years. I knew that amongst the Roman Catholic clergy in Queensland there was much drunkenness, financial and sexual wrongdoing, such as rape and the use of the confessional for immoral purposes, adultery with unmarried and married female parishioners, etc. but I never suspected such widespread crime and dishonour as he found in the USA.

McLoughlin is a man for whom I have an immense admiration, but he seems to know nothing or understand nothing of Atheism, Rationalism, Secularism, etc., names which I shall combine into the composite term of Infidel. These terms are commonly used by religious people, especially priests, as terms of abuse, but what they say is the exact reverse of the truth, which is that Infidels are the best behaved and the most intellectual and valuable citizens in any community, while Catholics are the socially lowest, the stupidest, the most credulous, the worst educated, and beyond any doubt the most criminal. And their women are the silliest, the most superstitious, and socially the most dangerous, because of their influence on the young. This has led to constant perpetuation of religion, which is the most dreadful evil that has ever afflicted mankind. So that I think it necessary to correct the effect, in this matter, that McLoughlin is likely to produce, and I hardly think he would like to be quoted by religionists against us.

He says, on page 79, that "Crimes are far more prevalent among Roman Catholics than among members of any other group or even among those of no religion." And on page 215, that the Roman Catholic Church "continues to harbour more criminals and sinners than other churches, more even than among people who renounce all religion." The implications of these statements about Infidels are, I repeat, the exact reverse of the truth. Let me particularise. Barnes and Teeters, *New Horizons in Criminology*, 2nd ed. 1951, pp. 184-187, say, "There are surprisingly few non-believers in prison. Of 85,000 convicts, only 8,000 were not affiliated with some faith. The avowed infidels and atheists were microscopic, some 150 (0.18 per cent). The proportion of religious affiliates is at least 50 per cent higher among convicts than among the general population. A high percentage of church membership in the total population has no apparent influence in reducing criminality in the community." "An interesting study was made of children exposed to a certain system of education in which considerable 'morality' was interwoven... children who had been exposed to progressive education methods based upon secular premises and modern psychology appeared to have a far better record [than those based on Bible education]." That is to say that the secularist or Infidel is morally superior. Quite obviously religion cannot be identified with morality.

Professor Carl Murchison in *Criminal Intelligence* says,

"Most criminals belong to some church and frankly admit the fact... The criminal is religious, the vast majority belonging to some established religious denomination." Mostly the Catholic, while conversely, Infidels form only a very small part of the convict body. Professor Max G. Schlapp and Edward H. Smith say, "Religious persons have in all times and upon innumerable occasions been guilty of the grossest crimes... two generations of statisticians have all concluded that the ratio of convicts without religious training and religious adhesions is about one-tenth of one per cent (0.10 per cent)." (*The New Criminology*). Professor Wm. T. Root, Trustee of the Western Penitentiary, Pennsylvania, has written, "The most perfect cases of sordid sex-offence and intense religious sincerity are to be found among those imprisoned for sex-offences." And in a table, he shows the high degree of participation of Catholics in three types of crime, especially murder and sexual, while a group he calls "indifferent" are far less prominent, and among these some infidels might be found; unfortunately Root does not list them as such.

I could again quote Murchison and G. H. Feber, a German criminologist, and S. H. Phillips, Amsterdam, on crimes of violence and sex crimes to prove that Catholics lead in these categories, while Infidels figure far less prominently or not at all. Judge Cleland, of Chicago, quoted by C. V. Dunn in *The Church and Crime in the US*, as saying that of 1,000 prisoners before him 49.6% were RCs, 48% Protestants and 1.5% Jews. Which leaves about 1% for Infidels and others. The Toronto *Sentinel* some years ago published a list of the religious denominations in Canadian jails: of about 2,200 convicts, 1,205 or about 56 per cent were Catholics, and only 6 or 2.8 per cent non-Christians. The Annual Report for Sing Sing prison for 1925 was typical. Of 1,420 convicts, 848 were Catholics, but only 12 were listed as "no religion."

Professor Bonger, Professor of Criminology and Sociology in the University of Amsterdam sums it all up very well when he says in his *Introduction to Criminology*, "Statistics leave no loophole for misunderstanding: criminality among irreligious people is usually the lowest on the list."

In the field of juvenile delinquency the facts are just the same. In Britain the figures are dreadful. Catholics are 8 per cent of the population, but their children are about 25 per cent of those appearing before the Children's Courts, and the delinquency rates in Leeds, Liverpool and Glasgow show Catholics high on top of the lists. The Liverpool figures are so terrible that a high official of Liverpool Roman Catholic cathedral commented on it publicly. In Leeds a professional psychologist appointed by the City Council reported that delinquency was worst among Roman Catholic schoolchildren, not so bad among those at Anglican schools, and lowest among State school children. That is, the further you get away from rigidly dogmatic religion the better you become. Healy and Bronner in *Delinquents and Criminals*, report that they studied 1,636 delinquents before the Chicago Juvenile Court and found that 90% of them were of religious background, 56% of the total being Roman Catholic and less than one-tenth definitely of no religion. For the State of Massachusetts they gave the following figures, Catholic 66.3%, Other (non-religious) 1.2%. And in *The Individual*

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Now that England has been inundated with Muslims, and more will undoubtedly come here, the whole question of religion will raise its divine head again and again. The latest example is so tragic that a Bishop had to intervene — the *Daily Express's* (June 26th) heading is "Bishop joins in row" — the operative word being "row". It appears that deeply religious Muslims in Peterborough want their burial graves to point in a north-south direction. All Christians must have them in an east-west direction, quite understandable, since the glorious Sun certainly accounts for a good deal of the Christian religion. Did not Jesus call himself "The Light of the World" — which can only mean the Sun? But to come back to the burial ground — the city's burial committee refused to allow any Muslim to upset their burial regulations and, though we do not know what the Bishop had to say on the problem, we are told that it "raised very important religious issues". Why not make all graves point north-west to south-east and solve the issue comfortably?

★

The famous Leonardo da Vinci cartoon, on show at the National Gallery, was damaged by a German — and it must have thrilled the court which remanded him to learn that he "did it in the name of God", while poor England, which he appears to hate, was ruled by the Devil. Herr Weng must still sigh for his lost Hitler paradise, but we are sure if he were forcibly sent back to its remains, he would again find a place there to worship God and hate the Devil, just as he did under his late lamented but Holy Fuhrer.

★

The "Daily Mail" feature writer, Charles Greville, tells us that "Faith is a strange commodity", in connection with Dr. H. Richards, pastor of the Cathedral of the Rockies in Boise, Idaho. Mr. Greville "disagreed with the vast majority" of what Dr. Richards said — here he has our deepest sympathy for we would have felt the same. "What is it about American religious attitudes which we find it so hard to swallow?" Mr. Greville asks. "It is impossible to poke fun".

★

Mr. Greville does not like some of the phrases Dr. Richards used — like "the whole personality pattern" or "bell choirs which travel the nation". But Dr. Richard's church is very popular, and his wife was about to post 4,000 postcards to members.

CARE FOR YOUR HOST

Another thing that would help would be for people to take greater care when receiving Holy Communion. *Please hold your head well up, open your mouth, and place your tongue well out.* The priest finds that many people bow their heads so low that it is difficult to place the Sacred Host safely on the tongue and there is sometimes a danger that the Host might fall to the ground.

—*The Trinity Light*, (Bulletin of the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady, Deptford), 24/6/62.

God forbid!

SPECIAL OFFER

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SOME THOUGHTS ON MECHANISTIC MATERIALISM

(Concluded from page 218)

aire Marxists, but *not*, be it emphasised, by the philosophically mature Marx or Engels. Both these men recognised that ideological factors reacted on the "economic base". Man is not a helpless victim of economic forces; it was he who created these forces in the first place; he then became subject to their play; and then altered them. There is action and reaction — interaction.

As stated what we have to consider is, on the one hand man; on the other hand the totality of his environment. And let us never forget that it is man who is the *active* element.

Man makes his history, said Marx, although not out of the whole cloth. But with advancing knowledge man is constantly extending his sphere of operations. His job, as Marx said, is to change the world; and he is doing it.

Those of us who are doing what we can to dissipate the miasmatic vapours of superstition owe much to Marx and his materialist conception of history. In pre-Marxian days it was a well-nigh universal belief that the gods intervened in human affairs. But Marx showed that human history, despite its twists and turns, despite its complex interrelations, yet followed a definite and traceable pattern. In short he demonstrated that the course of events was *determinate* and left no room for the supernatural. Supernaturalistic notions still persist in obscurantist circles, of course. I noted in the *Catholic Weekly* lately that 500 Catholics had held an all-night prayer session for the conversion of Russia. Such people represent the backwash of civilisation. But their number is decreasing; and among those whom we can thank for the retreat of supernaturalism are Karl Marx and his worthy collaborator Friedrich Engels.

THE SUPERIOR INFIDEL

(Concluded from page 219)

Delinquent, Dr. Healy says, "It is quite evident that formal religious training has not prevented delinquency in many of our cases."

It is often asserted, particularly by Catholic authorities, that the real cause is poverty and slum life. This has been proved fallacious in Liverpool where Catholic delinquents from a Catholic school are as much as six times the number from a State school in exactly the same area. In Melbourne Catholic children before the Children's Court are far more numerous than others living in exactly the same environment of slum and poverty. But the same facts were found to hold in a country environment of comparative comfort and security.

And finally as to prostitution: the religious beliefs of about 2,000 prostitutes in New York City given in Dr. Sanger's *History of Prostitution* were, Catholics, 97% (45%), No religion, 63 (4%). And it is common knowledge that the majority of prostitutes in Liverpool and Glasgow are Catholics. This is, of course, due to the twisted, unhealthy sex instruction given to these Irish girls at home which stimulates their curiosity to an unhealthy and disastrous degree.

I have often been accused of exaggerating the facts, but the above mass of official figures effectively refutes this charge. And I have been accused of bigotry. I admit that charge if the word means an attack on a gross and manifest evil which costs so much money and treasure and makes an already unhappy world worse to live in than it might be.

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, July 15th, 6.45 p.m.: EDMUND TAYLOR, "Charles Darwin".

Notes and News

THE Second Annual Dinner of the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society was held in the Stork Hotel, Birmingham, on Saturday, June 30th. It was a well-attended and friendly gathering, with Mr. William Miller in the Chair — and in his most witty mood. Other speakers were the Branch Secretary Mr. Harold M. Pooley and the General Secretary of the NSS. Entertainment was provided by Mr. Fred Henshaw, a clever magician and lightning calculator.

ON PAGE 223 we reprint a significant passage on the state of the Western Church from Gordon Gould's recent report on "Religion Today" for the *Chicago Tribune*. It is also worth recording Mr Gould's finding that two "counter-religions" are "spreading east and west with tidal wave force, ramming headlong into the foundations of established belief and rivalling the classical religions with gospels of their own". One is Communism; the other is "older, subtler, and harder to pin down, for it has neither organisation nor orthodoxy, and its high priests are often unaware of their ordination. Even its name is obscure. Some call it 'scientism'; some call it 'humanism'; some simply lump it into the catch-all category of 'atheism'. But whatever its name it is winning adherents in increasing numbers, especially among the educated of the world's urban centres".

WELL, COVENTRY has got its new cathedral and according to the *Coventry Standard* (22/6/62), "Almost everyone in Coventry and in the diocese is delighted" with it and

"wants to see it thrive as an emblem of our Christianity". Now it has to be paid for—nearly £45,000 a year—and the *Standard* suggests "a wage packet reduction of 3d. a week . . . by mutual agreement by all who would like to subscribe in this way". Such a scheme might reveal that "almost everyone in Coventry" was a little less delighted about the Cathedral than the *Standard* thinks.

RELIGION — all religion to a greater or lesser degree — is anti-life; a crime against humanity. Particularly when it enjoins celibacy and a life of seclusion, A *Daily Herald* photograph (21/6/62) showed some of the 68 girls who were initiated as Buddhist nuns in the Temple of the Twin Groves, Singapore. Half-an-hour before the ceremony their heads had been shaved and "Joss sticks had been set into their scalps and lit by monks. The flames burn down to the skin. They will bear the scars of their initiation till death".

THE *Catholic Herald* "Here's the Answer" column recently (June 15th) tried to interpret "brother of the Lord", as ascribed to St. James. It confessed that "brother" or "brethren of the Lord" was "still one of the most controversial issues of New Testament exegesis". Of course, "Our Lady was always a virgin and . . . therefore Our Lord had no uterine brethren". But "there is no doubt that in Semetic usage in general, and in the Bible in particular, the terms 'brother' and 'sister' have an additional, and precise use in the sense of 'cousin' and Catholic exegetical tradition . . . has tended to favour" this interpretation. However, "so eminent a Catholic authority as Riciotti does not rule out the possibility that Saint James was a step-brother of Our Lord by a previous marriage of St. Joseph". "Tended to favour": "does not rule out the possibility". And they tell us people turn to Catholicism for certainty!

AMERICAN Jesuits do not like the language used by the POAU (Protestant and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State), and its magazine *Church and State* is not surprised. "We always make the point without fooling around" it says (June, 1962) and, "In the Jesuit code this is an unforgivable sin. When we deal with the Jesuits we are dealing with men steeped in a centuries' old tradition from early youth in the fine art of using words to conceal meaning rather than convey it . . . A Jesuit never thinks in a straight line. He is trained not to. If he is going from New York to Washington, he will go by way of Rome — always".

LET US examine the Jesuit and POAU words used to describe the same thing, says *Church and State*. Here are some examples. "Independent schools" (Jesuit); "Schools wholly owned and controlled by priests of the Roman Catholic Church (POAU). "Justice for children" (Jesuit); "Subsidies for Catholic schools" (POAU). "Complex religio-ethnic group struggle" (Jesuit); "Catholic political pressure" (POAU). The June issue of *Church and State* also contrasts a statement made by Cardinal Spellman of New York in 1949, when he backed down after an argument with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, with his arrogant attitude today. "We are not asking for general public support of religious schools", he said in 1949. "Under the Constitution, we do not ask nor can we expect public funds to pay for the construction or repair of parochial school buildings or for the support of teachers, or for other maintenance costs . . .".

Emile Zola—Novelist and Humanist

By H. CUTNER

IT WOULD NOT BE UNFAIR to say that sixty years ago, the year of his death, the reputation of Zola in France had sunk to a somewhat low level. It is true that his early years in spite of their prolific literary output up to the time he published *L'Assommoir*, were years of hard and constant struggle; but his defiant exposure of the gang of military bullies and liars in the Dreyfus Case, to say nothing of his obvious inclusion of the Church in his historic denunciation—"J'accuse"—brought him unpopularity which he never outlived.

Emile Zola was born in 1840, and published his first work, *Contes à Ninon*—"Stories to Ninon"—at the age of 24. Though it probably attracted little attention, a new edition was called for, and more stories to the lady were written and published. A number of novels followed—the most famous of them being *Thérèse Raquin*, which was dramatised; and then, in 1871, came the first volume of the world-famous *Les Rougon-Macquart* entitled *Les Fortunes des Rougons*. It was actually a brilliant novel, the first of many, describing the beginnings and subsequent fate of the members of two families descended, the one through the husband Rougon of an incredible old lady known as Aunt Dide, the other through her lover Macquart.

Altogether, Zola devoted twenty volumes to his great scheme of describing in profuse detail what life was like in France during the Second Empire. Balzac had something of the same idea in *La Comédie Humaine*, but genius through Balzac was, Zola added a "journalist's" eye for a "factual" record unsurpassed in the whole range of French literature.

His principal motive was to show what heredity and environment were bound to do in our lives; but of course it by no means followed that we could say or prophesy what a man or woman would *really* do, even if we knew what the parents were like, or what were the conditions under which they all lived. Zola's "Determinism" got a rough handling from the critics, but we can discard it, and read each book for its own sake. And what marvellous books they are!

Zola—like his contemporary Jules Verne—took the utmost pains to get his facts right. In *Le ventre de Paris* (1873)—translated as "The Fat and the Thin"—we are in the midst of the great markets of Paris which are depicted with the art of a master. No one coming from reading this epic account of the "belly" of the great city could fail to see with what mastery Zola has handled a great subject—feeding a greedy, hungry population. And this apart from the love making, the quarrels, and the adventures of the principal characters.

Or take the way he has treated coal mining in *Germinal* (1885), surely one of the greatest masterpieces of French fiction. It is more than just fiction indeed for it gives us a picture of how the miners lived and died in digging coal, in striking when the terrible necessity for it arose, and what can happen when pit disasters tragically take place. The English translation by Havelock Ellis faithfully reproduces the sense of the original, and there is no excuse for anybody in this country not reading this masterpiece.

Some critics consider *Germinal* easily Zola's greatest book but—as in the case of Dickens—it is not easy to name out of say, half a dozen, of the Rougon-Macquart series which takes the lead. There is perhaps not one

which can displace *La Terre* (1887) variously translated as "The Soil" or "Earth", which, when it first appeared in English, got the publisher and translator three months in prison for printing "an obscene work". *La Terre* certainly does not mince matters, for it bluntly describes the life of peasants in terms which more than horrifies the squeamish, and must have been considered by our Victorian puritans of the '80s and '90s as not only filthy (which in a sense it is), but the last word in obscenity. Yet in these days, a more literal translation than that of Vizetelly (which sent him to prison) is sold quite openly, and not a word is heard from the police or from our "moralists". I think that all the early English translations of Zola were carefully "censored" by the translator; for in one of his literary articles on *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893) (the last of the series), John M. Robertson complained that the translator had "suppressed some passages in the text", though with the author's consent. Robertson was justly angry about it.

Then there is *Nana* (1880) in which Zola describes quite freely the life of a young prostitute. I suspect that this book was also "expurgated" when first translated into English; the modern edition is not; though, in any case, it tells us in detail what so many people in England must have thought when it first appeared was what "life in the raw" really was like in naughty Paris. Yet the curious reader may have discovered that G. W. M. Reynolds's novel, *Rosa Lambert*, written I think before 1850, is only a little less descriptive of the same kind of life in naughty London. Zola's *Nana* is perhaps more direct, more realistic, and written with less inhibition. But that is all. Yet *Rosa Lambert* is almost totally forgotten.

Whatever may be said in praise of some of the earlier novels in the Rougon-Macquart series—and they were very good—it was *L'Assommoir* (1887) which firmly established the reputation of Zola. Its English title is "Drink" or "The Dram Shop", and an adaptation for the stage for many years was immensely popular through the acting of Charles Warner as Coupeau. I think that *L'Assommoir* is the greatest didactic novel ever written. None of the many written here in England against the evils of intemperance (say, by Mrs. Henry Wood and others) comes anywhere near it for sheer power of description; and apart from that, it is a story, a novel, a romance, whatever you will—humorous, tragic, a picture of the working-classes in Paris, unrivalled in its intensity, in its pathos, in its pity. If *Germinal* is Zola's masterpiece, what is *L'Assommoir*?

Then there is Zola's terrific attack on war in *La Débâcle* ("The Downfall", 1892) in some ways the most tragic of all his books, for it showed the defeat of France in its war against Prussia, due to the most appalling incompetence of its War Office, and of so many of its generals; and certainly not to the heroic courage of its simple soldiers. Zola was not forgiven for his devastating exposure of the "militarism" reigning in France before the terrible "débâcle" of 1870.

In a short article, it is quite impossible to do justice to the twenty novels which form the Rougon-Macquart series. Critics have always found faults in them, faults of construction, or "unity", or characterisation, or long descriptions which—like so much in Scott—perhaps bore some readers. I myself was never bored; I was entranced. The Paris of Zola or Dumas, like the London

of Dickens, literally fascinated me—and still does.

Le Docteur Pascal is the culminating volume of the series, and must on no account be missed. If Zola had had at first the experience he gained while writing the earlier volumes, he might have written them better of course; in the last, one can see how much he had gained in many ways—though I haven't the space to go into this. In England, the marriage of an uncle with his niece—Dr. Pascal marries his niece Clothilde—was very much frowned upon at the time though such a marriage was allowed, I think, on the continent. They have a child—and the query, "what will it become?", that is, will its Rougon heredity affect its life as it did so many of the characters in the other novels, is left unanswered. Like

(To be Concluded)

The State of the Church in the West

[The following is taken from a special report on "Religion Today" by Gordon Gould, in the *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, Sunday, June 3rd, 1962.]

"ONE of the ironies of the present crusade for Christian unity", observes an American Jesuit, "is that there are not, relatively speaking, many *real* Christians to unite".

The evidence is disturbing. Says a Clergyman in France, "I never climb into my pulpit without realizing that I have to answer two questions from the pew: 'Oh yeah' and 'So what?'".

In England, an Anglican priest looks sadly at his empty pews and complains, "We've got a complete gulf between the so-called working class and the church. I mean, we're not really in shouting distance of the great mass of English people".

"The streets of Brussels used to be crowded on Sunday", remarks a Belgian business man wistfully. "Everybody was going to church. Now they are empty. Everybody is asleep".

In West Germany, 95 per cent of the Protestant population belong to a church, but German churchmen concede that only about 5 per cent actually take part in church affairs.

Sweden is acknowledged to be the most Christian nation on earth because 98 per cent of its citizens are members of the state [Lutheran] church. But Swedish pastors are not impressed. Church membership, they point out, is like citizenship: You are born with it and you die with it, and what you do with it in between is your own business.

Spain prides itself on being the most Catholic country in the world, yet the editors of the Catholic magazine *Commonweal* observe that although "there are wide variations from province to province . . . lack of church attendance serves as a rough index of the vast disaffection of the Spanish masses from what should be their cherished heritage".

And the city of Rome — the historic fountainhead of Christianity — is the Reddest capital in the west. "One out of three Romans", reports the *New York Times*, "is a Communist or a pro-Communist".

On this side of the Atlantic, the last Inter-American conference of Catholic Action organisations bemoaned the "sad state of the church" in 20 Latin American republics. And in the United States, which has been called "the most churchgoing country in the world", the climate of Christianity is scarcely more bracing.

Although church membership here is at all time high [109 million professed Christians] and money spent on new church building now exceeds a billion dollars* a year, churchmen see little cause for joy.

* i.e. \$1,000,000,000

Dr. Pascal Rougon himself, it will possibly be "neutral".

Although Zola describes so many aspects of life in the series, the one in which he shows his knowledge of the Church is *La faute de l'abbé Mouret*. There is very little religion in the others, proving that for Zola at least, religion as such could be discarded in most of the tragic—or otherwise—lives he so powerfully describes. Of course, even unbelievers have sometimes in France to go to church—for weddings, baptisms, burials, and so on; but Zola does not waste much time over religion. It is when he came to write *Lourdes* and *Rome* that he clashed with the Church, and gained its undying hatred; just as, when he wrote *La Débâcle*, and stood up for Dreyfus, he earned the loathing of all good militarists.

"The religious revival we are said to have had in recent years has been, so far as I can see, less a revival of faith in God and the hope of glory than a revival of desire for faith and of a hope", says Professor Richard H. Niebuhr of Yale divinity school.

Other churchmen put it more bluntly. Our churches have become "second rate country clubs", snorts Methodist Bishop Gerald Kennedy . . . "with the minister a social director", adds theologian Paul Tillich.

Freedom from Hunger

By D. H. TRIBE

JUNE 27, 1962 saw the public launching in Britain of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, which was inaugurated on July 1, 1960 by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation. Speakers at the impressive Royal Festival Hall function included Donald Twaddle and Earl de la Warr, respectively General Secretary and Chairman of the United Kingdom Committee; the Prime Minister; and the Duke of Edinburgh who, as Patron, officially opened the Campaign in a telling and witty speech. Also on the platform were the leaders of the other two major political parties, and, inevitably, of the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish Churches, which, it must be conceded, in some countries at least have already made substantial financial contributions. God came in at the beginning to "save our gracious Queen", but then discreetly withdrew, and, to the best of my recollections, made no subsequent appearance. Presumably He wasn't invited back as nobody saw precisely how He could help.

The Humanist Council, which comprises the Rationalist Press Association, the Ethical Union (British Humanist Association), and the National Secular Society, is one of the voluntary societies affiliated to the Campaign in this country, one of over 40 which have already set up national Committees. Their united task? The eradication of world hunger. I wish to say nothing here of the complexity and subtlety of this problem. This I have done in some detail before (*THE FREETHINKER*, December 15th, 1961). Let me just hint at its magnitude. Half the population of the world today goes hungry, and this century world population will double.

Lack of local resources, or capital to exploit them, is one major problem. But there is also a more basic human failure, incapacity to utilise gainfully those foodstuffs available — what Mr. John Anderson called "malnutrition through superstition!" It is in its relentless attack on the forces of superstition, wherever they flourish and however powerful they may have become, that the Humanist movement is making its perennial contribution, not only to the sustenance of man's body, but to the liberation of his

mind. In the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, however, we have a specific challenge. And so the Humanist Council has undertaken to sponsor a proposal of the Radical Humanists of India. We hope that this will gain official backing by the Projects Group of the UK Committee. But we must be prepared, if necessary, to finance the scheme entirely ourselves. This will need hard work and careful planning. It is hoped to have a rally in Conway Hall, London, on the twin problems of hunger and population pressures (the latter, it would seem, being neatly side-stepped by the official Committee, of which the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster is one of the Vice-Patrons). This will probably take place after the South Place Ethical Society Reunion on September 30th. Similar events, large or small, could be staged up and down the country. This is a national, indeed an international, undertaking, and we cannot rest while one belly is empty which could be filled.

CORRESPONDENCE

RECOLLECTIONS

I have sometimes noticed the name of Wallace Nelson of New Zealand in THE FREETHINKER. I wonder if he is any relative of a Wallace Nelson I used to know in the 1880s who emigrated to Australia? My father was then actively associated with the Barnsley Branch of the National Secular Society, and I used to sell THE FREETHINKER (bearing the words "Prosecuted for Blasphemy") and the *National Reformer* at the outdoor Sunday meetings in the market place. Wallace Nelson, a little Scot, a comb-maker by trade in Sheffield, used to lecture regularly 3 times during the day. He was witty and instructive, and a great favourite with his audiences. I seem to remember his being a member of the Queensland Parliament after he had emigrated. James Hooper of Nottingham was another regular speaker. Wearing a frock coat and long sleeve hat and showing a white expanse of shirt front, he too used to give three lectures each visit. Later, Sam Standing was a favourite. There were no hooting motor cars and no infernal buses in those days, and it was a pleasure to be in the crowd.

Among the indoor lecturers were G. W. Foote, Charles Watts, Annie Besant, A. B. Wakefield, and Charles Bradlaugh. Bradlaugh was a great thrill, I heard him in 1887, though I saw him a few years before, roll up in a 4-wheeler to a political meeting.

H. IRVING.

WHAT MATTERS?

Schopenhauer said that you must decide whether you want Christ to be a god or a historical person, as you can't have it both ways. If a god, he cannot produce any birth certificate; if a man, he cannot redeem others. What we pretend to know is unverifiable and in such a mess, that in practice it comes to admitting that we do not know anything, therefore there is no reality in the person called Jesus Christ.

However, Mr. Ridley is definitely right when saying the discussion about the historicity of Jesus has so far produced more heat than light. Moreover, the problem is (at least today and for us) of not much importance. What really matters is the question of civil liberty for dissenters who still are beset with a host of social disabilities. We who pay just as well tax and radio fees have not yet attained the same rights as the religionists to get the fare we want, despite the fact that our numbers are great enough to

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count. On the Continent, there has already sprung up a vigorous movement of non-denominational groups to challenge the medieval prerogatives of religion in civil society and it is high time to divert our efforts from the haggle about the historicity of Jesus or the existence of God to the far more important question of our civic equality and rights which the religionists still go on denying us.

O. WOLFGANG.

DOUBLE TALK?

I have just read Mr. Colin McCall's article "The Portuguese Angle on Angola". This seems to me to be a perfectly fair report but I cannot help asking myself whether you would have been prepared to undertake a similar scorching investigation into the affairs of a Communist country such as Hungary.

If the National Secular Society must introduce politics into THE FREETHINKER and in principle I am not against this, then it must be scrupulously fair and give equally publicity to Communist misdeeds as to those of the West.

In the same issue (No. 21) Mr. Ridley, whose articles I thoroughly enjoy, refers to "the Spanish Dictator" on the one hand and to "the Socialist People's Democracies on the other. The first expression is correct and the second one would be but for the fact that the countries concerned are not Socialist, they are only remotely connected with the people, and are in no way democratic (cf Chapman Cohen's definition of a coat). Is this sort of double talk to be attributed to the Ridley's training in the Church?

I do not wish to be unkind. I am a socialist and I incline very much to your general political ideas, but I do think that if you must introduce politics into your worthy paper, you must do so with strict impartiality.

G. BEDDOES. (Tanganyika)

DICKENS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT

Since writing my letter on Dickens which you printed on June 8th, I have been able to locate the short story on sinecures, entitled *Lively Turtle* (a misprint in your paper made this "Lively Twittle". It appeared in the weekly magazine *Household Words*, of which Dickens was editor, on Saturday, 26th October, 1850. It has been reprinted in many editions of the miscellaneous short stories of Dickens, and I quote from the fourth paragraph: "I live at a cathedral town where there is an old corporation. I am not in the church, but it may be that I hold a little place of some sort. Never mind, it may be profitable. Perhaps yes, perhaps no. It may, or it may not, be a sinecure. I don't choose to say."

Mr. Snoady, the narrator, was so selfish, and so utterly useless, that he must have held a sinecure.

RICHARD STERN. (USA)

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