

The Freethinker

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PATRICK VAN RENSBURG will be known to many readers as the author of the Penguin Special, *Guilty Land*. After the book had been published, Mr. van Rensburg intended to return to his native South Africa, though he knew he would have to enter the country illegally. Instead he settled in Bechuanaland, married an English Humanist, Elizabeth Griffin—niece of Harold J. Blackham, Secretary of the Ethical Union—and decided to found a school in Serowe.

Swaneng Hill School is intended primarily as a service to the African community which, says Mr. Van Rensburg, forms more than 90 per cent of the population, and whose need for better educational facilities is the greatest. At the same time, no child will be refused admission to the school on account of race, and a very small number of places at the school will be made available to Africans from South Africa, wishing to escape from Bantu education, and to Europeans, whose parents want them to have a balanced education outside their own country. It is hoped to provide a full primary education, and one form in secondary education. The Bechuanaland Information Department's magazine *Kutlwano* for August, 1962, discloses that there are 48,000 pupils in primary schools and 600 in secondary schools throughout the Protectorate, which "represents, it is believed, about half the children of school age".

The latest official report, issued in 1958, reminds us that, "Boys are traditionally employed as cattle-herdsmen until the age of about ten or eleven, when they are relieved of these duties by younger brothers", and that "Most parents are not yet prepared to depart from this practice". There is a growing enthusiasm about education amongst all the people, of all ages, which is very exciting, but the traditional attitude is still very widespread, and home backgrounds do not, as yet, encourage reading to any significant extent.

Organisation and Syllabus

These particular problems will be tackled in various ways. In the first place, the school will be governed by the parents of the children attending it. They will elect the school board and will be closely associated with the government of the school. This should capture the growing enthusiasm about education and should provide a means of countering traditional attitudes. Good library facilities will be a feature of the school, and the boarding establishment (which it is intended to build) will afford the opportunity of encouraging frequent reading, at least among the 100 children it will eventually accommodate. By providing a proper grounding in primary education, the school will seek to create a well of properly prepared pupils for its own secondary forms and for other secondary institutions in the Protectorate.

Instruction will be offered in English, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Nature Study, General Science, Setswana, Hygiene, Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, in the primary standards. Scripture must be taught, by

law, and facilities will be offered in woodwork, physical training, singing and music, and Arts and Crafts. In the secondary classes, additional instruction will be offered in Physics and Chemistry, Biology, Book-keeping and Commercial Arithmetic, Economics, Typing, and foreign languages, while practical work will include Arts and Crafts, elementary bricklaying, woodwork and singing and music, as well as domestic science.

The Farm School

The farm school will be an important part of the project as a whole. About 10 acres of land will be brought under vegetable cultivation, under the supervision of a trained farm manager who will have two

assistants. Attached to the vegetable gardens will be a poultry farm, and if funds permit between 6 and 10 cows will be kraaled nearby and beehives installed within or near the school boundaries. There is virtually no vegetable cultivation in Serowe and district, and very little in the territory as a whole. Most vegetables are imported from South Africa and are available only to the whites and the few black people who can afford them. Every boy in the school will spend between 3 and 4 hours in each school week in both the poultry and vegetable farms and will be instructed by the farm manager (the co-operation of the Department of Agriculture will be sought in this connection) and it is hoped that the school will provide all its own needs in vegetables and eggs, thereby facilitating school feeding. Apart from the obvious advantages of this in a country where the diet is so unbalanced, it will allow a slightly longer school day than is the local practice, and, therefore, make available more time not only for education but for sports and other extra-curricular activities.

Seven or eight members of the staff will be recruited from the United Kingdom and South Africa, and the rest in the Protectorate. All the staff will be offered accommodation on the school site, and it is hoped that the European staff will be attracted by their interest in the project rather than by the salaries offered. Considerable attention will be paid to adult education in evening classes and all staff members will be asked to assist in this work.

Schoolboy Enthusiasm

The support and approval of the Bamangwato Tribal Administration (the local government) has been sought and obtained, as has a grant of land on an excellent site which has now been cleared and terraced by the after-school labour of primary schoolboys. Some 4 acres have been prepared for maize and corn, and foundations are being dug for the buildings. A borehole has been drilled, and a plentiful water supply is assured. The South African Work Camp Association has decided to hold its annual work camp on the site in December and January, which is a vote of confidence and an enormous practical help. Unless, however, enough money is forthcoming immediately to purchase building materials, this arrangement will have to be cancelled and the completion of the school will be greatly delayed (they have been proceeding "on

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

A Humanist School in Bechuanaland

a very thin shoe-string").

Elizabeth van Rensburg writes:

"Our great worry is that we have become so committed to these Standard 6 schoolboys, who trek 3 or 4 miles to the site after school and work like mad till dark in order that they may have a secondary school here next year. They complete their primary education this year and few, if any of them, will get places in the existing overcrowded secondary schools—and many of them cannot afford the necessary boarding fees, as there is no secondary school in Serowe for them. If no funds emerge very soon, building will be so delayed that we will not open until 1964—which means that these boys will go without a secondary education and will disappear into the South African mines or become cattle-herdsmen once more. All highly distressing when you know the boys themselves and that they are keen and intelligent. Even a small amount would enable us to open a class for them—and if possible, a couple of others. They are the urgent priority at the moment and we would be perfectly happy to begin on this minimum scale and do most of the building during 1963, opening properly in 1964."

Outside Freedom from Hunger Campaign

This Bechuanaland project falls outside the terms of reference of the UK Freedom from Hunger Campaign Committee (except that the farm school will be considered when the whole school complex has been established). However, the Food and Agriculture Organisation has insisted that education is a fundamental part of the campaign, since improvements in agriculture and in diet and food habits depend upon it.

Christmas Notes for "The Faith"

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

IN AN ISSUE OF *The Faith*, a Maltese Catholic journal, I am attacked about my article on the Morality of the Catholic clergy. I know the Catholic clergy well and they are as I described them; their poor moral standing is due to ignorance, poor education and the unnatural strain of celibacy.

As to "misstatements" about the birth of the alleged Jesus. In Matthew 2,11, it is stated that Herod sent messengers to investigate the rumour of the birth of Jesus. They went "to the house" (*eis ten oikian* in the Greek version) and there saw the child with "Mary his mother". Jesus was thus born in a house under Herod who died in 4 BC. So Jesus must have been born in that year or earlier.

In Luke, however, it is stated that Mary was pregnant with Jesus at the time of the census of Quirinius in 6 AD, and that the birth took place in a stable because there was "no room in the inns of Bethlehem". In actual fact there were no inns there at the time. The common Christian legend has adopted the stable story, hence the annual crib ritual with ox and ass all complete. According to this story Jesus could not have been born before 6 or 7 AD.

Let us look at another typical Catholic swindle. Recently the Pope went on a praying expedition to Loretto where there is a house supposed to be that of Mary when she is alleged to have lived at Nazareth. But there was no such place at the time. But poor old Matthew thought that the word "Nazaraïos" or Nazarene meant a citizen of Nazareth and in his gospel fitted the Holy Family out with a home in Nazareth which he invented, or thought existed. The Crusaders failed to find such a place in 1096; it was founded by the Knights of the Cross in the 13th Century. The swindle of the miraculous transportation of the alleged house of the Virgin was sponsored by Pope Boniface VIII in 1291. This lad, says Voltaire, "usurped his place like a fox, behaved in it like a wolf and died like a dog".

A general meeting of members of the Ethical Union, National Secular Society and Rationalist Press Association in the Conway Hall, London, on October 29th, therefore unanimously recommended that the Humanist Council (which comprises representatives of the three bodies) should work for the Bechuanaland project as part of its contribution to the general objective of the Campaign, while awaiting details of a revised plan for a Bihar (Indian) scheme, which anyway will probably also be supported by American and Dutch Humanist bodies, and which may be listed by the UK Committee.

It is estimated that the eventual building costs of the Swaneng Hill School will be £13,870, while recurrent annual costs will be in the region of £10,000, less an estimated income of just under half that amount. The other half, it is hoped and expected, will be met at least in part by a government grant. But money is particularly needed now, in the opening stages. The Humanist Council has pledged itself to do all that it can to support this splendid project, and has already made a grant towards it. So has the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society, while the Marble Arch Branch has taken two collections towards it. Now other branches and individual members of the three societies are being asked for their contributions, which should be sent to the Treasurer of the Humanist Council, Colin McCall, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Matthew did not know apparently that the word "Nazaraïos" meant a person, commonly an Ebionite or similarly poor person, who was dedicated to the Lord from childhood. Thus are swindles born. Lourdes and Fatima were both in the Catholic fashion.

For the full facts about Loretto I refer readers to *La Maison Volante de Lorette* by Dr. Brotteaux, Editions de L'Idée Libre, Herblay, (S. & O.), France.

Poison Gas

"THE AUTHORITIES had to take me into their confidence in order to apologise," the abbot said gravely. "It was, of course, very disturbing for Brother Simon. As you may know, when he was collecting for . . . for our holy funds, he was actually met with affability. This, it seems, was due to some leakage from the government's secret factory at Graylands. Yes, my brothers, they tell me that they are experimenting there with a gas which will completely disarm an enemy by making him the soul of docility."

Brother Mark looked as if he had been outraged by sticks and stones. "It's a fine thing," he cried, "if it takes a filthy gas to make them be polite to us!"

"Oh!" exclaimed the young novice rudely, "but think of the things that a gas like that might do—end wars, crimes, persecution . . ."

"And," cut in the abbot sharply, "you might say that it could also be the end of us. If everyone is as good as . . . as monks ought to be . . . they may not see the need for specialists. Indeed it seems to me that our only hope during the serene years to come, is for us to flaunt our sins instead of trying to keep them secret. One day they will tire of goodness, and then where will they turn? So, my dear brethren, if we are as clever as our colleagues the Jesuits, some of us may live to see the glory of another holy way, another inquisition. Perhaps everything will finally be for the best in the worst of possible monasteries. eh? I mean . . . I mean it would surely never occur to the authorities to spray our holy abbey, would it now?"

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

Mars

By F. A. RIDLEY

A RUSSIAN SPACE SHIP is now *en route* for Mars, and somewhere around our terrestrial Christmas, this product of atheistic science, is due if all goes well, to pass within a short distance of the "red" planet. Whereupon we may expect more detailed information to be relayed to us with regard to our neighbour in space than has hitherto been available via the medium of telescopic research at the interplanetary distance of some 35-60 millions of miles—the average distances that separate us from the ruddy celestial body so appropriately named after the old Roman god of war. Will information by radio from the Soviet Mars ship reveal anything really fresh about the much-publicised, much-discussed problems that centre round the presence of intelligent life upon Mars? Above all, will the information relayed from the Russian space-ship really solve that hitherto most intriguing of heavenly problems (in the astronomical, not theological sense) of the famous "canals" of Mars.

In the early years of this century, the problem of life on Mars came to transcend the merely technical domain of astronomy, and became a topic of quite general interest and discussion by the man in the street and in the world at large. At this period the problem of whether intelligent life actually existed upon the planet was inseparably bound up with the allied problems attendant upon those strange—and still not entirely explicable—markings upon the surface of Mars, to which, as early as 1877, the Italian astronomer, Professor Schiaparelli, gave the rather misleading title (in English translation) of "canals".

Obviously such a term readily opened the way for all sorts of conjectures and interpretations, including misinterpretations of this ambiguous term. For by the term "canal", something man-made, something artificial, seemed to be connoted. Were these Martian "canals" like their earthly counterparts, the work of intelligent engineers? Did a kind of "Manchester Ship Canal"—or its Martian equivalent—run through what are to all appearances (and in the opinion of most contemporary astronomers) the dreary and monotonous deserts that make up the great bulk of the surface of our neighbouring planet, the romantic appearance of which, blazing in the sky, appears to hide the reality of a vast dust-bowl.

This intriguing idea took on. Popular magazines featured Mars and the hypothetical Martians, sometimes with considerable imaginative scope. Authors (this writer amongst them) wrote what would now be termed, "science fiction"; thrillers describing the canals and the inhabitants who resided upon their salubrious banks. Even serious astronomers—Professor Percival Lowell, USA, was a conspicuous example—took up the suggestion, and even produced finely-spun (if far-fetched) theories to fit the presumed facts about the canals and also about the presumed crisis in Martian civilisation that these brilliant waterways through the deserts were presumably intended to solve. According to these certainly imaginative theorists, the ageing planet had gone completely dry. Only at the poles where the ice-caps melt every Spring (as has long been known to telescopic observers) was water to be found.

So argued the theorists of the Lowell school. The ancient civilisation of Mars, in a last desperate attempt to avert the awful fate that confronted it, had created this cyclopean network of canals by means of which the life-giving waters of the poles might be diffused over the deserts, so

that life and civilisation upon Mars might continue to defy the harsh natural conditions. Mars represented a planetary "Egypt" wherein life and civilisation were kept alive by the canals, the Martian equivalent of the River Nile which created and still sustains the oldest known human civilisation.

How much of all this luxuriant crop of fanciful speculation still survives today? Very little it would appear. For astronomic research has got busy on Mars since the now far-off days of Schiaparelli and Lowell. Current estimates of our planetary neighbour come to much less exciting conclusions. For as summarised a few years ago (1954) by a contemporary expert on Mars, the certain (or at least highly probable) *facts* about Mars may be cited in these modest terms: There probably *is* life on our ruddy neighbour, but it is only life of the humblest and most primitive kind; elementary plant-life. According to another expert, even a cabbage would be much too advanced an organism to exist in the arid Martian soil. There *is* an atmosphere, but one so thin as to be equivalent to the earthly atmosphere at about 56,000 feet (about twice the height of Everest) so no warm-blooded animal, and certainly nothing remotely resembling a human being could conceivably continue to exist under such adverse physical conditions.

Except to a very limited degree at the poles (when, as noted above, the ice-caps melt in Spring), there does not appear to be any water at all over the great bulk of the surface of Mars. (Also, since there is no running water, there cannot be any sand, which incidentally negatives the title of a famous science fiction novel: *The Sands of Mars*.) As for the canals themselves, they appear to be optical illusions, perhaps caused by some irregular natural configurations in the landscape.

In brief, the brilliant fancies formerly common to both scientists and to science fiction writers (literally) turn to dust, to the dust that makes up most of the planet's dreary landscape, though Dr. Hubertus Strughold considers (*The Red and Green Planet*) that despite the rigours of life upon Mars, human explorers could exist there with artificial aids.

In view of these above facts and probabilities, as myself a science fiction writer of the bygone days, I look forward with a somewhat melancholy anticipation to the information expected this month from the Russian Mars ship which will probably finish off the canals of Mars for good and all!

THEATRE

"The Witch of Edmonton"

"What do you take me for, an atheist?", asks the male lead in *The Witch of Edmonton* (Mermaid Theatre, London). We might at least spare him that; bigamy, murder and lying are surely as much as any man's conscience can stand! But the question is indicative of a Jacobean attitude that hasn't completely disappeared yet. (It is only through the goodness of God that you are allowed to live, I was told after my recent broadcast.) And, in fact, *The Witch of Edmonton* is of greater historic than dramatic interest.

Described on the title page when first printed as, "A known true Story composed into a tragi-comedy by divers well-esteemed Poets, William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford &c", it perhaps inevitably lacks cohesion, though I didn't find it dull. It is well staged, and is illumined by a free programme containing "divers" fascinating information about witches in general and Elizabeth Sawyer (the witch of Edmonton) in particular.

C.McC.

This Believing World

Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge managed to extract from Mr. Christmas Humphreys, QC, if nothing else, at least a coherent expression of his Buddhist beliefs in the "I Believe" series on TV the other week. Like Lord Fisher, ex-Archbishop of Canterbury, Mr. Humphreys believes "everything"—in Buddhism of course—not in Christianity. It is, he tells us, "limitless in terms of space and time"—whatever that means. It implies a "Oneness" of life, that is, "an unlimited compassion for every form of life" which is so great, no doubt, that under no circumstances would a Buddhist kill bugs, rats, or tapeworms.

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But Mr. Humphreys was first attracted to "Karma"—the doctrine that "every action, good or bad, receives its reward or punishment" taught in Buddhism—so unbelievers, look out! As he also believes in "reincarnation"—with Mr. Humphreys it is not just a belief but an undoubted fact—Karma may well mean that "criminals" can come back as bugs, rats, or tapeworms. And serves them right! One day, Mr. Humphreys may perhaps find out that the doctrine of Evolution annihilated the childish fancies of these Oriental superstitions, and gave us instead the hope of a better world founded on science and discovery.

★

We have never quite understood why the Anglican Bishop of Accra was expelled except that he criticised some Ghana youths for not being religious enough. After all, Nkrumah is more than a mere Christian, he is now the "Messiah"—a fact which the Bishop acknowledges but which he sadly admits is a mistaken view. However, all's well that ends well, and Bishop Roseveare is going back so that the Church can give "a very considerable contribution" to make Ghana "among the most advanced and progressive nations in the world".

★

We love nothing much more than the way ladies tell us in the *Daily Express* why they are going to church. Over many years, a Miss Hilda Coe has told us what a religious thrill it has always been for her "because it is Truth and Life", because of the Church's "Sacraments", and because she has ever striven "to be faithful to Christ my Redeemer and my King". Here we have the veritable strains of mid-Victorian tracts which can alas never die with our Miss Coes fighting so hard and so piously to preserve them.

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On the other hand there is Mrs. Christopher Soames, who is the wife of the Minister of Agriculture, and a daughter of Sir Winston Churchill, who also tells us why she is "going to church tomorrow". She was brought up in it and it helps her to express "thankfulness and joy", as well as "consolation, forgiveness, strength and guidance". She says nothing whatever about Christ my Redeemer—in fact, even the word God does not occur in her article. But she likes the prayers and hymns in church, and it is obvious there is far more of the "social" side of the Church for her than the religious one.

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Healing by a "magic touch" either through Christ Jesus, or through doctors still living in Summerland, or even through a "healer's" more or less "divine" gift also intrigues us. *The People* devoted nearly half a page reviewing *I Hear a Voice*, a "biography" by Mr. M. Barbanell whose speciality in things "psychic" has always been "unshakable" evidence. The healer who hears the voice is Mr. (E.) Fricker, and many of his cures were detailed recently in *The People*, including a challenge from

the reviewer to the "powerful men who head Britain's medical profession".

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It is of course most difficult to check any "cure" by a healer, divine or not, or even vouched for by Mr. Barbanell. But there should be no difficulty to prove that a healer can heal by going to any home for spastic or blind children, and curing the lot in a trice. Mr. Fricker did this with a lady who had a slipped disc and had to wear a steel belt for years. In 60 seconds he cured her completely and for always, by merely putting his hand on her back. He took longer to cure an almost blind woman, but she was cured and so were many more people. With a "gift" like this from Heaven—surely Mr. Fricker could cure all the blind children in England? If not, why not?

FOR THIS RELIEF . . .

WERE YOU WORRIED during the Cuban crisis, apprehensive about the Sino-Indian "border-dispute"? Then you mustn't have known of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychological Study's "nightly concentration of prayer in 10,000 British homes". At the height of the Cuban crisis this concentration of prayer was "mobilised to combat the nuclear threat" and "was directed on to the minds of Khrushchev and his colleagues in the Kremlin" (*Leicester Mercury*, 22/11/62). Within a few days came the "sudden turn-about decision from that quarter". The concentration was then "directed to Peking", and a week later came the "dramatic cease-fire news". The massed prayer campaign has also been directed towards such relatively minor matters as the Ford dispute, and the Fellowship, which is supported by twenty-one Anglican bishops, considers it a "reasonable conclusion of which there is considerable evidence, that these results can be traced to this intensive specially guided mobilisation of spiritual forces . . .". Prayer succeeded where "man-made efforts proved useless". Are you relieved?

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS

In reply, Mr. Betjeman made a prophecy. He said people were going back to the churches, and in 20 years' time they would be much fuller, and there would be no question of redundant churches.—*Kent Messenger* (24/11/62).

CHARITY AND CHASTITY

Professor Carstairs's references to sex in the Reith Lecture on Sunday night—he said that charity was more important than chastity—were criticised in London last night by the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council.

Father M. O'Leary, the chairman, said: "Our experience totally contradicts Professor Carstairs's view that in our society premarital intercourse can lead to stable married life."—*The Guardian*, 27/11/62.

And your experience, Father?

WITHOUT COMMENT

The ruins of St. Mary Aldermanbury, just behind Guildhall, are going to be transported to America . . . "We are only too glad to let them have it", the Archdeacon of Hackney, Michael Hodgins, told me. "We have wondered what to do with the church for a long time."—*Daily Herald* (27/11/62).

RECENT PENGUINS AND PELICANS

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, by T. E. Lawrence, 10s. 6d.
The Island of Dr. Moreau, by H. G. Wells, 3s. 6d.
A Short History of the World, by H. G. Wells, 5s.
Hitler. A Study in Tyranny, by Alan Bullock, 8s. 6d.
A Pictorial History of Nazi Germany, by Erwin Leiser, 3s. 6d.
Meet Yourself As You Really Are, by Prince Leopold of Loewenstein and William Gerhardt, 3s. 6d.

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Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1. Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. P. MURACCOLE, J. A. MILLAR

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

Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street), Sunday evenings.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead).—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, December 11th, 7.30 p.m.: DR. JAMES HENNING, "The New Face of Africa".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 9th, 6.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Spartacus Revolution and Christian Origins".

Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, December 9th, 7.30 p.m.: G. H. MILLS, "Atheism and its Allies".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Scymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, December 9th, 7.30 p.m.: L. EBURY, "The Curse of Immortality".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, December 9th, 11 a.m.: DR. J. A. C. BROWN, "Propaganda and Persuasion in the Modern World".

West London Ethical Society (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8), Sunday, December 9th, 7 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "A Secularist's View of Humanism".

Notes and News

AS CHRISTMAS, Yuletide—or whatever you like to call it—draws near, the problem of presents confronts Christians and non-Christians alike. We remind readers that, in addition to the Pioneer Press's own publications, a wide variety of paperbacks and children's books may be obtained from THE FREETHINKER bookshop. We should also like to make a special appeal for donations to THE FREETHINKER Sustentation Fund, to help us meet the cost of publishing the only weekly Freethought paper in the English-speaking world.

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THIS WEEK, in response to many requests, particularly from readers in the North of England and overseas, who were unable to hear it, we are printing the first part of Colin McCall's radio discussion on "Atheism" with Father Anthony Kenny and John Wren-Lewis. We should like to thank the BBC, the producer, Dr. David Edge, and the two questioners for giving permission for publication.

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THE FOURTH Annual Conference of the University Humanist Federation will be held in College Hall, Leicester University, during the weekend, January 4th-6th, 1963.

The theme will be "The Development of Humanism", and the lecturer is Paul Cherrington, MA. Full details may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, A. F. M. Brierley, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8.

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A BIRMINGHAM firm was recently surprised to receive a circular letter addressed "To all Muhammedans", giving the "auspicious news that the Urs Sarif (Death Anniversary) of Sultan-ul-Hind Hazrat Summa Ajmeri Gharib-Nawaz (Reh.), will be held from 1st Rajjab and ends on 6th Rajjab", that is, from November 29th to December 4th. Khwaja Sahib—as he is mercifully referred to in short—went to India "to reform, preach and stimulate the true doctrines of Islam" at the end of the 11th century, and he is now regarded as a saint who can mediate with God. Of course, the purpose of the circular was to ask the recipient to "take part in the Fatcha . . . by sending any amount . . . by money order, postal order, cheque, bank draft, etc.". But it was nice to read that "Currency notes should never be sent strictly".

★

THE DEAN OF CANTERBURY, who has shocked a few people in his time, was himself shocked—we read in the *Kent Messenger* (23/11/62)—by an article by Somerset Maugham, an old boy of The King's School, Canterbury, in which the famous author said he didn't believe in God. Speaking from the pulpit of Canterbury Cathedral on Sunday, November 18th, Dr. Hewlett Johnson said: "Many of us were shocked to know that Somerset Maugham said bluntly that there are no good reasons to believe God exists. I would reply to Somerset Maugham that there are a thousand good reasons around us to believe that God is in all creative life. Every creative part of life is a reason". The Dean, we feel, would have some difficulty defending his position against Mr. Maugham's but, then, anyone so "shocked" by the famous novelist's atheism can hardly be regarded as intellectually up-to-date.

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WHEN INTRODUCING his series of ITV programmes, "I Believe", Malcolm Muggeridge made the stupid statement that unbelievers "keep fortune-tellers in business, and crowd the waiting rooms of quack psychiatrists" (*TV Times*, November 4th-10th). He was rightly taken to task by C. H. Hammersley, Secretary of Leicester Secular Society, who tells us that: "As a result of my letter in the *TV Times*, I have had a bundle of tracts, a letter from a lady who says I don't know what I am missing, one from the Layman's Home Missionary Movement, a number from unbelievers, *but no abusive letters*". This, Mr. Hammersley adds, "is an improvement".

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LIKE DR. DUHIG (on page 386) we have "a bone to pick" with *The Faith*. In its December issue, this Roman Catholic paper quotes "with surprise and satisfaction" our reply to a correspondent (21/9/62) in which we quoted Paine and Voltaire to show that they believed in a Creator and were opposed to atheism. That is fair enough, but it is far from fair to imply, as *The Faith* does, that the Deism of Paine and Voltaire was akin to the Christianity of Paul or Aquinas. And *The Faith* carefully avoids mentioning that the two FREETHINKER articles which had been objected to by our correspondent were written by an ex-nun and an ex-priest respectively. *The Faith* must know this, since it was referred to in the very reply that it cites.

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WE SEND our best wishes to Bayard Simmons, Freethinker, Socialist and poet, who will celebrate his 80th birthday on December 9th.

Atheism

(An unscripted radio discussion broadcast on the BBC Home Service, October 31st, 1962.)

Announcer.—In "What's the Idea?" this evening, the subject is Atheism. Colin McCall, Secretary of the National Secular Society, defends his views. He is questioned by John Wren-Lewis, and Father Anthony Kenny who opens the discussion.

Kenny.—Mr. McCall, I'm a Secular Priest. I wonder would that qualify me for membership of your Secular Society?

McCall.—No. I'm afraid that wouldn't qualify you for membership of the National Secular Society, though I might mention that we have at least one ex-priest in our ranks. The National Secular Society is concerned essentially with this world, this life. And most of its members, including myself, would describe themselves as Atheists. I then am an Atheist. By which I mean that I disavow Theism. And by Theism, I mean the belief in an almighty, all-knowing, all-loving God such as is posited by Christianity. I think it is meaningful to ask does such a God exist, as I think it is meaningful to ask if fairies or unicorns exist. And in each case I answer no. But I also consider it *important* to ask if such a God exists, since a great many people devote a lot of their time, and very many more people devote some of their time to worshipping God. It isn't just an academic question then. I want to emphasise that. Moreover belief in God is often regarded as conducive to decent behaviour, and disbelief, of course, said to lead to immorality. In a Parish magazine published only this month, a parson who wanted to found a youth club declared that "people who never say their prayers are almost always wet or irresponsible. They are either self-centred, unfair, low-minded, boozy, quick-tempered, or lazy". On a much more official level, in the Queen's regulations for the Royal Navy, we read that all officers and men, "are at all times, to exert their influence, against all that tends to the disparagement of religion, and the encouragement of vice and immorality". There, you see, religion is quite unjustifiably equated with morality, and Atheism with immorality. That is a widespread though quite erroneous attitude. It is the attitude that lies behind the compulsory religious teaching in our schools, which makes difficulties for parents and teachers, and above all, misleads and confuses the children, often quite disastrously. Indeed, if I were permitted to make just one change in our educational system, it would be to banish religion from the schools, to make our education completely secular, and let parents who wanted their children to receive religious instruction to arrange for it outside school hours, and off school premises. Because, let us be frank to start with, neither of you knows any more about God than I—and I know nothing. There isn't the slightest evidence that an almighty, all-knowing, all-loving God exists. Indeed, the evidence is against it. Why, then, should our children be taught to believe in God and worship him? It is teaching them to believe in a myth.

Wren-Lewis.—Would you want to abolish all reference to religion whatever, from school? I can't imagine you want that because this would make nonsense of most of the history that's taught, where reference to religion and God continually come in.

McCall.—No. Indeed I think that religion might well be brought into history and geography periods very satisfactorily, because quite obviously religion has played an important role in the history of the world, and you can't

understand history, the teacher can't even teach history without some reference to religion. And obviously, in geography too, when the children are learning about the practices and the habits of people in other parts of the world, their religious beliefs and practices would come into the geography lesson, but I would emphasise that it should be taught without any sectarian bias whatever.

Kenny.—Well would you have say, Christianity taught as part of the folk-lore of contemporary or earlier Britain? Or would you have the teacher take a definite side; that is to say to decide whether there is or is not a God?

McCall.—I think this is one of the things that make the religious period so very difficult in schools, because you have teachers who have no religious beliefs, practically compelled to teach Christianity in the schools. And either doing it hypocritically or doing their very best in a very difficult circumstance. That is one of the reasons why I believe that religion, the teaching of religion as such, is better out of the schools altogether.

Kenny.—Well I think we'd all agree that we don't want a continuation of a situation where people who don't have any religion are teaching religion to others. But I'd still like to ask whether you would like Atheism to be taught in schools, in the way that religion is now taught in schools, or perhaps more efficiently, but would you like it as part of the syllabus?

McCall.—No, because I think basically that if the child learns his lessons in a naturalistic way; if he is taught science, and history and geography in a naturalistic way and without bias, then he is able to reach his own conclusions on religious matters later.

Wren-Lewis.—What makes you think that teaching him naturalistically is teaching him without bias? I should have thought that was teaching him with a bias straight away. And anyhow, one of the things you'd have to do, if you were teaching history, would be to try and explain why people have held these religious beliefs, which you regard as so unlikely.

McCall.—When I said "naturalistically", I was thinking more of science; to teach science, various sciences in a naturalistic way. I have no objection whatever to a child, as I say—I repeat myself—learning about Christianity in a historical way. But I quite definitely oppose the teaching of Christianity in a special way, as the chosen religion that is taught to the children automatically in our schools unless they are withdrawn from religious instruction.

Kenny.—Is it not impossible to teach even the *history* of Christianity without to some extent taking sides about its truth or falsehood? For instance, there will come a point in teaching the history of Palestine in Roman times, where one will have to explain that various people became convinced that one of their number who had been crucified had risen again from the dead three days later. Now the teacher will surely have to make clear whether he thinks that this in fact happened, that Christ did rise from the dead, or whether he thinks it's a myth, and he'll have to give some explanation either way.

McCall.—I agree it is impossible to teach anything in a completely unbiased way, because the teacher inevitably approaches all problems with some preconceived ideas. We will have to reach some sort of practical agreement on this matter. But I suggest that it is not impossible at all to teach Christianity as an historical religion, in a similar way to

which one would teach Muhammedanism, as an historical religion, without any bias: to say that the people of North Africa hold such and such a belief, and the people of other parts of the world hold another belief.

Kenny.—But the children are going to ask if these beliefs are true. And what will you then say?

McCall.—What would I say? Well I should then be compelled to say that I don't consider them to be true. But these are problems that obviously would have to be settled. The principal thing that I'm trying to avoid, is the special teaching of a particular religion which, I might point out, is not held strongly in this country and indeed is rejected by probably ten per cent of the population of this country.

Kenny.—Well now I'd like to ask what do you think that ten per cent of the population should do? Because it seems that, if as you say that only ten per cent reject Christianity then it seems rather unfair that they should demand the other ninety per cent should give up the teaching of Christianity in schools, which as you have yourself said, is, if it is true, very important. Now one possibility which seems to be open to your ten per cent, is to come together and set up their own schools, with whatever amount of financial assistance the Government agrees. I represent another ten per cent of the country, the Roman Catholic Church, and this is more or less the situation which we've had to face. We have a quarrel like you with the agreed syllabus of religious instruction, we quarrel with it, from a slightly different angle, but rather than say that nobody ought to be taught agreed syllabus religion in schools, we've set up our own schools, and teach religion the way we think it should be taught. Now what would be the objection to you and your Atheist friends doing the same?

McCall.—Yes, with a great deal of state support, I might say. And it seems to me that in this country at the present time, with more and more overseas immigrants, there are likely to be more and more complications in connection with the religious syllabus. And whilst the Roman Catholic parent who is compelled by circumstances to send his child to a state school, might have no compunction whatever in withdrawing him from religious instruction, this is in fact one of the problems that the sensitive Atheist faces as far as *his* children are concerned. Although he doesn't agree with the religious teaching in the schools, he is a bit dubious about withdrawing his child from the religious period, because of the effect that it might have upon the child. It seems to me that in this respect the Atheist parent shows more sensitivity towards his child than the majority of Catholic parents do, who have no compunction whatever in withdrawing their children from religious instruction if they should happen to go to a state school.

Wren-Lewis.—Well I think many Christian people of my own cast of mind would go a long way with you in wanting to see some kind of reform of the teaching of religion in schools, along the lines that you suggest. I would do it for reasons which might strike you as paradoxical. I would like to withdraw the kind of atmosphere from schools in which religion is equated with respectability, because in my judgment this will make any child with any intellectual drive and self respect and energy of rebellion in him an Atheist before he's sixteen, as it did me. And this I would on the whole regard as a bad thing! Therefore I would like to see this kind of smug religious teaching, which identifies religion with "the respectable thing", removed from schools. But when you've done that, you're still faced with the difficulty that we are living in a country whose way of life has been formed, *not* by Muhammedanism or Buddhism, but by

Christianity, and we're living in a civilisation, a scientific and technological civilisation, which has issued out of that religion and which is rapidly moving over and taking over the whole world. So I think that, however modified the teaching of religion is in schools, it's bound, surely, to place special emphasis on the role of Christianity.

McCall.—Well I would say that the one thing that we haven't touched upon yet, is the extreme difficulty of teaching Christianity in schools, because whilst it sounds very good to say that there should be Christian teaching in all the schools, in fact there are so very many brands of Christianity; there are so very many different interpretations of the Scriptures, that the teaching of Christianity, and even the teaching of the Bible, present enormous problems, even to the sincere Christian teacher in our schools today. And this, of course, is something that is quite often voiced in the scholastic press.

Kenny.—Yes, well I think that we've all agreed that there is a question of inefficiency in many schools in the teaching of religion, and that it would be difficult to get agreement between many Christians as to exactly what religious doctrine should be taught in schools, but I think that we could perhaps simplify the discussion by concentrating on the main issue, which is whether you teach children that there is a God or not. All Christians I think would want this to be taught in school, they would think it a very important fact for the child to know, and you I take it would wish children to be taught that there is no God?

McCall.—No, I do not wish that at all. I say that a Christian parent is quite obviously at liberty to bring his child up at home and, if he goes to church on Sundays, in church, to believe in Christianity, but I don't think that it is satisfactory to introduce religious teaching into the school.

Kenny.—So you'd have God not mentioned either for good or ill, throughout?

McCall.—I would have no religious instruction in the schools. I think the teachers have plenty on their plate to teach other subjects, without getting into the complicated business of trying to teach Christianity in a totally unsatisfactory way, not through any inefficiency of the school system, not through any inefficiency of the teachers, but simply because Christianity is hopelessly contradictory, and, of course, out of date as well. I think I can say without any fear of contradiction that you two people opposite me, have very very different ideas of what you nevertheless both call Christianity.

(To be concluded next week)

CORRESPONDENCE

TWO CRITICISMS . . .

Mr. McCall (September 28th) misses the point of my criticisms of Mr. Wappenhans's irrelevant distinction among atheists. I want all Freethinkers to be aware of Fritz Mauthner's excellent criterion: "The best criticism of a word is its history".

Now the history of both terms that are tremendously important to the issue of Rationalism versus Christianity, "atheism" and "God", reveals that the only correct definition is the original one for both terms: "atheism" was a denial of the existence of *all gods*, and "the god" of the Greek New Testament and Septuagint was *the West Semitic god Yahweh* of Moses and of Israel. Since Yahweh was one of the gods, atheists are perfectly correct in denouncing Christianity as false.

I insist that Freethinkers get rid of "God" when disproving Christianity: the correct term to speak of is "Yahweh" since it is "Yahweh" that is meant by "the god" in Greek NT and Septuagint. If someone still thinks that the NT god is not Yahweh, he is only a dupe of the Christian translators' swindle in such passages as Rom. 3, 29 (Revised Version) where "the god God", or I Cor. 14, 33, where "a god God", is introduced. The Greek original has only "*the god*", a standard reference to Yahweh. But this mistranslation has led to a perverted present

definition of atheism as "disbelief in God" in all the dictionaries. I insist that Freethinkers stick to the perfectly adequate original definitions of atheism which, of course, quashes all the *three gods and the goddess* of orthodox Christianity.

What Mr. McCall objects is partly irrelevant, partly incorrect. In criticising *verbal* superstitions, you must be aware of Fritz Mauthner's linguistic principle, namely, "Not behind every word there lurks a corresponding object". A definition is only an enlarged label, and not the object to the label. It is exactly a lack of language-consciousness that confuses words with things. Both "Yahweh" and its synonym, "the god" in the New Testament, have *no* thing behind it, no referent or object. And this reduction of Christianity to an ordinary Oriental mythology is the unimpeachable and conclusive proof that atheists are absolutely right. Atheism is a truism.

As regards attitudes, Mr. Colin McCall disregards the fact of psychology that an attitude dwindles away if its holder becomes aware of the falsehood of his presumptions: "Attitudes are often functions of beliefs. We often change our attitudes to something when we change our beliefs about it." (C. L. Stevenson, *The Nature of Ethical Disagreement*, in: *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, New York). Atheism empties the churches.

Incidentally, I can assure Mr. McCall that my argument along the lines indicated above left a local theologian, Dr. Walsh of St. Patrick's College, Manly, nonplussed in red-faced confusion at a recent symposium on State Aid to Church Schools in Sydney.

Finally, don't insert a comma in the phrase "the god God" as none is required after a *class* name qualifying a (pseudo) *proper* name.

GREGORY S. SMELTERS (N.S.W., Australia)

Now that "Mr. Humphrey's reasoning is—like ideas of God—'vague and muddled'", perhaps Mr. McCall will be good enough to state *his* ideas of God. Is God a He, a She, or an It? According to Mr. McCall—"It isn't true to say that because there is no evidence of the existence of God, the word cannot mean anything to anybody, any more than it is to say that because there is no evidence of unicorns or fairies, these words have no meaning. Quite clearly they do." Of course they do. That is to say, *unicorns and fairies* have meanings. *They are made up of things that are known to exist.*

To say that, "Ideas emanate from the brain, and may be stimulated by many internal or external factors", is like putting the cart before the horse. It would be true to say that the brain *possesses* ideas and that *all ideas come from experience*, and having experience of the knowledge that there exist such things as, horses, goats, beards, lions, tails and composite creatures like unicorns, fairies, banshees, etc., these are the material factors that stimulate ideas. Material things would still exist even if there were no one to perceive them. In fact only matter, matters, and without experience, man can form no conception of "God".

JAMES HUMPHREY.

... AND A REPLY

Mr. McCall writes: Mr. Smelters's argument may have nonplussed Dr. Walsh, but I am afraid that it doesn't have that effect on me. It is neither incorrect nor irrelevant to point out the inadequacy of a purely linguistic criticism of Theism. I am quite well aware that "not behind every word there lurks a corresponding object". The fact remains that behind the word "God" there are all kinds of concepts: the word has meaning for a great many people—or rather has many different meanings that can't all be covered by "Yahweh". Indeed, "Yahweh" itself can have different meanings. The concept of God is by no means uniform throughout the Old and New Testaments. So I repeat: Bradlaugh was essentially sound in demanding a definition of "God" at the start of a discussion. That gave him a referent.

Mr. Humphreys asks for my ideas of God. I have many, gleaned from different religious beliefs that I am aware of, but don't share. "Yahweh" is one, and my ideas of this god came from reading the Bible. I agree that "material things" would still exist even if there were no one to perceive them; the point is that there could be no perception of them in the absence of animals with brains. It is therefore valid to say that ideas emanate from the brain, though they are, of course, conditioned by experience.

THE MARY CELESTE

I noticed two letters in THE FREETHINKER (23/11/62) on Mr. Ridley's article, "The Mary Celeste". Both he and Mr. Henstridge appear to be wrong. The matter has been cleared up in Robert Furneaux's book, *Myth and Mystery*, published by Allen Wingate, 1955.

Incidentally, the same writer has written a chapter on the Dead Sea Scrolls in a further book, *Legend and Reality* by the same publisher, 1957, which supports the freethought idea.

R. L. KENNING.

TWO MORE CRITICISMS

In his article "Atheism—its Nature and Value" (16/11/62) Mr. G. L. Simons says: "Atheism holds that humanity is important above all else, and is not prepared to sacrifice human happiness for some undetectable cosmic principle".

I am sorry to see that Mr. Simons, like many other European Atheists, Freethinkers and particularly Communists, has inherited from Christianity that horrible man-centred dogma which says that all other animals, plants, etc., were made entirely for man's benefit, to feed and clothe him.

Ernest Haeckel in *The Riddle of the Universe* condemns this anthropocentric dogma, and points out that it is the cause of so much cruelty to other animals. True compassion has no limits, but must pour out to all living creatures. If I help a human being it is not because he is a human being but because he is a living creature. Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, are life-centred philosophies. Christianity, Islam and Judaism are man-centred creeds.

RAYMOND POEL.

Like many abstract nouns the word "atheism" almost defies definition but the word "religion" is equally meaningless. Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary gets away easily with "atheism", taking less than one line to say "disbelief in the existence of a god". "Religion" requires six lines starting with "belief in, recognition of, or an awakened sense of, a higher unseen controlling power or powers, with the emotion and morality connected therewith". Count the abstract nouns that have had to be used in this definition which makes no mention of "god".

G. L. SIMONS (THE FREETHINKER, 16/11/62), tries to tell us of the Nature and Value of Atheism but what can he mean by "Atheism values beauty, love and knowledge"? Surely it is simpler to define atheism as the attribute of an atheist and then formulate a definition of atheist—a concrete noun.

A reasoning human being is implied; one cannot be an atheist from birth although this is sometimes claimed. The atheist rejects the theory that there is any higher unseen controlling power or powers just as he might reject any other theory which relies on false or misinterpreted evidence.

CONSTANCE N. AIREY.

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