

The Freethinker

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IT HAS OFTEN been noted by perspicacious literary critics that successive forms of literature emerge from different phases of human society. Successive social phases impress themselves upon the consciousness of mankind and then become, as it were, reincarnated in appropriate literary form. Thus, Greek tragedy, certainly one of the most majestic of literary creations, originally emanated from the ritual dances celebrated in honour of the Greek (originally Thracian) god Dionysus (the Roman Bacchus). Similarly, the rise of individualism in the Renaissance after the collectivist society of the Middle Ages, was soon followed by the rise of the novel, the study of human personalities in their intimate relationships, often of an amatory character. In a rather similar fashion, the 20th century has evolved a new literary genre with which to express the most sensational of its present technical achievements, the exploration—presaging presumably the eventual conquest—of outer space, science fiction.

Pre-Scientific Science Fiction

Proverbially, coming events cast their shadows before them. This proverb is easily demonstrable in and from the evolution of science fiction. For long before the first balloon took off from the ground (1781), imaginative writers had submitted various ingenious ways of crossing the then impassable gulfs of outer space in order to visit our nearest planetary neighbours in space. Perhaps the earliest, and certainly the earliest surviving specimen was *The True History*, by Lucian of Samosata (2nd century AD). Naturally Lucian's hero's interplanetary techniques would not have satisfied the exacting requirements of the modern Russian or American laboratory tests: actually he ascended to the moon on a dynamic water spout—an ingenious anticipation of modern rocket propulsion!

However, once upon our satellite, Lucian's story has quite a modern touch. In fact it might well have been compiled by a modern satirist with pronounced left-wing tendencies, for the lunar visitor arrives in the middle of a furious interplanetary conflict, an imperialist war fought between the King of the Sun and the King of the Moon over their respective claims to the planet Venus. (Let us hope that this account is not prophetic of more terrestrial interplanetary conflicts in the future!) Lucian's pioneer essay appears to have inspired successors in antiquity whose work has not survived. He had also one theological predecessor, for one recalls, for example, that curious essay of Plutarch *On the Face of the Man in the Moon* (c 100 AD), a curious combination of science fiction and Pagan theology.

Plutarch, who was a priest at the famous shrine of Apollo at Delphi, makes the moon the abode of demons. Rather incongruously, the details which he gives of the moon's barren landscape are actually surprisingly accurate: "rent with caves, mountains and gaunt ravines", by no means a bad description of our satellite even if the face of the man in the moon was not really quite

so diabolical as the old Pagan theologian supposed.

Renaissance Science Fiction

The Christian Middle Ages do not appear to have been interested in this particular department of fiction. Had not the holy Ambrose of Milan (4th century) gone on record with the notable comment that the motions of the heavenly bodies are of no significance to our salvation? In any case, the Church had already an interstellar air-service provided gratis by the Deity. But the Renaissance which witnessed the epoch-making discoveries and speculations of Copernicus, Bruno and Galileo, produced a crop of science fiction that ranged from Cyrano de Bergerac's *Journey to the Sun and Moon*, to Jonathan Swift's *Voyage to Laputa*, the third and greatest of *Gulliver's Travels*, to the flying island where scientists occupy themselves with exacting sunbeams from cucumbers and where they also speculate (with surprising accuracy) about the planet Mars. (Swift's imaginary Laputa astronomers actually discovered the two moons of Mars a century and a half before they were first seen through the telescope.)

The First English Science Fiction

Of less scientific and literary interest but of today a perhaps even greater topical interest is an earlier story of lunar travel by an ancestor of Dean Swift, like his great grand son a dignitary of the Church of England, Francis Godwin (1562-1633) Bishop of Hereford, a learned ecclesiastical author but according to a contemporary "a great Simoniac", whose main interest in life appears to have been enriching his children with as much ecclesiastical preferment as he could. However, like his Pagan predecessor, Plutarch, he found time from his devotions (and depredations) to turn his attention to other worlds than this one. For he deserves at least a modest niche in the annals of English literature as the author of the first science fiction story in the English language.

A Lunar Goose Chase

For in 1638, five years after the death of its author, there appeared *The Man in the Moone*, a tale of lunar travel, with a frontispiece depicting the man ascending in a kind of basket drawn by wild geese or ganzas as the lunar explorer himself described them. The first man in the moon was not (alas) an Englishman, but a Spaniard, a worthy countryman of Don Quixote, who after sundry terrestrial adventures divertingly described, made his daring wild-geese chase to the moon between 1599 and 1601, about which date at the end of the reign of Elizabeth I, internal evidence suggests that this posthumous work was actually written by one Senor Don Domingo Gonsales of Seville.

Actually Godwin's pioneer story of lunar exploration (which was republished by the *Hereford Times* in 1959, 5s.) combines rather incongruously, the literary characteristics of a rattling good yarn about Gonsales's terrestrial adventures as a castaway on St. Helena, where he tamed his wild geese and taught them to fly, and in Teneriffe, where his ship was sunk and he himself nearly captured by

IEWS and OPINIONS

The First English Science Fiction

By F. A. RIDLEY

English pirates, with a brief and extremely dull account of the lunar Utopia. As soon as Godwin's intrepid Spanish hero actually gets to the moon, the author's imagination flags, as almost invariably seems to happen with utopias (the only one that I have ever been able to read without sleeping, was William Morris's charming idyll of the far future, *News from Nowhere*).

The Lunar Scene

When Gonsales gets to the moon, he finds everything on a scale that our German friends would term *kolossal*. Twenty-seven feet is the standard height of the lunar inhabitants, their houses are as high as St. Paul's Cathedral, while their sanctimonious attitude is colossal. The whole lunar scene is enveloped in a dullness which has no counterpart upon earth, and we are highly relieved when Senor Gonsales takes off for earth again. However, the lunar monarch does not forget to send a present to Queen Elizabeth of England—a courtier-like gesture on Godwin's part. He arrives safely in China where, after some rather improbable adventures, much less realistically related than his pre-lunar ones, he is taken care of by a benevolent mandarin, and the story ends with the first man in the moon about to return to Spain with the aid of the Jesuit missionaries, then very influential in China. (It was incidentally these holy fathers who gave to the national sage of China, Kong-Fu-Tsu, the Latinised name of Confucius by which he is now known to the West.) No doubt

Gonsales informed his most Catholic monarch that there was much lunar loot to be enjoyed and souls to be saved in the moon by a Spanish lunar armada presumably transported by wild geese, with the Spanish Inquisition in full flight! However, Gonsales's lunar trip is deadily dull despite demons whom Godwin (perhaps imitating Plutarch) introduces *en route*.

Godwin and Copernicus

Humanistic readers will however, perhaps be interested in the Copernican speculations introduced by the author on the outward trip to our satellite. Here, Dr. Godwin, a contemporary of Galileo, professes a cautious acceptance of Copernican astronomy which cannot have been common amongst Anglican bishops, though it is true the Church of England never appears to have officially condemned the Copernican astronomy. Assuming the date of Godwin's story to have been around 1600, Galileo had not then telescopically demonstrated the truth of the Copernican astronomy, which makes our aeronautic Copernican speculations all the more remarkable. Bishops who shared the views of Bruno (who was burned in 1600) cannot, one assumes, have been very common in the early 17th century.

As a work of imaginative literature, *The Man in the Moone* is good in parts, but it has considerable topical and even scientific interest as the first anticipation in English literature of our own dawning era of interplanetary communications.

What Humanism is About

By MARGARET McILROY

What Humanism is About by Kit Mouat (Barrie and Rockliff, 16s.) is an excellent explanation of Humanist philosophy, and deserves the widest possible circulation. It will be particularly helpful to the many people who are rather ashamed of their unbelief, and feel themselves somehow inferior to those who naively accept Christianity. Reading this book should give such people a new confidence and pride, for it clearly shows Humanism to be morally, as well as intellectually superior to Christianity.

Mrs. Mouat shows the lack of historical evidence for the miraculous birth and the resurrection of Jesus, and goes on to demonstrate the weakness of the philosophical arguments for the existence of any god. She deals devastatingly with a claim so often repeated by Christians that many non-Christians actually believe it—the claim that all the virtues are in some way derived from Christianity, and that without religion men would behave like brutes. It is not true, Mrs. Mouat explains, that kindness and conscience are developed from the idea of God—they have developed from the relationship between mother and child, and their basis is biology, not religion. In fact most of the cruelties and most inhuman actions ever recorded in history have been done in the name of religion. She shows the monstrous and degrading immorality of the idea of Hell, to which most Christians have traditionally consigned the majority of their fellow-men. "It is," she says, "fair to ask how those who have been taught to practise compassion and service to the unfortunate in this life can be content to sit back in Heaven enjoying the rewards of their own virtue and good luck while the unrepentant suffer eternal torment".

Mrs. Mouat discusses briefly all the great social problems of our time, giving a Humanist solution to many of them, and showing how religious prejudice often prevents a solution. Particularly striking is her chapter on abortion. She quotes the horrifying estimate of a minimum of 50,000

illegal abortions annually in Britain, and writes movingly of the misery of girls driven by fear to back-street abortionists. However much one may think abortion should be discouraged, we should consider very seriously the actual results of our present law, which clearly fails to prevent abortions, while it ensures that they are carried out under conditions which gravely endanger health and life.

At several points Mrs. Mouat's argument would be greatly strengthened by a consideration of economic interests, as well as religious ones, as a bar to progress. Interesting as her analysis of the connection between racialism and Calvinism in South Africa is, one cannot understand South Africa without being aware of the importance of the desire to exploit Africans as cheap labour. Similarly a discussion of peace which never even mentions the powerful interests involved in the armaments industry, or in the maintenance of special privileges in colonial countries cannot get to grips with the problem. I would be the last to underestimate the role of Vatican fanatics in opposing peaceful co-existence, but the fanatics who succeed in doing real damage are the ones who have economic interests behind them.

Many people may disagree with Mrs. Mouat's view of Jesus. While rejecting all the miraculous elements, she seems to accept the remainder of the Gospels as being a reasonably accurate account of his life and teachings.

However, when every point of criticism has been made, *What Humanism is About* is a book from which every reader should benefit, and it will give a new view of life to many.

BLANK IT OUT!

... Nevertheless I should be happy if you would blank out in my copies all reference to Mark Twain's hideous, blasphemous and satanic writings.

—Letter to *Life* from A. Crane, Pensby, England.

Logic and Religion

By G. L. SIMONS

TODAY IT IS OFTEN recognised that reason is hostile to faith, that the ways of logic and science are opposed to the ways of intuition and revelation, and that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a man to embrace both a rational philosophy and a religious one. When reason points away from the beliefs of the religious person we are accustomed to hearing him say (perhaps with a note of regret), "Well, so much the worse for reason". But it is important to realise that, considered historically, this is a very recent attitude.

For until the spread of rational thought, it was widely believed that all the central dogmas of orthodox religion could be established by reason. Aquinas believed that God's existence could be proved; and he evolved a philosophical system upon which the ideology of Catholicism was to be founded. Until the Reformation it was universally believed in Christendom (by those who studied such things) that the existence of God, free will, an after-life, the occurrence of the Fall, the resurrection of Jesus, the virginity of Mary, etc., could be proved by logical argument either *a priori* (using pure reason) or *a posteriori* (using empirical evidence). But after the Reformation the Protestants were less confident, and for the first time the notion of revelation was elevated to a pre-eminent position. The classical "proofs" for God's existence were beginning to fall into disrepute, and to maintain its position the Church had either to acknowledge the trends in contemporary thought and state that they were of little consequence, or to ignore them altogether. The first technique was the way of the Protestants, the second the way of the Catholics. And today the position is very similar. Protestant theologians seem to rely much on revelation, on God's personal communication with favoured human beings. Catholics (although pointing to their own examples of revelation and "miracles") appear to rely much more on reason, *as they define it*. Thus Catholic theologians still believe in arguments which were thought before the time of Christ to prove God's existence.

The progress of philosophy has passed them by. So long as God was metaphysically secure, theologians were willing to philosophise and (to some extent) to follow current trends. However as soon as logic and philosophy began to outgrow theology, the theologians averted their ecclesiastical eyes and looked elsewhere—to the Middle Ages when the Church was undeniably philosophically supreme—a state of affairs which the Church ensured by a monopoly of education. Hence modern Catholic theologians are not really modern at all. They still mentally exist in the Middle Ages, ignoring contemporary trends in modern logic, hankering after the pious days when the logic of Aristotle and the philosophy of Aquinas were unhesitatingly revered by all and sundry.

For the Church this is a sad situation. For whether churchmen like it or not intellectual progress *has* been made since the time of Abelard, Duns Scotus and William of Occam, and when theologians ignore this they merely underline the affection they feel for the doctrinaire days when the Church selected those it thought worthy of indoctrination, and brainwashed them into a state of mind where independent thoughts were heresy.

But despite the indifference of the theologians, the importance of logic in the history of thought cannot be denied. For the history of logic is almost synonymous with the history of philosophy, and there is a clear sense

in which the great philosophers were rationalists. Parmenides and Socrates were concerned with the logic of meaning, Plato with the logic of perception, Aristotle with the logic of relations, Chrysippus with the logic of propositions. Even Aquinas was essentially a logician, formulating arguments which not only "proved" God's existence, but also ones which "proved" that God could never know human beings. (This latter type of argument is not mentioned much by Catholics.) Bacon started to formulate the philosophy of science which Aristotle had instigated. Locke opposed the notion of "innate" ideas, and developed an empiricism of lasting influence. Berkeley improved the logic of Locke, but was forced to posit God to explain why things endured even when unperceived by human beings. David Hume developed the philosophy of Berkeley to its logical conclusion and by so doing, revealed its essential emptiness.

From Berkeley's premises it followed that no one could justifiably believe in another human mind much less the mind of God. Hume (immaculately and brilliantly) showed the fallacies in the theological argument from Design for God's existence which even today is believed by pious Catholics. Immanuel Kant, inspired by Hume, investigated the nature of reason, and (less immaculately than Hume but equally brilliantly) showed the fallacies in the First Cause argument and the Ontological argument for God's existence. Spinoza tried to give ethics the formal properties of geometry, and Leibniz prepared the way for a new and more rigorous form of logic. After Peano and Frege had shown how logic and arithmetic were related, the scene was set for the monumental work of Russell and Whitehead in attempting to show that the whole of higher mathematics can be deduced from the axioms of pure logic.

At last the nature of significant propositions had been clearly shown. Propositions were either formal (true or false by definition, and empty of worldly content), or empirical (more or less probable, and susceptible of scientific investigation). Modern empiricism (although far from perfect) and a logical technique which has acquired the rigour of mathematics, have thrust theology unceremoniously into a backwater.

Thus Christian philosophers (such still exist) are in a sorry state. For they have either to maintain with the Catholics that the classical "proofs" of God's existence, despite the destructive criticism of Hume, Kant, Russell, Moore, Ayer, Carnap, and a hundred others, are still intact, or have to state with the Protestants that reason has limitations (which no one denies) and that revelation is the chief reason why belief in God is justified. Thus the Catholic theologian is eternally committed to the sorrowful task of trying vainly to patch up arguments which were invalidated a century ago. And the Protestant has to be content with the conclusion that he has no more reason to believe in God than the lunatic has to believe he is Napoleon.

Today the climate of thought is hostile to religion. The difficulties in maintaining an intellectual religious philosophy have never been more apparent. Even thinkers who are sympathetic to religion seem to spend all their time trying to give such concepts as God, Divine Grace, soul and the like, a meaning which is capable of surviving a critical analysis. Thus it appears difficult to give religious

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Now that the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead has retired from active ministry, he has made it quite clear that he no longer believes in the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, and the Hell to which Jesus was always consigning unbelievers. Dr. Weatherhead bluntly said so in the *Daily Mail*. The reply was an avalanche of letters from angry ladies and gentlemen, champions of God's Precious Word, and horrified that in this year of grace 1963 there could be found anyone anywhere who had the audacity to disbelieve anything whatever in that Holy Work.

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One pious Christian gentleman can speak for them all: he is a Mr. L. G. Pine who said that he, for one, did "not intend to be in any sort of church with those who, like Dr. Weatherhead, deny or cast doubt upon fundamental Christian doctrines". We congratulate Mr. Pine on this magnificent display of Christian love and tolerance. He must be heartbroken that the Hell of Jesus is not just round the corner.

★

In the meantime we have the London "Evening News" the other day telling us about the footprints discovered in quarrying operations in the Purbeck Hills—footprints made by two dinosaurs 120,000,000 years ago. These footprints may be even older by 50,000,000 years, and made by flesh-eating megalosaurus. What a pity that Mr. Pine and his angry Christian friends are not asked to reconcile these figures with the one Revelation given us from God himself—4004 BC. Surely the Lord hasn't made a mistake?

★

While "our Lord" complained of being so poor that often he had nowhere to lay his head, the Church he founded recently concluded a wonderful financial deal, netting what the *Daily Mail* (January 30th) calls a "£4m. selling spree". In two and a half hours, "the Church Commissioners realised a record £4,671,000 . . . for properties" in Park Lane, Kingsway, and other places, with the auctioneer begging buyers not to waste his time by offering "hundreds". Whether crime does or does not pay, religion certainly does, and all in the name of Jesus, "the despised and rejected of men". We cannot help wondering whether the buyers and sellers even thought of him, let alone worshipped him!

★

At last we have been told—in the "Sunday Pictorial" (December 30th, 1962) how "faith-healing" really does work. Norman Price quotes Dr. Alexis Carrel saying that he saw "a cancerous sore shrivel into a scar" just by an "earnest prayer". Thus, Dr. Carrel was convinced, "prayer is the most powerful form of energy we know". It is therefore not Jesus, the greatest Faith-Healer the world has known, but "a form of energy", that is, "an intense brain wave, a thought wave, a soul wave" which "reshapes the pattern of sick body cells" which do the trick of curing incurable ailments. Personally, we object to the shelving of "our Lord" in this way, and we ask Mr. Price the very pertinent question—does Jesus faith-heal or not? Has he never had a cure?

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All the same, you can't keep Jesus out of the news. At one time it was considered the height of blasphemy to show him on the stage or in films, but a play called *Christ '62* produced the other day in Rome angered the Vatican, and had to be taken off. In it, Jesus and St. John "cursed each other obscenely". Mary "showed her thighs doing a strip tease", and the disciples "held frequent fist-fights

and took off their clothes". The producer, Carlo Bene, is very hurt. He "wanted the utmost realism" (*Daily Mail*, January 7th) and can't understand, "why the fuss? But we can."

French Educational Gatherings

THE FRENCH Educational League and its Central Office for International Cultural Co-operation (3 rue Recamier, Paris 7e), is organising international meetings of educators and young people at Aix-en-Provence and at Nice this summer. There will be lectures and discussions, excursions to places of interest and visits to theatres and music festivals, and a reasonable knowledge of the French language will be required. Fees are reasonable and the dates of the meetings are as follows: Aix-en-Provence—Young People's Meeting from July 13th to 25th; Educators' Meeting, July 27th to August 8th; Nice—Young People's Meeting, July 8th to 20th; Educators' Meeting, July 22nd to August 3rd. Application forms are obtained direct from the Central Office.

Though by no means all the League's membership of nearly 3 million are Humanists, the leadership represents the best tradition of French rationalism and is particularly anxious to improve liaison with British Humanists in the present period of deterioration in Anglo-French political relations generally.

G.E.A.

LOGIC AND RELIGION

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notions a meaning, much less to establish that they are true. An example of these difficulties is the use of the word "God". It appears to be used as if it has the properties of a proper name, like "John" or "Jean". But what individual does it denote? And how can attributes be assigned to an imperceptible being even granted that such a being is imaginable?

For a time, in its infancy, logic has served those who wish to rationalise their prejudices. Aquinas believed in God before he discovered rational arguments to justify his belief. But such days are past. Today logic is a vital tool in modern thought. But as it grows in stature its own shortcomings become more apparent, causing its adherents to develop that rational scepticism, the antidote to dogma which is so necessary in the modern world. Thus logic not only provides a way of searching for truth—a superior way to any other yet discovered by man—but also has a moral significance, destroying arrogance and bigotry, fostering tolerance and understanding.

Religious thought represents the infancy of human inquiry; children believe that the universe revolves around them, has been designed for their special convenience. Logic and science represent the adolescence of human inquiry; healthy young minds begin to awaken and to be impatient of authoritarian shackles.

THIS SATURDAY
March 2nd
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
57th ANNUAL DINNER

AND DANCE

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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. 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

Chelsea College Catholic Society (Manresa Road, London, S.W.3), Tuesday, March 5th, 5.30 p.m.: DEBATE, "Is There a God?", FATHER J. CORBISHLEY, SJ, and COLIN MCCALL (NSS).
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, March 5th, 7.30 p.m.: R. H. M. MAKARIAN, M.A., "Esperanto".
Homechurch Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, corner Gubbin's Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, March 5th, 7.45 p.m.: MISS JEAN MORRIS, "A Writer's View of Historical Creeds".
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, March 3rd, 6.30 p.m.: PHILIP HUGHES, BA, "Moral Facts and Religion".
Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, March 3rd, 7.30 p.m.: R. W. MORRELL, "Religion and the State".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, March 3rd, 11 a.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, MA, "Despotisms Old and New".

Notes and News

It is surely an indication of the decrepitude of Christianity that the *Daily Herald* (18/2/63) should feel it necessary to explain that Lent is "40 days during which people give up some form of pleasure in memory of Christ's period in the wilderness". It seems that an Essex rector, the Rev. William Winfield, had asked his parishioners to give up watching television during Lent, but "Many of his parishioners are against it. They are asking: Is it right that TV should be a Lent sacrifice?" We can't answer that one, but somehow we don't think the TV companies have anything to fear.

★

INDIFFERENCE is the rule in another country with a State Church, Sweden, where churchgoers are "a small minority of the population" (*The Guardian*, 20/2/63). This despite the admission of women to the ministry—Mrs. Barbro Sahl, the fifth to be ordained, being described as "turbulently attractive". The decision to admit women, which was taken in 1960, was "pressed—some would say, forced"—on the Lutheran Church by Parliament.

★

THE BISHOPS of the Church of England were responsible for defeating a motion by Dr. E. G. M. Fletcher, MP, to

restrict the reporting of immorality cases in ecclesiastical courts at the Church Assembly at Westminster on February 19th. Dr. Fletcher had obtained leave in the last session of Parliament to move a measure on these lines and wanted an expression of opinion from the Church Assembly. In the House of Bishops the voting was 9 for and 11 against, in the House of Clergy, 164 for and 34 against; and in the House of Laity, 96 for and 92 against. The motion had to be carried in all three houses and it was lost in the House of Bishops.

★

FROM THE beginning of the 1963 school year there was to be no more religious instruction by teachers in the primary and secondary schools of New South Wales. Mr. E. Wetherell, the New South Wales Minister of Education made this announcement despite a request by Dr. H. R. Gough, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, that Christian teaching should be made a compulsory item in the syllabus of State schools. Before 1959 all religious instruction in schools was given by visiting clergymen and this practice is being reverted to.

★

DEPTFORD (Kent) Town Hall was recently the scene of what the *Kentish Mercury* (25/1/63) described as "a bitter religious quarrel". A local Baptist minister and a group of young people "wrecked" a meeting addressed by a French Roman Catholic priest, the Abbé Dolbeau, by protesting and hurling "provocative questions", while the Protestant Truth Society distributed 25,000 leaflets urging a boycott of a Roman Catholic Mass arranged by the Council of Churches. "Surely they do not expect a Catholic priest to attend a Protestant service just because he is in England", a lady wrote about the Protestant Truth Society (25/1/63), to which the Society responded (1/2/63): "Then why were we thought intolerant because we said that a Protestant should not be expected to attend Mass?"

★

ANOTHER INSTANCE of Christian unco-operativeness was reported by the *Daily Herald* (19/2/63). A Church of England vicar, Mr. Llewellyn George "banned Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses from helping with his Good Samaritan movement at Lillington, Warwickshire, which provides sick visitors and helpers for old people and baby sitters for married couples". Mormons and Witnesses "are not to be trusted", said Mr. George. "We have no room for anyone indoctrinated with their false beliefs". "We agree with Mr. George only on his views about Mormons", said a Jehovah's Witnesses spokesman.

★

THE REV. Gunther Helft, the Bishop of Oxford's youth officer wanted young motor cyclists to be clear that a proposed blessing at the diocesan youth festival in High Wycombe on June 8th, would not cast "a magic spell which will enable them to do the ton-up with impunity . . ." (*The Guardian*, 20/2/63). Rather, that "they are making an acknowledgment before God that they must handle these potentially lethal weapons with care".

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"WE ARE all happy people. Ours is a happy religion." So says Simon Cameron, 31-year-old furniture salesman, who leads a new religious sect that he calls "The Love Family" at the Zion Tabernacle in Peterhead (Aberdeenshire). The accent is on love, says Mr. Cameron, who "embraces and kisses every member of his congregation when he greets them at the door of Zion Tabernacle every week" (*Sunday Mail*, 17/2/63), and then "leads them all—to the accompaniment of three accordians—in the 'Glory Dance' which goes on almost non-stop from mid-afternoon".

Humanists and Sex Morals

By DENIS COBELL

IN THIS ARTICLE I wish to discuss the position adopted by many humanists in connection with sex morals. Policy statements of the humanist organisations have only dealt in general terms with the problems posed and there is a variety of differences among the members contained in them. However, most humanists have thought that British society is still knit too closely to a society founded in medieval times, in its attitude to sexual behaviour. This is clearly reflected in prejudiced, and therefore, anti-free thought. Bertrand Russell stated the position succinctly when he wrote: "Sex, more than any other element in human life, is still viewed by many, perhaps by most, in an irrational way. Homicide, pestilence, insanity, gold and precious stones—all the things, in fact, that are the objects of passionate hopes or fears—have been seen, in the past, through a mist of magic or mythology; but the sun of reason has now dispelled the mist, except here and there. The densest cloud that remains is in the territory of sex".

The enslavement of women, that has existed concurrently with the Christian patriarchal society, and which free-thinkers have been foremost in the fight against, has been responsible for the feeling "that men came to desire virginity in their brides. Where the matrilineal society exists young women sow their wild oats as freely as young men", *Marriage and Morals*, B. Russell, 1929). The idea that in love a woman "gives" her body has been fostered in Christian civilisations (Eph. 5, 22) but is contrary to the objectives of sexual equality; as D. H. Lawrence saw it, "In love all things unite in the oneness of joy and praise".

Paradoxically, and contrary to the thought of other humanists which I shall quote later, it is a little surprising to find G. I. Bennett displaying his idiosyncrasies about this subject, which he is imprudent enough to label "free-thinking", as he has done in criticising an article I wrote in this journal a few weeks ago. My article supported the idea that charity was more virtuous than chastity, as expressed by Professor Carstairs in his recent BBC lectures; incidentally, in a broadcast comment on these lectures on January 24th, Peter Laslett the Cambridge historian, thinks that teenage sexuality has more to do with a lowering in age of puberty onset (for girls: four years in the past three centuries) than with a lack of restraint.

The acceptance of complexity within our society, and simplicity in primitive races, is thought to deny the useful analogies that Professor Carstairs drew from them. In the broadcast already mentioned, Peter Laslett also made this error when he stated that too much importance had been placed upon the field work of Margaret Mead and others among South Sea Islanders; however, he admitted that this remark was outside the historian's scope. I think this view is admirably refuted by Ernest Jones in an essay, "Psycho-analysis and Anthropology": "Few anthropologists today would expect savages to be primarily concerned with ethical abstractions . . . Those who used to imagine this did not recognise the more lowly nature and origin of their own interests. The primitive interests of mankind lie nearer home, in his own breast, and that must be as true of the savage as psycho-analysis has shown it to be of ourselves." (*Essays in Applied Psycho-analysis*, Vol. II, 1951.)

Professor Carstairs's lecture suggested that a loosening of many hypocritical Victorian conventions may be to the advantage of us all. F. H. A. Micklewright, a prominent

humanist, has pointed out: "Whilst the Victorian found his hidden outlets in prostitution, the brothel or the far from unknown homosexuality catered for in large towns, he kept up an outward facade of silence with regard to the whole sexual pattern" (*South Place Ethical Society, Monthly Record*, October, 1959). Another humanist who has deprecated the contemporary attitude, and is an advocate of progressive feeling towards sex morals, is J. B. Coates, who devoted a special appendix of his book *A Challenge to Christianity* to its consideration. Mr. Coates has also aligned his thoughts with those of Middleton Murry, whom he purports believed: "The gospel of love is as applicable to the man-woman relationship as to any other personal relationship, so that there is no reason why sexual love should not express the Christian spirit. It is similarly a perversion of Christ's teaching to hold that he regarded marriage as indissoluble and prohibited divorce. Such conceptions are social conventions which have no relation to the inner life of personality and are thoroughly materialistic" (*Crisis of the Human Person*, J. B. Coates, 1949). Upon this interpretation of Christ's thought, it is less valid to state that sexual freedom is anti-Christian, although orthodoxy prohibits such toleration. Moreover, the Protestant theologian Emil Brunner, has declared that he is grateful to secularists for helping to educate public opinion towards the acceptance of virginity and celibacy as false aims of earlier Christian eras.

Contemporary humanists are not the forerunners of liberal views on sex behaviour. Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant were tried before Justice Cockburn in 1877 for the publication, in England in 1858, of a book entitled *Fruits of Philosophy: an essay on the Population Question* by C. Knowlton, M.D., of America. The book had been banned because it contained advice on birth control and emphasised that pleasure, as well as procreation, should be the result of coitus. Surely, the reason for banning such a book lies in the fact that a knowledge of birth control methods may encourage pre-marital and extra-marital relations without the worry of pregnancy. It would be wrong to confuse the aims of family planners with prosciucuity, but those who advocate birth control cannot be so naive as to fail to recognise the inevitability of their actions. It is interesting to note that freethinkers have recently battled for freedom to advertise family planning in London's tubes almost a century after Bradlaugh's trial.

The opinions I have quoted do not deny the necessity for restraint; but surely, a refusal to accept them renders one outside the mainstream of humanist thought, as represented by many members of it!

[EDITOR'S NOTE: We regret that we cannot print the many letters received in connection with G. I. Bennett's "In Defence of Myself" (15/2/63). However, Denis Cobell's article above and D. H. Tribe's, which we hope to print next week would seem to cover most of the points raised.]

WITHOUT COMMENT

I am sending on this prayer for the benefit of those doing examinations in the coming months. It is a very great help and I will assure anyone who says it every day that he or she will get on very well in exams.

The prayer is to St. Joseph of Cupertino, who by your prayers, obtained from God to be asked at your examination, the only proposition you know, pray that I, like you, may succeed in the examination which lies before me. In return I promise to make you known and cause to be loved.—Amen." "Grateful Student."
—Sunday Review (Dublin), 10/2/63.

A Clerical Education Act

By A. M. van der GIEZEN
(Holland)

AFTER ITS EMANCIPATION by the revolution of 1795, Dutch Catholicism has slowly increased in power. A policy of leaning on different parties and playing them off against each other, plus a remarkable skill of organisation, has enabled it to profit fully from the considerable number of its adherents (30 to 40 per cent of the total population). And unlike the steadily crumbling Protestant Churches, the Roman Church has succeeded in holding its grip on its followers. Thanks to its practically absolute authority, rebels who do not want to leave the Church nearly always end by submitting themselves to its decisions. Holy Mother Church keeps her children under her wings during their whole life. She has organisations, paid for by the taxpayers, for all aspects of human life from the cradle to the gates of Paradise.

By her powerful, well disciplined organisations, superior to all others, the Church has her intellectuals and her hundreds of thousands of workmen well in hand. In this way she has become the principle guardian of the *status quo* in the eyes of all those, believers or not, who support it. The submission of the Catholics and the paralysing effect it has on the whole of the population allow the employers to pay low salaries, the lowest in Western Europe. The Church is rewarded for her services by a large influence in the educational and cultural sectors.

Her organising power is particularly efficacious in education. This office radiates its activities of every practical and theoretical nature over the whole country.

Catholic educational policy aims at the substitution for the already weakened liberal educational system of a Catholic-corporative one, and a severe limitation of knowledge under the pretext that pupils must not be overburdened. A medieval-inspired obscurantism, already being gradually enforced upon the schools, will eventually permeate education for all social classes.

In 1958 the Catholic Minister of Education deemed the time ripe to introduce a bill organising education for children, roughly speaking between 12 and 18 years, on a Catholic-corporative basis. He proposed four categories of schools, separated from each other like watertight compartments for the population divided in four classes. It is true, the first forms of all schools are named "bridge-classes" to create the illusion that they link the different categories, but that is not their function.

Originally, educational administration was intended to be handed over in the future to an educational corporation, wherein the Churches would play their part. But this was too much like fascism even for the docile Dutch Second Chamber. Now, the Act will contain no more than a vague and general scheme, which is later to be filled up by the government without parliamentary control.

No wonder that confessional education is to be privileged, and that non-confessional public (state and municipal) schools, placed in a very awkward position, are deemed to disappear in the end!

Not one teachers' union has ever been consulted in the preparation of this unbelievably backward construction. And when they presented their suggestions, they were not even listened to.

Public opinion in Holland is politically apathetic. Yet it had to be softened-up to accept these anachronistic ideas, which are likely to be found in Opus Dei-Spain, but not in a highly industrialised country in Western Europe. Four

years of patient and astute propaganda have only been partly successful in representing such medieval legislation as a masterpiece of democracy and progressiveness—as a starting-point for reform.

Protestant teachers' unions have opposed this characteristic Catholic bill to the end, their Catholic colleagues, fearing the reactionary results, did so for a time, but then suddenly became silent. Public secondary teachers were unanimously against, but public primary teachers, strongly influenced by the Labour Party, were in favour.

In parliament a majority of Catholics and Socialists supported the bill, but some Catholics probably, and many Socialists undoubtedly, against their conviction. Liberals and Communists were against without exception; Protestants partly. Liberals and Protestants are parties in office, but the government remains unshaken, because the governing parties are determined not to endanger the policy of low wages for labour and big profits for capital by an Education Act. The Socialist's attitude may be explained by their desire to enter into the government with Catholic aid.

Dutch clericalism, becoming more and more Catholic clericalism, is chiefly responsible for the decline of Dutch science in the past fifty years, and the gloomy outlook for Dutch economy as a consequence of steadily lowering intellectual standards. Now it has driven the country a step further on the road to obscurantism.

Religion and The Law

(A Statement by the National Council for Civil Liberties,
4 Camden High Street, London, N.W.1)

THOSE WITHOUT A RELIGION do not, legally, enjoy free speech. The 1698 Blasphemy Act, still on the Statute Book, makes it an offence to "by writing, printing, teaching or advised speaking, deny the Christian religion to be true, or the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be of divine authority". True, it is unlikely today that anybody would be prosecuted under this Act, but he could be; and contracts to let halls to secularist meetings could be voided. Those in the Navy are not only forbidden to express their own opinions on religious matters, but are enjoined to snoop on their colleagues. The Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions for the Government of Her Majesty's Naval Service, 1953, No. 1827, states: "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".

The implication that religious scepticism is somehow associated with immorality also finds its way into our law courts. Despite the Evidence Further Amendment Act of 1869 and Bradlaugh's Oaths Act of 1888, it is not unknown for chairmen of sessions and judges to warn juries against accepting the evidence of anyone who affirms instead of taking the oath, and even—as in the case of George Clark's major witness, Trevor Hatton, at London Sessions on November 8th, 1961—to refuse to allow him to give evidence at all. Though such conduct can be grounds for appeal (which in George Clark's case was successful), it leads one to wonder how often a bias of this sort, unexpressed and thus unknown, is in fact operating. At any rate, for one reason or another, police officers and other

officials of the law never themselves, in the experience of many observers, seem to exercise their right to affirm when giving evidence.

In their professional lives unbelievers suffer many disadvantages. In the field of social work, particularly in probation, youth and prison services, candidates are quizzed on their religious beliefs and observances, and are unlikely to be accepted if they frankly admit they have none. The 1944 Education Act lays down that the day is to start with "collective worship" and "undenominational" religious education is to be regularly given. It is, of course, possible for teachers to opt out of both, but such action creates illwill in staff rooms among those who must deputise during religious instruction periods. Furthermore, it is virtually certain that no teacher who is not prepared to attend and indeed conduct collective worship will be promoted to the position of head. Apart from these specific examples, there are many other public and private posts where information on the religion of the candidate is unjustifiably demanded.

In their family and social life unbelievers suffer similar discrimination. If they wish to adopt children, they will find it difficult. By the 1958 Adoption Act, natural parents or guardians have, in a form of consent to adoption, to accept the loss "permanently of my rights as a parent/guardian", but are able to specify the "religious persuasion in which the infant is proposed to be brought up". Parents of the specified belief must then be found. The practical result is that within one large denomination there is a preponderance of babies awaiting adoption over eligible applicants wanting to adopt them while among some other denominations and those of no religion, there is an excess of prospective adopters over babies available.

The BBC, which is supported by the licence fees of all, allows considerable time for religious broadcasts, but unbelievers enjoy no special radio programmes. When wishing to organise meeting places to satisfy social needs analogous to those met by churches, Humanists find that the absence of advantageous terms for acquiring land and of full taxation and rating exemption, such as are enjoyed by religious organisations, is a serious handicap. They cannot, should they wish, establish State-maintained voluntary schools; and though they have the right to withdraw a child from religious instruction in State schools, they are often unwilling to do so for fear that the child will be embarrassed or victimised.

This kind of discrimination is one which is less in the public eye, and little is therefore known of the results of the discrimination. We are endeavouring to obtain concrete information and examples in this field, and would be very grateful if all members and affiliated organisations could help us.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHRIST'S ICHOR

There are so many mythological accretions concerning Jesus, even at the time of the writing of the parts of the New Testament, that one might regard him as some sort of myth-magnet attracting all sorts of current pagan nonsense around his life. This process may have been due to an attempt to make him acceptable to the pagan gentiles with myths and rites similar to their religions; also at work may have been the usual convention whereby the triumphant king or god took on the titles of the conquered.

Mythological lore is often characterised by an economy of language in the attempt to translate some ancient story or event into a coded version by the use of meaningful symbols. Details and descriptions, not strictly relevant to a story but of literary beauty, find their way into novels but not usually into myths.

Because of all these factors then, one might be justified in a suspicious examination of even those innocent-sounding gospel

narrative details which are somewhat irrelevant to the whole story. The piercing of Christ's side while he was on the cross and the observed flow of some clear fluid from the wound is just one such example. Within the veins of the Greek gods was supposed to flow, not the usual red human type of blood but, instead, the divine blood vessels contained ichor, a clear ethereal fluid. Could it be that this rather medical episode on the cross was concocted in order to pander to the beliefs of certain pagan quarters so as to gain converts?

D. M. CHAPMAN.

THE BIG PARADE

When the highly-publicised Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church reconvenes in September the world will no doubt see another parade of deluded Protestant leaders flocking to Rome to fawn on the Pope and to swallow his "line" about Catholics being interested in unity with other Churches. Let no one be so foolish as to think that the Council has any thought of real unity with other Churches, but is concerned only with how to absorb Protestantism.

If these Protestant "observers" will route their return tickets through Spain they will see first-hand what Roman Catholicism really is and how it uses its power to destroy the freedom of others when it is in the majority. Some of the "observers" will be Masons or Orangemen. They will see their meeting places closed by government order and their fraternal brothers serving prison terms for the "crime" of being Masons or Orangemen. The "observers" will be shocked to learn that this campaign of terrorism and atrocities is carried on by the Franco dictatorship with the full knowledge and "blessing" of the Pope, who could stop it with *one word* if he had any desire to do so... but that *one word* has never been uttered.

With all the flattering publicity given it by the biggest collection of press agents the world has ever seen, it is doubtful if the Council will be anything but a gigantic public relations spectacle and colourful display of Roman pageantry to publicise the Roman Catholic Church. When the myth of "Papal Infallibility" was made the law of the Church in 1870, the last vestige of independence within the Roman Catholic Church disappeared. No decisions made by the Council will be valid unless ratified by the Pope, who also has the power to veto or nullify any of its decisions.

JACK ODOM (California).

UNDERPAID?

Britain's 24 prison chaplains, whose claim for a £3 10s. rise to £27 10s. a week has been turned down, are to protest to the Prison Commission.—*Daily Herald* (11/2/63).
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