

The Freethinker

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AT THE CORE of the Rolf Hochhüth's play *The Vicar* or *The Representative* are the questions: Was it possible, was it useful, was it necessary to resist National Socialism? And his denunciation of "the Vicar's" silence means at the same time an exoneration of millions of National Socialists. Pope Pius XII knew about the deportations, the concentration camps, the gas ovens, the mass executions. Individuals as well as groups had pressed him to speak a word for the Jews who were sent to death by millions. The Vicar decided not to speak. How then could any ordinary citizen, not knowing what was going on other than by rumours, be made responsible for not having resisted National Socialism when a man like the Vicar preferred to keep silent even while Italian Jews were being arrested and deported right from his doorsteps? The Jewish Professor Friedrich Torberg of Vienna, remarked at a discussion at the Bavarian Catholic Academy that Hochhüth is less pro-semitic than anti-papal. This, to a large extent, may explain the vivid interest and nationwide discussion Hochhüth's play has caused in Western Germany.

Anti-Catholic feelings were strong during the Third Reich, not against religion as such but against "the institution". The Third Reich itself was, no doubt, a replica of the Roman "institution". Himmler had one of the most complete libraries on Jesuitism, and the SS was drilled, kept, and activated along Jesuit lines. Now, in 1963, at one and the same time, Pius XII is accused for having been silent on mass deportation and asphyxiation of millions, and the overall support he gave to Hitler, while his successor to the throne of Peter, the bemourned John XXIII is praised in East and West for his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*.

The Concordat
Hitler would have stopped his Jewish persecution, says Hochhüth, once the Pope had said one word in public. It must be admitted that Pius XII helped thousands of western Jews with money and with falsified passes to escape abroad. He had hidden many in abodes and monasteries over months, but had nothing to risk when doing so. The ordinary German—and there were thousands who assisted Jews one way or other—risked their lives. Alternatively, Hochhüth says, the Pope should at least have withdrawn the concordat with the aid of which Hitler had gained international recognition. When the concordat was signed in July 1933, Hitler had remarked: "I am not interested in what this concordat contains, but it will guarantee an atmosphere of confidence which will be of high value in our fight against international Jewry".

All the characters introduced into Hochhüth's play are taken from life. The young Jesuit, Riccardo Fontana—his father a high dignitary at Rome—accompanies the Jews to Auschwitz and dies there as representative of "the Representative" after failing to persuade Pius to veto Hitler's "final solution" of the Jewish problem. This

character is taken from the dossier of a priest of St. Hedwig's Cathedral in Berlin, who went to Auschwitz on his own initiative. Never was any priest sent along, not even if he were a Jew who had been converted to Catholicism.

Gerstein, an active member of the Protestant Church succeeds in getting access to high SS circles and tries to act for the Jews from within. This figure, based on documents, is proof that *The Vicar* is not an anti-Christian play. Symptomatic is the way the Churches adapted themselves to the Third Reich.

The first act provides a very good survey of the overall situation about 1942

/43, but, like the whole play, is much too crammed with details to be ever fully staged. It introduces the alleged conflict—the private responsibility and/or public attitude of the Vicar. The second act brings the situation right to St. Peter's doorsteps. In the third act, the conflict increases—affliction: "The world knows what is going on. There is no question about it, and yet . . . nothing but silence—And the silence is kept by the Vicar of Rome . . ." (from an illegal Polish pamphlet, dated August 1943). A deportation scene of Jews from Rome, and the SS in conflict between Hitler and the Vicar lead to the crucial fourth act: Will the Vicar remain silent? Riccardo, trying in vain to get the word from Pius XII is ready to join the unhappy Jews, and share their fate at Auschwitz, where the sinister fifth act ends by accusing "the institution".

Documentary Support

Two hundred and twenty-seven pages of the drama itself, and 45 pages more documentary explanation. Very unusual, for a play. It is evidently the result of many years' study, and proves that there is sufficient documentary material to support the thesis, in spite of the Kremlin and the Vatican not giving access to their archives. Parts of these documents are given in the book (Rororo paperback, Rowohlt Publishers, Hamburg).

For twenty years the Church succeeded in tabooing any discussion on the subject. Now that this discussion has been opened, as much evidence as possible should be disclosed. It can only be hoped that many will read the book, more see the play on the stage, and that still more might be stimulated by what Hochhüth presents to dig deeper into the historical background between World War I and World War II.

Catholic Attack

Small wonder that Catholic circles lead the attack on Hochhüth and his play, with accusations of "insulting pamphlet", "falsification", "intrigues", "libel against the dead". Catholic papers and politicians declare Pope Pius XII's love for Germany and for all mankind. Cardinal Frings of Cologne: "misrepresentation both of the Vicar and the then historical situation" (*Kath. Kirchenzeitung*, Köln, March 10th, 1963); Dr. Hans Buchheim (Institute of Contemporary History, Munich): Hochhüth is "in-

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The German Play that Condemns Pius XII

By GERDA GUTTENBURG

correct. The Pope had no chance by open declaration in forcing Hitler to stop the final solution. There is no evidence that Hitler was the originator of the extermination of the Jews, no written document, hardly any witnesses . . ." (*Herder-Korrespondenz*, May 1963); Dr. Wilhelm Alff, another member of the Munich Institute: "Correct in details, but misinterpreted in the overall conception". To the last, Hochhüth responded: "There was no general conception. Alff is not in a position to present other documents from mine. He fully ignores Hitler's role in the Crusade against Bolshevism". (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 11th and 30th, 1963). Carl Amery, a "liberal" Catholic who cannot and will not deny Catholic assistance to the Third Reich makes "the milieu" responsible both in his contribution on Hochhüth's play in the weekly paper *Die Zeit* of March 15th, 1963, as in his latest publication, a Rororo paperback, *The Capitulation or Catholicism Today*, published May 1963. This is the attempt of a "modern" Catholic, who wants to save his religion from the accusation of having interfered in politics ever since World War I (too much evidence to be completely suppressed!), to blame the small bourgeois Catholic "milieu" in Germany for both the Hitler and the Adenauer eras.

17,000 Copies Sold

Hochhüth's play reminds me of Shaw's plays. You must first read them and then you'll fully enjoy them on the stage. This should be done with *The Vicar*. It will not be possible for any theatre to give the play in full. To a high degree it will depend on the director what will be shown on the stage. Piscator at Berlin skipped whole scenes without destroying the effect. True, there will be more stage performances abroad than in Western Germany during the months to come; too many clerics have heavy influence in cultural performances. But so far, since March, 17,000 printed copies have been sold. More will be demanded. There was a discussion on TV, and Church dignitaries remained as silent as Pius XII 20 years ago.

A Christian Drama

Hochhüth gives his play a sub-title, "A Christian Drama". And he was right to do so. There would hardly be any possibility of this play being produced, nor any nationwide discussion of it, if it were written by someone outside the Churches. Therefore, we Freethinkers must welcome this discussion on the "final solution". But at the same time we have to examine whether *The Vicar* is a help in appreciating the role the Christian religion has played in the history of the occident.

Hochhüth alleges three things that cannot be accepted without comment:

1. Neither the Vicar nor any other clergy hold anti-semitic feelings (p. 259).
2. The Pope must be considered a neutral (p. 273).
3. Can anyone be made responsible for anything in a mass society?

Anti-Semitism

When Pius XII died in 1958, the Paris Jewish paper, *L'Arche*, published an extremely bitter article, "Le Silence of Pie XII", contradictory to all other obituaries, and concluding that the anti-semitism from the Middle Ages had been one of the reasons of the Pope's silence. Rabi, the author, claimed that this could be proven from the attitude French clerics held with regard to the anti-Jewish laws of the Vichy Government. No bodily persecution was involved, but there was social discrimination in the name of justice. And the bishops based their attitude on St. Thomas Aquinas (p. 259).

The Catholic doctrine, according to a textbook published in Mainz in 1949, puts the soul before the body

when interpreting the fifth commandment. A war is just, if the good to be defended is greater than the risks. This interpretation underlies *Pacem in Terris*.

When more and more publications appeared on the Vatican's role during the Third Reich, Pius XII himself changed an Easter prayer and ordered the words "*perfidis judaeis*" to be omitted in future. Before the Eucharistic Congress at Munich in 1960, a special monthly as well as a book tried to prove the genuineness of the Shroud of Turin and said "The Jews are no longer guilty of having killed Jesus Christ! Not '*tradidit spiritum*', but '*emisit spiritum*'". In 1963 at Easter Service at St. Peter's, John XXIII stopped the service because the above mentioned prayer had been given, by chance or on purpose, in the old form!

Cardinal Defends Third Reich

In 1963 Cardinal Faulhaber delivered five sermons during December until New Year, defending the holy books of the Old Testament. Three times he even lauded the Third Reich, but distinguished sharply between the Jews before Christ as bearers of the Revelation, and those later who had forfeited their status by not following Jesus. The Old Testament was based on relation of blood, the New based on relation of belief; the New had taken everything worthwhile from the Old and so represented the fulfilment of the Old. Professor H. R. Trevor-Roper clearly pointed out that Himmler could be compared with Bellarmine. Sensitive in their personal feelings, neither hesitated to send people to death—into a better life at their own good and grace. (*The Last Days of Hitler*.)

Could the Pope be neutral? All he could do with regard to the Jews, still held responsible for Christ's death and anew for the success of the Russian Revolution and the rise of the anti-Christ in the 19th and 20th century, was to remain silent.

Private Bill on Sterilisation Veto

MR. WILLIAM HAMILTON, Labour MP for West Fife, has announced that he will bring a Private Members Bill before the House of Commons to end a husband's right to veto a sterilisation operation for his wife. In a case cited by the *Sunday Citizen* (7/7/63), a woman had eight children and was told by doctors that it might be fatal if she had another. They recommended a sterilisation operation, but the husband refused to give his consent, which is necessary in law, and now the woman was pregnant again.

Mr. Hamilton knows that he will have to face Christian—and especially Catholic—opposition, but he has declared: "I don't care what the religious organisations think of my Bill. This is a humanist measure and I shall press on regardless". A spokesman at Westminster Cathedral has already sounded the alarm against "the widespread adoption of sterilisation", while the Marriage Guidance Council has reacted in a typically timid way. "It sounds dangerous to me", said an official. "A woman shouldn't take drastic steps her husband doesn't agree with". As if drastic steps aren't necessary in face of possible death! Sanity, as expected, from the Abortion Law Reform Association, which welcomed Mr. Hamilton's move as an improvement on "the sad situation which exists at the moment".

WITHOUT COMMENT

The father of a two-year-old girl who is awaiting a hole in the heart operation at the Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, said last night that he would not permit a blood transfusion during the operation "even if it was a matter of life or death". He is Mr. John Acquah, a Jehovah's Witness.—*Daily Telegraph* (9/7/63).

Hobbes and his Critics

By COLIN McCALL

WAS THOMAS HOBBS an atheist? It is an intriguing if insoluble question. His opponents arraigned him as such, but he just as strenuously denied it. In the seventeenth century, of course, the term was used loosely, at times indiscriminately, often abusively. Over a century later it was used abusively—and falsely—against Thomas Paine. Certainly Hobbes was a materialist. God then, had to be material. He was the First Cause, omnipotent. But when men "dispute the attributes of God, they but dishonour him". Such disputations "tend not to his honour, but to the honour of our own wits, and learning", signifying "pious intention" rather than "philosophical truth".

Hobbes's argument for the existence of God rested solely on the Bible, not on reason; but his materialistic conception of God was, he claimed, both scriptural and reasonable. "Immaterial" or "incorporeal" substance was inconceivable. "Do you understand the connection of substance and incorporeal?", he asked. "If you do, explain it in English; for the words are Latine". It was unscriptural and came from Plato and Aristotle. "Heathens, who mistook those thin inhabitants of the brain they see in sleep, for so many incorporeal men". The irony is that, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes subjected the Bible to searching "higher" criticism and found it sadly wanting. The truth of revelation, he concluded, must be interpreted by the civil authority.

This being so, can Hobbes really be called a theist? Professor Leo Strauss (in *Natural Right and History*) has argued that the theistic and even Anglican elements in Hobbes's writings were a safety screen. Many present-day scholars, Professor Strauss has remarked, "do not seem to have a sufficient notion of the degree of circumspection or of accommodation to the accepted views that was required in former ages, of 'deviationists' who desired to survive or to die in peace".

Samuel I. Mintz, author of *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge University Press, London, 1962, 27s. 6d.) is doubtful. "It is hard to credit such a theory", he says, "when we remember that Hobbes's openly-avowed opinions on the nature of God were profoundly unorthodox and aroused the most intense opposition in their own time. Hobbes must have known that the line between his brand of theism and seventeenth-century atheism was a thin one and that for many of his contemporaries this line did not exist at all".

The problem, as I have said, is insoluble. We can never know whether Hobbes was sincere, or whether his theism was a disguise. What we can say is that the consequences of his materialistic thinking were plainly irreligious. And his contemporaries recognised this. They recognised it, and they reacted strongly. If he did believe in a god, it was, as Mr. Mintz says, "a remote, abstract, intellectualised deity who could give little comfort" to those contemporaries. As far as they were concerned, Hobbes was not only an atheist, he was the arch-atheist. As such he was attacked, and it is with these attacks—and Hobbes's counter-attacks—that Mr. Mintz's fascinating book deals.

Hobbes's enemies sank their sectarian differences in the defence of the faith. They fall roughly into three classes, the clergy, the dons, and the lawyers, but they all wrote as Christians, and *Leviathan* provided them with many of their metaphors. For Charles Robotham, he was a "Colossus lying stretched out in the sea in all his enormity,

his dreadful jaws gaping fiercely, and with obscene regurgitations belching forth abominable dogma which befouls the British coastlines". Bishop Vesey saw him taking "pleasure in that deluge of *Atheism* he has spued out of his mouth . . . attended with a numerous shoal of his own spawning". To an anonymous author, he sailed "i' the *Ocean* of the most *Profound Impiety*". But for Bishop Lucy, he was a "wild bore" that "hath digged at the roots of Religion", and for James Lowde, a "troublesome Fly . . . always busie about the sores of Human Nature; not with intent to cure 'em but to make 'em worse". In 1686 Bishop South preached in Westminster Abbey against "the lewd, scandalous and immoral doctrine" of "the infamous author of *Leviathan*".

Not all criticism was on this level, though. Hobbes's most systematic critics were the Cambridge Platonists Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, who tried to refute him with his own analytical methods. The centre of their disputes was Hobbes's materialism, with its corollaries, determinism, nominalism and relativism. Its implication was, said More, "That it is impossible there should be any God, Soul, or Angel, Good or Bad; or any Immortality, or Life to come . . .". For the materialist there was "nothing but Matter and Corporeal Motion"—and necessity. More, as Mr. Mintz says, at least "fought with dignity and calmness and a real desire to test the issues in a philosophical way". Cudworth never once mentioned Hobbes in a thousand folio pages, but he quoted and paraphrased him (not always accurately) and presented the idealistic case in opposition to materialism.

The Cambridge Platonists also believed in devils, which Hobbes rejected completely. A man might suffer from hallucinations, he said, due to natural and material causes, and these might be called demons by the ignorant, "As if the dead of whom they dreamed, were not inhabitants of their own brain, but of the air, or of heaven or hell; not phantasms, but ghosts". To this must be added "juggling and confederate knavery". Even they that be perfectly awake, he wrote, "if they be timorous, and superstitious, possessed with fearful tales, and alone in the dark, are subject to like fancies; and they believe they see spirits and dead men's ghosts walking in churchyards; whereas it is either their fancy only, or else the knavery of such persons as make use of such superstitious fear . . .".

Hobbes's views on witchcraft have, as Mr. Mintz remarks, a "distinctly modern ring". They were in fact the most forthright assault on the dogma until Hutcheson's *Historical Essay on Witchcraft* in 1718, and they were expressed at a time when opinion generally, including educated opinion, was favourable to the belief. His rejection of witchcraft was, of course, a consequence of his searching materialism. Reconciling it with the Bible required a good deal of ingenuity, as may be seen from chapter 45 of *Leviathan*, but the truth is that Hobbes used the Bible as it suited him, interpreting it in accordance with his own philosophy. He had, Mr. Mintz says, "no particular reverence for Scripture *qua* Scripture". He conceded in his famous controversy with Bishop Bramhall, that certain texts "make equally for the Bishop and me", but "he insisted that no text is better than the rational interpretation placed upon it".

The controversy had begun in 1645, when John Bramhall, Bishop of Derry, wrote to Hobbes on the subject of
(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

Whether there really is "unity" in the Church of Rome we cannot be sure—probably not as much as Roman Catholics affirm—but there appears to be little in the Church of England, for even vicars are not above slating their bishops. It may be urged that a mere vicar doesn't matter, but it is worth noting when, like the Rev. Peter Thompson of St. Mary's, South Ruislip, he has the courage to disagree openly with the Establishment. In going for the Bishop of Woolwich and his book *Honest to God*, Mr. Thompson is perfectly right in pointing out that the book "merely states heresies which are as old as the Church itself".

★

This is quite true. There always was heresy and Mr. Thompson's Christian Church, whether called Protestant or Roman, found out that one very good way to stamp it out was to butcher every heretic they could find and they did so for centuries. When that method of dealing with them was impossible, they tried imprisonment as in the case of Robert Taylor, Carlyle, G. W. Foote, libel in the case of Paine. Now the *Age of Reason* can be quoted by scholarly Christians for they are, if only slowly, reaching the positions once called "blatant infidelity" put so splendidly by its author. The Church in fact is learning.

★

On the other hand, there are still bishops clinging to what they call "Christian morality", who bitterly oppose "freedom" for anybody in the realm of homosexuality, fornication, trial marriages, and so on. The Bishop of Exeter has been attacking what he calls "South Bank" morality, which he appears to associate with the Bishop of Southwark. Before going to Rome for "unity", it would not be at all a bad idea if the bishops could get it for once in the Church of England.

★

The "Daily Express" (July 5th) gives an entertaining account of "the spirits" in Accra, a story which looks as if it came straight out of *Psychic News*. Ghana's ex-foreign minister, Mr. Ako Adjei, managed to get the Ghana Commercial Bank to let him have £25,000 which was to be doubled in a field by the "spirit Zebus of the Kingdom of Uranus". After the usual spirit invocation, Zebus appeared in human form and the money disappeared. Mr. Adjei then brought another £2,500 which also disappeared as did, of course, Zebus back to Uranus, leaving Mr. Adjei holding the baby and facing a charge of defrauding the Bank.

★

A brilliantly conceived reason for making women vicars or even bishops crops up every now and then in our popular press. It is that, as Christianity is based on the Resurrection of Jesus, and as the first person to see him after coming out his sepulchre alive, was a woman, Mary Magdalene, it is simply disgraceful that the Church denies ordination to women. Most if not all good Christians take this for Gospel truth, but if they would only examine God's Precious Word for themselves they would find that the "authorities" completely disagree on the question who saw the risen Christ first.

★

Matthew says it was Mary Magdalene "and" the other Mary; Mark and John say there wasn't the other Mary; Luke says it was Cleopas and his companion; while Paul says it was Peter. According to Matthew, Mary recognised Jesus, according to John, she did not—and so on. The contradictions are so glaring that in his notes in the Greek New Testament, Dean Alford sadly agrees "that

we must walk by faith and not by sight". Still, no woman vicar need be deterred by such contradictions—she could believe the lot and proudly say so.

★

ATV has now appointed a lady, Miss Garnett, as its religious director. She will be responsible for *About Religion*, and she insists that "religion is not just a question of going to church but covers everything one does". Although she very sadly admits that "90 per cent of people don't go to church, that does not mean that they are not interested . . .".

★

We ourselves are very interested in religion especially its damning effect on "everything" if literally believed in. Miss Garnett considers that the word religion unfortunately has "adopted a lot of frills"—and no doubt she will do her best to iron them out. But it would surprise us if she allowed anti-religionists any chance of meeting religionists in a frank and uninhibited discussion—even if all the religious "frills" had disappeared!

HOBBS AND HIS CRITICS

(Concluded from page 227)

free-will. It continued intermittently until Hobbes's *An Answer to a Book Published by Dr. Bramhall*, which appeared three years after his own death. Mr. Mintz agrees with John Laird that it must be classed as "one of the best of all philosophical duels", but rightly reprimands T. S. Eliot who (in his essay on Bramhall) preposterously described Hobbes as "the most eminent example in his age of a particularly lazy type of thinker", and "one of those extraordinary little upstarts whom the chaotic motions of the Renaissance tossed into an eminence which they hardly deserved and have never lost". Mr. Eliot can never forget—or forgive—the Renaissance, and wrote, as Mr. Mintz observes, "with less detachment and smaller understanding of the issues at stake in the controversy than did Bramhall". Hobbes, says Mr. Mintz, "put the case for scientific determinism as clearly as it could be put", while "Bramhall, though perhaps not always so lucid, was an able opponent".

It is the philosophical discussions, which Mr. Mintz summarises and presents so impartially, that form the most interesting part of his book. After the Restoration, the "high philosophical tone" gave way to "an eruption of popular feelings" against Hobbes and "libertines": Hobbes being a "libertine" because he denied religion, and being given a sort of Machiavellian role in the heroic drama of the time.

There is no doubt, though, that he continued to be read, as the printings of *Leviathan* testify. And as Mr. Mintz points out:

Hobbes exerted a subtle but powerful influence on his critics: he imposed upon them his own strict, rational standards of argument. He obliged them to meet him on his own grounds, to combat him with his own weapons of logical exactitude and severe reasoning. He caused them, for the purposes of argument, to lay aside their theological presuppositions and moral predilections, and to try the issues on their own merits . . . The critics were satisfied that they had cut Hobbes down to size; in fact they had yielded, slowly and imperceptibly but also very surely, to the force of his rationalist method.

It is its survey of this process that makes *The Hunting of Leviathan* specially attractive to believers in that method.

—NEXT WEEK—

JOSEPH LEWIS'S \$2,000 CHALLENGE TO
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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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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

Hornchurch Humanist Society (Harold Wood Social Centre, corner of Gubbin's Lane and Squirrels Heath Road), Tuesday, July 23rd, 8 p.m.: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

North Staffordshire Humanist Group (Guildhall, High Street), Newcastle-under-Lyme), Friday, July 19th, 7.15 p.m.: A MEETING.

Notes and News

NO PLAY for years has caused such a sensation as Rolf Hochhuth's "epic drama" (as the *Sunday Times* called it), *The Vicar* (or *The Representative*), a terrible exposure of the so-called "Pope of Peace", Pius XII. As most readers know, the story concerns a young Jesuit, Riccardo Fontana, who pleads in vain with Pius ("the Vicar") to intervene and stop Hitler's mass murder of the Jews—his "final solution" of the Jewish problem. Fontana (a character based on fact) is horrified and exclaims:

A vicar of Christ,
who sees before him what is
happening,
who remains silent, for reasons
of state,
who deliberates for even one
day

who hesitates even one hour,
to lift the voice of his anguish
in warning malediction . . .
such a Pope
is a criminal.

The young Jesuit pins a yellow star on his chest because:

The silence of the Pope
on behalf of the killers,
lays upon the Church a guilt
which we must expiate.
Because the Pope, who is also
but a man,
can be God's vicar upon earth,
a poor priest . . . could . . .
and will . . .

take the Pope's place—there
where the Pope should stand
today.

There is Auschwitz.

IN THE Autumn, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company is to produce an English version of this remarkable—and fully documented—German play. We therefore asked a German Freethinker, Gerda Guttenburg, to review *The Vicar* and to relate it to its background. We are pleased to print Frau Guttenburg's article as our Views and Opinions this week.

★

UNDER THE heading "Courageous Death", the *Evening Standard* (28/6/63) reported the finding of a previously unknown letter among some old papers in a solicitor's office in Bedford Row, London. It was written in August, 1776, by the economist Adam Smith to a future Lord Chancellor, Alexander Wedderburn, MP, and it related to the death of David Hume. Hume knew that his condition was hopeless and trusted that "in a few days . . . the business will be over", but Smith reported that "his spirits are so good, that he cannot help talking incessantly when anybody is with him". He declared that, "I have now done everything that I intended to do". Hume, who died eleven days after the letter was written, showed, according to Smith, "great cheerfulness and good humour, and . . . more real resignation than any whining Christian".

★

"ALL THIS trouble stemmed from a jealous woman and a number of priests", declared the Right Rev. Dr. Francis Walsh, Roman Catholic Bishop of Aberdeen, when he ignored a Vatican order to dismiss his housekeeper, Mrs. Christine MacKenzie, divorced ex-wife of a Church of Scotland minister (*The Guardian*, 10/7/63). "Filthy accusations in letters from [a] woman, then anonymous letters and persecution on the telephone" to Mrs. MacKenzie: it is the mixture as so often before "A group of people, by their action, reduced my housekeeper to a state of nerves and fear", said the Bishop, who does not see why she should leave and "sacrifice herself to satisfy malice and spite".

★

MUCH OF *In the Eyes of Others*, an American book in which eight Jesuits attempt to dispel common misconceptions of Catholicism is "fair and reasonable", according to *Books and Bookmen* (July 1963), but the magazine found the arguments on censorship hard to swallow. That Zola and Balzac should be on the *Index*, but no American novelist, seemed to the reviewer "to represent an odd idea of what is or is not liable to corrupt", while: "More fundamental is the general statement that Catholics are forbidden to read anything on religion if it has anything in it contrary to Catholic faith and morals. In other words, Catholics are not allowed to hear any point of view but their own. Fortunately, most intelligent Catholics ignore this prohibition, but it seems a formidable stumbling block to intellectual acceptance of their faith".

★

READERS WILL be pleased to know that the American edition of *The Sin of Father Amaro* by Eça de Queiroz (St. Martin's Press, New York, \$5.95) promises to be as big a success as the English. It is the same translation, by our good friend Nan Flanagan, who is described on the advertising folder as a contributor to THE FREETHINKER. It may be remembered that the novel was hailed as "classic" by the *Sunday Times* and as "a masterpiece" by *The Observer* and *The Spectator*, while our own reviewer Oswald Blakeston, said that it deserved to be "the bestseller on the index!". It is incidentally, still available (Max Reinhardt, 18s.).

Ernest Renan—and Jesus Christ

By F. A. RIDLEY

THIS YEAR is the centenary of an event in the literary world which caused a European sensation: the publication of an international bestseller, *La Vie de Jesus*, by an already well-known French scholar and man of letters. Ernest Joseph Renan. Nowadays, when lives not only of Jesus but of almost every religious hero are two-a-penny, this publication may not seem of much importance. This demonstrates how far the world has travelled since Renan made what a French critic aptly described as a "sentimental journey with Jesus through Galilee".

Actually the historical and scientific value of Renan's biography of the titular founder of Christianity is very slight, whilst from a purely literary point of view, though the work of an acknowledged master of French prose, the book is marred by its over-indulgence in rhetoric and by its excessive sentimentality. All told, his *Life of Jesus* does not add much either to Renan's considerable reputation as a man of letters or as a scientific inquirer into Christian origins. However, it would be unfair not to concede that the tremendous furor excited by the initial appearance of this first popular biography of Jesus, not only in France but throughout Europe, did much to put liberal ideas on the map. For, whilst Renan added little to our knowledge of the origins of Christianity, the European vogue immediately attained by the *Life* certainly made things easier for his successors in this hitherto closed field for rational research. Renan enjoyed the advantage of writing in the first period for many centuries in which a critical scholar was free to express his views without physical repression.

Born like his successor, Joseph Turmel, of humble origin in a Breton fishing village of 1823, Renan—again like Turmel—was spotted by the Church and eventually found his way to a Parisian seminary, where he soon showed himself to be brilliant in Oriental studies. But like the later Rationalists Turmel and Alfarcic (and in England, McCabe), Renan was led through study to doubt. In his deservedly famous autobiography, *Memories of My Childhood and Youth*, he has described how his doubts grew, the deeper he became immersed in theological—chiefly biblical—studies. The end was his definitive breach with the Church. Thereafter he supported himself and presently acquired a growing fame by studies in which a remarkable flair for Oriental languages, conjoined with a literary style of great fluency and charm, eventually combined to make him a major figure in the cultural life of the 19th century. Renan specialised in biblical history, and produced successively major works on Israel and Christian origins.

The most famous and widely circulated of his numerous books (though far from the best) was, of course, his *Life of Jesus*, which sold 60,000 copies within six months and was soon translated into practically every European language. *La Vie de Jesus* had the unique distinction of being the first popular biography of Jesus ever written. For earlier studies such as that of D. F. Strauss, were critical dissertations written by scholars to be read by scholars, whereas Renan's was written like a popular novel with an idyllic hero and an appropriately bucolic background. One is hardly surprised at the comment of the young French lady when she put down the volume: "What a pity it did not end with a marriage!"

The Jesus of history, or rather the Jesus imagined by Ernest Renan, is quite an attractive fictional character.

Indeed, *La Vie* is best considered as a work of fiction, though naturally Renan, who actually composed the book in Palestine, does manage to include a good deal of first-hand information about the historical and geographical background to his Galilean odyssey. However, its extreme sentimentality, coupled with a markedly "reverent rationalist" approach to the whole problem of Christian origins, did not save Renan from the most furious Catholic demonstrations.

For despite all his verbal disclaimers, Renan had, if not debunked, at least (if we may coin the expression), de-deified Jesus Christ. However many laudatory adjectives Renan could and did, lavish on Jesus, they were addressed to a *man*, not to a god. Historical Christianity, according to Renan, had a *human* and not a divine origin. That was Renan's supreme crime in the eyes of the Church; that was why, when he later visited Rome, the pope denounced him as the "supreme blasphemer" of the age. For, after all, the Christian Church exists as the infallible foundation of a god. Once take away the initial godhead and the writing of doom is on the wall for organised Christianity, and it was precisely this that Renan did in the first biography ever written of a *human* founder of Christianity.

As the first and most probably still widely-read humanist biography of an entirely human Jesus, one must concede some at least propaganda value to Renan's bestseller. It put a humanist interpretation of Christian origins on the map in a way that more scholarly, but dry-as-dust, treatises on Christian origins (Strauss, etc.) could not do. It is precisely this fact that made Renan's *Life of Jesus* an important book, and still makes the date of its centenary an important and significant centenary to Humanists at least.

But one has to add—irrespective of one's own personal views on the much controverted question of Christian origins—that apart of course from the still considerable literary merits, the above is about all the value that a century later one can still attach to Renan's "biography". This is so essential, not only because critical biblical scholarship has made great strides since Renan's day, but even more because Renan set himself a fundamentally impossible task. For only a god can write the biography of a god, whereas to write the biography of a man, human sources are necessary, and there simply are no human sources for a biography of Jesus Christ. For all, without exception of the sources of the New Testament have been so overlaid with legend and mythology, that no reliable—or recognisable—human materials still survive which could serve for an authentic basis to such a biography.

Since Renan's day, another eminent French Freethinker has made this apt *critique* not only of Renan but of all his by now numerous successors as biographers of Jesus Christ. In his remarkable book, *Orpheus (a History of Comparative Religion)*, Salomon Reinach observes: "Is it even possible to extract the elements of a biography of Jesus from the Gospels? It is contrary to every sound method to compose, as Renan did, a life of Jesus eliminating the marvellous elements from the Gospel story. It is no more possible to make real history with myth than to make bread with the pollen of flowers". One can relevantly add in this connection that to make such an assertion, it is not necessary to deny either that there was a *man*, a human prototype to the Jesus of the Gospels—in

fact Renan himself believed that there was—or to hold (as I do) that some at least of the events recorded in the Gospels (including probably the Crucifixion) had their prototype in contemporary Jewish history.

Whether there was, or was not, an individual Jesus, no life can now be written, failing of course, some future documentary discovery on say, the lines of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For in both Renan's day and ours, it still remains true that the biography of a god such as we have in the four Gospels, cannot ever provide any reliable basis for a genuinely human biography.

Points from a New Book

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

"WHAT HAVE I DONE," people ask plaintively, "to deserve this misfortune?" It's one of those thoughtless questions which can goad people into accepting a religion that offers pie-in-the-sky compensations for suffering. The rational attitude has been summed up by an old char whom I meet in my local. Recently, she fell down and broke an arm. I told her, sympathetically, it was a "shame". "It's not a shame," she said, "it's just something than happened".

Another dangerous question which people put to themselves is: "Who am I?" This is a trap-door which can drop the sentimental into bogus mystical sects. There is no need to say any more than "I am I" and then analyse the circumstances which led one to question such an obvious fact.

In Anna Kavan's new novel, *Who Are You?* (Scorpion Press, 15s.), tropical birds keep on repeating the call which gives the book its title. Their eternal monotonous question without answer weaves itself into the whole fabric of the day. They challenge a young wife who has been forced to marry a man with two blue glass circles for eyes above a brutal mouth and who has brought his reluctant bride to live in "the white man's grave". But the girl has an intellectual background and, even in the sweltering heat, she realises that the birds have no avian feeling and that their sole function is to drive people mad.

The house in the compound in which she lives is undermined by termites. Creaking fans turn at slightly irregular intervals, with marginal variations which are as unpredictable and as agonising as Chinese water torture. Some of the furniture has been made in the local jail and is of dark reddish wood which is always slightly sticky. The servants hate one another and their savage master and their inefficient mistress; and the head "boy" is a bearded Muslim whose lean bare legs shut and open like blackish scissors as he walks around to spy on secrets.

Miss Kavan makes us feel the place and the atmosphere which turns men into devilish mermen in a sea of sweat. Here all the discomforts and miseries and threats of ordinary life are magnified up to nightmare proportions. Because, at this amplification, they could so clearly lead to any madness, they show us how, at more normal levels of endurance, they can force people without courage to take refuge in religion. Indeed the natives in this jungle console themselves with a sacred snake, a monster whom they feed into sluggish acceptance of their worship.

The husband tries to bully his young wife into playing a game of indoor tennis in the evenings with half dead rats. He tells her the legend of the king rat which is a whole litter joined by a single tail. She attempts to find some solace in innocent conversations with a younger man who can still see that tropical birds are mere handfuls of brilliant feathers barely held together by the frail thread

of life and not heralds for demon rats, who is prepared to laugh at the supernatural horrors which men invent to explain the horrors which exist as "things which happen". But the husband finds out what is happening, and Jack is confronted with the Killer in a situation in which one can be certain that it is the giant who might do the killing.

The rains come with monsoon storms, and palm trees bend over till their topmost leaves sweep the ground like a witch's broom; and the story reaches a terrible climax. But this is not all. Probably inspired by Robbe-Grillet, Miss Kavan gives her story a second ending, no less remorseless if less cataclysmic. So the point is made again—that one cannot build the edifices of religion on the moments of breakdown in our fortunes which depend on circumstances and environment.

Who Are You? is, then, a vivid experience which should be read by all rationalists who are interested in the art of the modern novel. Miss Kavan has, of course, for many years been highly regarded by eminent critics: Lawrence Durrell put her in a bracket with Anais Nin and Djuna Barnes.

The Plain View—Summer 1963

By G. L. SIMONS

THIS ISSUE of *The Plain View* (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8) opens with a brief commentary on "Job Analysis". I regret I found this commentary wordy and rather pointless.

The first main article is "Education and the Humanist Revolution" by Sir Julian Huxley. Here Huxley tries to view education "in the perspective of evolution". This is good, he says, for several reasons which he mentions. Huxley stresses that for the first time in history evolution has entered the stage where biological evolution gives way (as a powerful force for human beings) to cultural and social evolution. For the first time man has sufficient awareness to adopt a philosophy in which all aspects of his knowledge are organised in a naturalistic framework.

Whatever action man takes in the world he affects the process of evolution. Thus he must be responsible and guide the process intelligently; Huxley seems most concerned with the rational use of natural resources. For man to be responsible he must be educated, Huxley says, in a broadly humanist way. Education is important for other reasons, e.g. in preparing people for full, rich lives. However there are difficulties, Huxley observes, in contemporary education. Puberty occurs earlier than it did, and it is difficult practically to foster many diverse personalities, but this diversity is, of course, of great social value.

This essay is rambling; it lacks coherency and in places is obscure. I am puzzled by Huxley's remarks on mind and matter; I think he virtually contradicts himself at one stage. I would also question (although as a layman with trepidation) some factual remarks about biological evolution. The only value that this article held for me was that it underlined some obvious points, e.g. that education is important.

"Universities under Siege" by Sir Frank Ashby is the text of an address given to the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. Ashby talks first of general principles that should be observed in running a university. He stresses the importance of a cosmopolitan outlook and free exchange of ideas. He sites important instances of

the decay of a society where universities have been artificially restricted.

More specifically, he talks of African universities which are having racial difficulties, and how important it is to oppose racial segregation. He gives useful information to refute the notion that coloured people are innately inferior. He concludes by stressing how important it is that a university should be self-governing, and independent of undue state control.

This makes a fine article. It is cogent and well supported factually. It is this sort of appeal that enhances human dignity, and shows that there are tolerant and enlightened forces in the world. I hope this essay will be widely read.

A review article by Gwyn Illtyd Lewis of Dr. Thomas Kelly's "A History of Adult Education on Great Britain" provides some interesting information. There are other book reviews; for me, the two by Virginia Flemming were the most useful and interesting.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor welcomes letters from readers, but asks that they be kept as brief and pertinent as possible.

BAYARD SIMMONS

I was grieved to read the obituary of Bayard Simmons. Long years ago, when we were both in our twenties, we were members of the Emerson Club in Buckingham Street, Strand. Now long disappeared, fifty years ago it was a meeting place for Fabians, Ethicists, etc. Those who are left of its old members will no doubt mostly be found at the Conway Hall of the South Place Ethical Society, which was in South Place at that time.

WILLIAM H. SEED (Jamaica).

E. W. HENSTRIDGE

I was very distressed to hear of the sudden death of Mr. E. W. Henstridge. On several occasions in recent years, when I was speaking to the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society, Mr. Henstridge entertained me after the meeting and saw me off by the night train to London. I always found his conversation varied and instructive, ranging as it did from the philosophy of Schopenhauer (upon which he was an expert and a member of the Schopenhauer Society—several of whose meetings I subsequently attended at his suggestion) to Indo-China and the far East, where he had lived for many years.

Mr. Henstridge was a most interesting companion with a keen and logical brain and I greatly regret his passing.

F. A. RIDLEY.

TRAGEDY

As I do not know for sure, nor does E. Foges for that matter, whether millions of Russians read tragic authors, I cannot very well argue out this point. But nevertheless Mr. Foges should bear in mind that the authors he mentions were all prior to the Russian Revolution, and therefore could hardly be censored or thrown into prison by the Soviet authorities.

In regard to the famous plays of the great tragic-poets being shown on every stage in the USSR, I should like to inform Mr. Foges that they are quite often revised in the interests of the so-called Soviet realism in the theatre.

For instance, in Akimov's production of *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov Theatre, Shakespeare's tragedy was "cleansed" of any long passages that "hindered" the action. It became completely adventurous and dynamic. All the "philosophical ballast" of Hamlet's soliloquies was removed. The speeches left him were "made materialistic". Thus, the "to be or not to be" speech was heavily abridged, and Hamlet uttered it while holding a crown in his hands and examining it. What he asked according to Soviet realism was whether to be or not to be king, whereas in reality the essential content of Hamlet's soliloquy was briefly whether the wretchedness of his existence was preferable to non-existence.

I agree with Mr. Foges that the Jews have every reason to be pessimistic, but nevertheless their world view as written in the Bible is optimistic and anti-tragic.

Eva Ebury begins her letter by calling me a Marx-mutilating philosopher, but surprisingly enough she does not comment on or

precisely say what my Marxian mutilations were. When she does I shall try my best to answer her.

I don't think the remark I quoted from Schopenhauer is so nonsensical as Mrs. Ebury would like to make out. According to Schopenhauer the inner nature of the world is Will, and a philosophical knowledge of the world is the understanding of the tragedy and purposelessness of human existence. As an atheist I do not believe that there is a purpose in history at all, and therefore her quotation from Comte makes us no wiser in regard to this matter. Comte rejects the individual in history and allows humanity alone to be real. In this view he is maintaining a conclusion that is not obtained from observation, but simply and solely from imagination.

Seeing that I have tried my best to answer Mrs. Ebury's questions, I wonder if she would answer one of mine. Does she believe that there is a purpose in history, and if so what is it?

R. SMITH.

Thank god for Eva Ebury! All the arguments, all the Marxist wranglings silenced with a single sentence. What! You found *Capital* difficult? Turn to the lady. Hurl away your Marxist-Leninist libraries, your *Modern Quarterly* sets (unnecessary lumber) and heed just eight words (with appropriate capitals): "the Tool is the Dynamic of Social Progress". There you have it—"the sole necessary axiom of Dialectical Materialism". Marx thou shouldst have been living at this hour!

RICHARD BARRY.

ADENINE EXPERIMENT

I read with interest the item on page 213 of THE FREETHINKER of the 5th July, which describes the experiment of the Ceylonese biochemist, Dr. Ponnampuruma.

I would like to point out for the record, however, that cosmic radiation, which would be present in great quantities on an embryo Earth, is not a flux of high-energy electrons, as you described it, but ultra-short electromagnetic radiation, similar in composition to heat, light and radio waves. I am sure that this mistake was due merely to a misunderstanding of the experiment.

I have not seen this experiment reported elsewhere (for I do not subscribe to the scientific journals) and would be grateful if you could obtain further details for me, or let me know where I can find them. It seems to me that Dr. Ponnampuruma's experiment is a great step forward in Man's understanding of life, and yet another triumph for rationalist thinking.

Hoping for your co-operation on this matter,

IAN F. TRAYNOR.

[It was because we shared Mr. Traynor's view of the importance of Dr. Ponnampuruma's experiment that we summarised it in Notes and News, ostensibly correctly. Our source was the Science section of Time for June 7th, which referred to a "beam of high-energy electrons" which "represented the cosmic rays that scientists believe assailed the primitive atmosphere". Perhaps Mr. Traynor could learn more from the University of California where the experiment took place.]—ED.]

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