

The Freethinker

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AS A SORT of response or reaction to the recently published book *Objections to Christian Belief*, we now have *Objections to Humanism*, that is to Humanist beliefs. Both titles could be somewhat misleading. They might seem to imply that objections are being raised whereas in both cases objections are more strictly being settled. Four well-known writers described as leading Humanists contribute the varying views and opinions expressed in this book, which is put forward as being a ruthless examination of their beliefs by those who hold them. The symposium is edited by Mr. H. J. Blackham, Director of the newly-formed British Humanist Association. He is responsible for both the Introduction and the last essay. The other three contributors are Professor Ronald Hepburn who deals with what he calls Humanist Theology, Miss Kathleen Nott who criticises the use and value of bare rationalism and Kingsley Martin, who discusses the nature of Humanist aims. It is suggested on the book's jacket that "this volume may herald the end of the cold war between Christians and 'the men without God'". What then did the previous volume herald? It is extremely doubtful if either volume heralds anything of the kind. **"Objections to Humanism"**

Objections to Humanism starts off with Pope's famous dictum about the proper study of mankind being man. No Humanist would be inclined to cavil at that. But reading this book brings to mind another and more questionable of Pope's pronouncements, that a little learning is a dangerous thing. We must drink deep or let it alone. This would seem to imply that safety lies either with a great deal of learning or with none. Maybe. But whatever this book can be accused of it cannot be accused of a "little learning", still less of none. Now it would be rather rash to speak for Humanists who, by the very reason of their being Humanists must have inevitably gone some distance at least beyond a mere little learning. Obviously only intelligent and thinking people can truly become Humanists, for Humanism is wrought by taking thought, whereas Christianity seems to be wrought chiefly by taking thought away and substituting authority that has no authority. To non-Humanists therefore, particularly the rank and file of Christians, who accept their Christianity much as they accept their dinner, the book could well seem so learned as to put them off altogether. It requires the use of faculties not much in demand among habituated Christians. And this fact exposes one of the disadvantages Humanism is up against in its conflict with religion. Humanism cannot very well succeed without satisfying the intellect. Religion has scarcely any such need. It can get along even better without seeking that sort of satisfaction.

In his Introduction, Mr. Blackham refers to Humanism as free inquiry which, "is better thought of as a more general principle that each must think and decide for himself on important questions concerning the life he has and his

conduct of it; and, most general, that nothing is exempt from human question". He goes on to say that free inquiry is radical and dangerous and quotes Burke to the effect that "no human institution, nothing, however sacred, not God himself, can stand against it"—notwithstanding God is omnipotent. The validity of science we are told is equally open to question and only in so far as science is organised free inquiry, is it a Humanist quest and not secular dogmatism.

Such matters as social agreement, human values, tolerance, Humanist commitment are successively introduced and briefly considered. And these considerations are rounded off with the summary that

"Humanism in the stricter sense is justified by its production in every generation of its quota of just men". A list is given of eminent names which no Humanist could do other than admire. But it is pretty certain that Christianity could and would unhesitatingly make and similarly illustrate a similar claim.

Ronald Hepburn

Professor Ronald Hepburn writes the first essay. He calls it a shade startlingly "A Critique of Humanist Theology". Theology is a word so closely bound up with what we normally mean by religion, that its association in this way with Humanism seems almost a contradiction in terms. Yet, as we grapple—as grapple we must—with Professor Hepburn's very learned disquisition, it becomes clearer why he uses the word theology. Much of what he is saying of Humanism is so analogous to the relation of theology to religion that there seems to be no other term that could so well convey his intention. He seems to look upon Humanism as in some sense a religion, though not in the sense we ordinarily speak of religion. Professor Hepburn is not exactly easy to read and one cannot always be quite certain that one has understood him correctly. Towards the end for instance, he tells us that, "What we should be doing above all is keeping alive the religious imagination and simultaneously confronting its products with a searching, uninhibited rational critique: setting partial vision against vision, as it were chord against chord in an unresting, taut progressions". This is very much the language of the cap and gown. Only to an élite of trained intellects could one expect this to be immediately lucid. Less professional readers can hardly be blamed if they find it a trifle up in the air. That does not say it may not be worth trying to construe. It certainly helps us to a stimulating mental exercise.

Kathleen Nott

When Miss Kathleen Nott asks at the top of her section of the book "Is Rationalism Sterile?" the first impulse is to retort of course not. Obviously, if it were, there would be no point, even if there were possibility, in asking and discussing the question, which is here, demonstrably in itself an example of being rational and which, because of that, arouses our keen and pleasurable interest. She has an amusing smack at the philosophers and rationalists.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Humanism Takes Itself to Task

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

All philosophers, she says, are cerebral, which, being interpreted, presumably means brainy. Brains or not, philosophers in their daily affairs are not always philosophical any more than rationalists are always rational. Probably nobody would contradict that, but not everybody would agree that "a rationalist in the nineteenth-century dyed-in-the-wool sense of being almost wholly preoccupied with the question of the existence of God, and with rebutting any supernatural sanction for morality" is therefore all that sterile. It was at least not sterile in so far as it provided a stepping-stone to the higher things which include the sort of rationalism exhibited in the present analysis of it by Miss Kathleen Nott.

She carries us on through pages of further entertaining reflections and one of the most pertinent provokes her question: "Is there an inevitable clash between thinking and feeling?" Whether there is or not it is thinking that enables her to ask the question and it will require thinking to supply an answer. Towards the end of her essay, she tells us that Humanism means to her, "a deep and intimate concern with the full flowering of human potentiality and personality which can only be the experience of real individuals". Very nice. But again one wonders how many who repudiate Humanism, especially Christians, would without scruple appropriate these words to their own outlook.

Kingsley Martin

Next comes Kingsley Martin with the question: "Is Humanism Utopian?" And we at once find ourselves out of the lecture room into the more bracing atmosphere of first-rate journalism. Mr. Martin not only thinks very clearly what he says, he says very clearly what he thinks. He can make himself immediately intelligible to that grade of intelligence which sometimes finds it a bit uphill to be quite clear as to what the more consciously scholastic are talking about. Mr. Martin has his Humanist feet more firmly planted among the practicalities of daily human existence. What he says therefore will probably have more weight with the general run of readers, including many Humanists, than any finespun theories about the character and purpose of Humanist activities.

Very much to the purpose he tackles the differences between Humanism and its opponents with the manner and power best calculated to defeat and dissipate objections. With both pungency and cogency, he leads us on to see that Humanism is an attitude of mind which can be as inspired as anything religion can offer. In so far as Humanism is Utopian, its Utopia is not towards some unattainable perfectibility, but towards a working theory of life consistent with current scientific knowledge and thereby to a happier and more reasonable society. This is the sort of stuff most likely to confirm Humanists in their Humanism and to invigorate them to further advances. It is a joy, almost something of a relief, to read.

H. J. Blackham

Finally, we have Mr. Blackham on "The Pointlessness of it All", by which of course he really means the point of it all. When he says that the most drastic objection to Humanism is that it is too bad to be true, we feel quite sure that he is sallying forth to demonstrate that Humanism is too good to be false. And this he fairly succeeds in doing. The principal reason, it seems, why Humanism is too bad to be true is because it rejects the Christian, or indeed any other religious Hereafter. Humanism is discredited as being dismally and exclusively preoccupied with the passage of this life. Its concerns begin with birth and end with death. It is depicted as endorsing the old

French dictum:

On entre, on crie—et c'est la vie.

On crie, on sort, et c'est la mort.

But although that is true enough, Humanism does not say it is all the truth. Cruel, evil, tragic as life so often is, there cannot be many lives that do not know some laughter as well as tears. With a highly literate, level-headed, one may say level-hearted wisdom, Mr. Blackham speaks up convincingly for an intellectual attitude and a way of life more likely than religion to alleviate man's miseries and increase his happiness. To that end, religion too often builds savage obstructions upon completely unjustifiable foundations. Humanism is for the seizable here and now, religion for some chimerical then and there.

Much more could be said, and this book does not pretend to have spoken any impossible last word, or to have provided a complete answer to all the objections. Only a superficial flavour can here be given of a distillation of four outstandingly excellent minds, very far from being superficial. They have provided a book that will well repay reading many times.

PASTOR DROWNS DURING BAPTISM

Baptism by total immersion has been taking its toll of life among members of African religious sects who practise it. Three African clergymen are among those who have been drowned in the last year.

The latest drowning by baptism was that of the Rev. Faan Phindela, who disappeared in a river at Robertson last Sunday. He was helping at a baptism service conducted by his church in the Breede River.

He stepped out of his depth and was swept away by the strong current.

Two months ago an African Zionist priest, Mr. Z. Nqueli, was drowned when conducting a baptism service in the Umgeni River. He was waist deep in water when he suddenly disappeared from the view of his converts.

His converts saw him go under, but they did nothing to save him because they thought it was an act of God.

Last year Mr. Alfred Mohitsane, of Dube Township, Johannesburg, was drowned while baptising sick people in a 5-ft. deep dam near Van Wyk's Rust, Transvaal.

A woman got into difficulties during the mass baptism and everyone rushed to help her. Afterwards they discovered that Mr. Mohitsane had drowned in the rush.

All the churches of the Pentecostal movement, which include the many branches of the Zionist Church, the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Full Gospel Church of God, baptise people by total immersion.

A leading member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who also conduct mass baptisms by total immersion, said the Witnesses usually used swimming pools or the sea and there were seldom casualties. [Reprinted from the *Evening Post*, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. 28/10/63.]

BATTLE-SCHOOL FOR ATHEISTS

No other capital in the world can have so many institutions devoted exclusively to refuting the tenets of religion as Moscow. Now it is shortly to have a Club of Scientific Atheism.

This is intended as a meeting place for all the city's *anti-religiozniki*, as the professional fighters against religion are called. One of its main purposes will be to improve the training of atheistic propagandists.

For, despite considerable expenditure on the battle with religion over the years, it appears that organisers of meetings to propagate atheism have difficulty in finding a speaker. And when they do the speaker often turns out to be incapable of answering questions put by believers in the audience.

Izvestia cited the case of an anti-religious propagandist who refused to speak at a meeting when he learned that enthusiastic Christians would be present.

Other fronts on which the atheistic war is waged include the Soviet Academy of Science, which has an anti-religious department in its Institute of Philosophy, and the Moscow planetarium, which has a special "scientific atheistic" section.

In addition the State political publishing house has a group of editors concerned only with atheism; there is an atheistic journal called *Science and Religion*; Moscow University has a chair of scientific atheism; and the city's university of Marxist-Leninism has an anti-religious faculty.—*Daily Telegraph* (12/11/63).

Two Chosen Peoples

By F. A. RIDLEY

SHORTLY BEFORE the first World War, a booklet was published by Messrs. Watts for the Rationalist Press Association entitled, *The Making of a New Religion*. Its author was B. H. Chamberlain, a teacher long domiciled in Japan: but not either then or subsequently (as far as I know) at all well known to the world at large or even to the small but select public that then read with assiduity and admiration, the invaluable series of cheap reprints regularly issued by the RPA. One may relevantly add that in the importance, as well as for the out-of-the-way nature of its subject matter and the originality of its speculative treatment. Mr. Chamberlain's *opus minor* probably ranks as one of the most permanently, as well as immediately valuable publications of its time. It has long been one of the small number of publications that I still make a point of re-reading regularly, half a century after its first appearance in print.

Briefly, the theme is literally in accordance with its title *The Making of a New Religion*, or more precisely, the re-making of an old one with a new look and for an entirely new purpose in an altogether different age to that of its original inception. The "new religion" in question was the Shinto cult of Emperor worship, that was artificially revived and strenuously propagated by the ruling circles in Japan after the national revolution in 1868 did away with the medieval feudal system previously in operation since pre-historic Japan, and then proceeded to unify the country under the at least nominal rule of the Emperor. The national religion of the Empire of the Rising Sun, proclaimed by the new rulers of post-feudal monolithic Japan was, appropriately enough, the cult of the Sun-goddess whose lineal descendant (presumably by the instrumentality of a virgin birth) was the reigning Emperor of Japan, who accordingly stood out amongst the merely human rulers of this terrestrial globe as the only one of supernatural origin. According to the central dogma of this resurrected cult of Shinto—an archaic cult of Japanese antiquity long since regarded as a curiosity of the museum—this divine right was shared by the divine Emperor with his subjects, with the logical conclusion that the Japanese Sun-blessed and Sun-descended Empire had a god-given jurisdiction to subdue the races who surrounded it and to establish a world-empire under the divine rule of the Mikado. The religion of Imperialism was the precise title for the newly-resurrected state-cult of Shinto, given in personal conversation with our author by a high Japanese official. (In deference to Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan we use the term "Mikado"; actually however, this term is only employed in the Japanese writings of antiquity.) In modern times the official title is *Tenno*. Though not raised by Chamberlain, it is an interesting speculation whether the original form of the Shinto sun-cult had any overt connection with the very similar sun-cult of the pre-Spanish Incas of Peru on the other side of the Pacific.

The central and fundamental dogma of the state-enforced Shinto cult between 1868, the date of Japan's unification under Imperial rule, and 1945 which witnessed the obliteration of the Japanese sun (and Sun-goddess) by modern atomic science, was then the divine right of the Emperor to rule Japan and (by a kind of reflected divinity), of the Japanese Yamato race to conquer and to rule the world. Japan had always been ruled by her divinely-descended emperors ever since the beginnings of time, or

at least of Japanese recorded annals—"from ages eternal" was the Shintoist ritual phrase. But here the Shinto theologians came up against an undeniable, and from their point of view, insoluble contradiction.

For many centuries prior to the 1868 Restoration, Japan had been given over to feudal anarchy and had been ruled (or misruled) by warlike barons and/or usurping Shoguns—Japanese king-makers who had not only usurped the Emperor's prerogatives, but had frequently imprisoned and humiliated the imperial offspring of the Sun-goddess, a state of things that had continued in fact right down to 1868. We even learn that one of these merovingian monarchs had been reduced to taking in washing for a living, another to painting picture postcards, whilst a third was reduced to hawking around his own poetic compositions bewailing his unhappy lot. To make Shintoism a going concern, these awkward incidents had to be expunged from the national annals. They were expunged as our author indicates with much informative detail between 1868 and 1945.

The priests of the Shintoist religion of Imperialism, succeeded in completely falsifying Japanese history; the feudal faction-ridden Japan of pre-Restoration times suffered a "sea change" (on paper at least) into a peaceful and unified empire ruled in becoming splendour by an unbroken dynasty from ages eternal of divinely-descended emperors. To anyone who has even an elementary knowledge of what Japanese history was really like in feudal times, the Shinto sacred historians may surely be credited with at least one authentic miracle!

One may relevantly add that whilst B. H. Chamberlain's little book saw the light in 1911, the imperial Shinto cult—the origins of which he so vividly described—did not reach full fruition until much later. Its theoretical summation came in 1920 with the *Tanaka Memorandum*, issued under the auspices of Prime Minister Baron Tanaka, the then leader of Japanese Imperialism. This Japanese *Mein Kampf* proclaimed the conquest of the whole world by the Nipponese offspring of the Sun-goddess to be the final goal, the practical outcome of which was the Imperial "new order", based on the effective conquest of the Far East between 1937 and 1945 by Japan's Shinto Crusaders.

In the concluding paragraphs of his little masterpiece, Chamberlain points out that Japan's Shintoist theologians were not actually the first to resurrect an old religious cult for purposes entirely foreign to its originators. That honour belonged to the Jews—or rather to the Jewish rabbis. In a most interesting historical parallel, Chamberlain points out the truly remarkable similarity that existed between the social and religious position of Judaism after the Babylonian Exile in Old Testament times (c500 BC), and the modern situation of Japan and her rulers. Both had to live down an unhappy and humiliating past in order to face the future with confidence and both nations (or rather their rulers) solved the problem in fundamentally the same way.

The Jewish rabbis resurrected the archaic cult of the old thunder-god, Jehovah, whom their ancestors had traditionally picked up on Sinai whilst en route for their Promised Land, quietly got rid of his Ark and other visible paraphernalia (including his celestial consort, Anahata so as to give him a new look) and having promoted him from

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This Believing World

We always thought that it was a humble parson or priest who, in general, exorcised a ghost from a haunted house but, according to the *Daily Express* (November 14th), it was a real live bishop who did the trick when called in by a Mr. and Mrs. Durston. They both saw a ghost in white, "a white mist roughly in the shape of a man moving across the room". As the couple were both frightened of what the misty spirit could do, they reported it to their vicar who in turn went to the Bishop of Exeter who eventually "personally conducted a secret 35-minute service to exorcise" the spirit. He or it must have had the fright of his or its life to find a bishop conducting this painful exorcism personally, and no doubt fled in sheer terror.

★

Afterwards, television took a hand and introduced us to the now happy couple sitting with the Bishop in command giving us the story. All three were gleefully overjoyed at the way in which the spirit was routed by a holy and distinguished man of God. Apart from the spirit the Devil, who is more or less responsible for all reported hauntings, must now hide his head in shame at being so thoroughly beaten. Anyway, Mr. and Mrs. Durston can now live happily ever after in the same old house.

★

We are always glad to see that at least some parsons are never afraid of mentioning that there are "secular Humanists" in the world, and one of them is Dr. W. R. Matthews, the Dean of St. Paul's. In one of his weekly sermons in the *Daily Telegraph*, he dealt with "walking by Faith", and he sorrowfully admits that they do not walk by faith in the Christian sense, but they certainly do in another sense. By "faith", the Dean means "accepting some assertions as true, and acting on them without having conclusive proof which excludes all doubt". That may well be so, but what Christians want is that people should accept something for which there is no proof whatever—like, say, the Resurrection and the Ascension, to say nothing of the Virgin Birth.

★

Whether Dr. Matthews calls himself a genuine or "true" Christian in the sense of, let us say, the *Church Times*, or *The Universe*, we don't know, but these journals would certainly repudiate his claim that "the Humanist walks by a genuine and noble faith"; though, later, forgetfully he calls Humanism "the bleak doctrine of an indifferent universe". Thank Heaven, it is never so bleak as genuine Christianity.

★

One of the greatest puzzles archaeologists have had to face in Britain is why the Romans, who occupied the country for over 400 years appear to have left no Christian remains—or very few. After all, Christianity became—more or less—the state religion after Constantine (who died in 337 AD) and Roman soldiers and business men must have brought their religion with them. Yet most, if not all, Roman religious remains relate to Mithras, and never as far as we know to Jesus. However, at long last a "Roman head of Christ the oldest in Britain" has been found (*Daily Express*, November 6th). Archaeologists are naturally convinced that it is a head of Christ because it has a halo around it, because it has the Greek letters "CHI-RHO", and because it is beardless and fair-haired.

★

The President of the Methodist Conference, the Rev. F. Greeves, speaking on "unity" (that blessed Christian word which shocks so many Christians) wants to know if God himself wants a unified Church which would perforce

include a wide "variety of doctrine". He himself felt that "unity" did not mean "uniformity" though why in heaven not, considering Christianity is a divinely inspired religion with God as the author guaranteeing its sinless purity, we simply can't understand. We suspect that as long as people pour into the coffers of the Methodist Church plenty of cash, it will continue to be "separated" from its Christian brother Churches.

★

Fanny Hill has still to fight her legal battles in the English court and, as Susan Drysdale indicated in the *New Statesman* (15/11/63), the August 1963 victory in New York doesn't necessary apply to the rest of the United States. All the same, it was quite a victory, and it was followed by the collapse of "In God We Trust" on the wall behind the judge's chair. Shortly after the judge had left the courtroom, the "o" and the "u" clattered to the ground.

TWO CHOSEN PEOPLES

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local to cosmopolitan celestial status, then created a new religion, Judaism, in his name. For this purpose, the entire records of pre-Jehovist Israel had to be expunged or rewritten. The Old Testament, written or edited by Jehovist rabbis, falsified the national records so effectively that, as Chamberlain notes, it was not until more than 2,000 years later that a few bold rationalistic scholars first drew attention to the hoary historic hoax.

He concludes by noting that this historic parallel between modern Shintoism and ancient Judaism, between two chosen peoples originating from similar historical dilemmas is striking, noteworthy and up to a point remarkably exact.

A SHORT SERMON

To what end, my brethren, does the Shepherd guard the sheep?
 To what end will he lay down his life
 Though the hireling, when the wolf appears,
 Will run away?
 To what end, my brethren, is the flock kept
 But that they might be sheared,
 That their skins might be taken for coverings
 And their flesh eaten?
 The Shepherd, my brethren, is defending his own
 That they might sustain him.
 He keeps but to give to the butcher
 The throat of his ewe lamb.
 And is it not right, my brethren, that Jesus,
 Who is the Shepherd, even as we are the sheep,
 Should sustain himself upon us,
 That Time should do a slow violence upon us,
 In that we have no alternative
 Other than to feed the nameless Evil
 That would scatter and destroy for ever
 Nor ever shield us?

A. WELFORD JOHNSON.

WITHOUT COMMENT

Rome, Wednesday
 Tom-toms and bongo drums can now be used at services in Roman Catholic churches, the Vatican Council decided here today.—*Daily Herald* (31/10/63).

TWO IMPORTANT NEW BOOKS FOR HUMANISTS

The Humanist Revolution by Hector Hawton

Cloth 15s., Paper 10s. 6d.

Objections to Humanism, Edited by H. J. Blackham

Cloth, 16s.

Plus postage from THE FREETHINKER Bookshop

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.**OUTDOOR**

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

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group (Arnold House Hotel, Montpelier Terrace, Brighton), Sunday, December 1st, 5.30 p.m.: M. L. BURNET, "Christian Agnostics".

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, December 3rd, 7.30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "The Ethics of Word Usage".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, December 1st, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY, "God, Free-will and Immortality".

Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, December 1st, 7.30 p.m.: R. T. CLARE, "Secular Thought and Capital Punishment".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, December 1st, 7.30 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Religion and the Double Think".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, December 1st, 11 a.m.: DR. MAURICE BURTON, "The Role of the Human Eye in Mythology".

Notes and News

HAVING last week reviewed Hector Hawton's *The Humanist Revolution* (Barrie & Rockliff, 15s.), this week Reginald Underwood devotes Views and Opinions to *Objections to Humanism*, edited by H. J. Blackham (Constable, 16s.). This book formed the subject of BBC's *Meeting Point* on November 17th, when Mr. Blackham was questioned by the Rev. Harry Williams (who contributed to the earlier Constable volume, *Objections to Christian Belief*) and Professor H. D. Lewis, and was excellently supported by Anthony Quinton, who called himself "an old fashioned atheist". Mr. Blackham described the Humanist ideal as "the abolition of the lottery of birth", giving everybody the chance of living life well, of living it with "service, skill and style".

THE PRESIDENT of the National Secular Society, D. H. Tribe made his second television appearance on Friday, November 15th, this time on Wales and Western (Independent) TV. Mr. Tribe discussed the recent NSS statement on education with a lecturer in philosophy and theology at Cardiff University.

WHEN THE Maltese Prime Minister, Dr. Borg Olivier, returned home at the end of September from his economic

missions to Washington and London, he broke his journey in Rome. Before reporting to his Cabinet, said H. D. Ziman (*Daily Telegraph*, 5/11/63), Dr. Olivier "had first to consult the Archbishop of Malta, Dr. Gonzi, who was attending the Ecumenical Council". No one in Malta regarded this as unusual, for, "On all major issues the Archbishop intervenes" and, in fact, Dr. Olivier owed his election to one such intervention: the Archbishop's interdict against Mr. Dom Mintoff and his Maltese Labour Party. But, as Mr. Ziman remarked, "The wide authority enjoyed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Malta is, none the less, beginning to be questioned". And that means the beginning of the end—for the Church.

IT IS worth noting, in connection with the foregoing, that, in a letter printed in *The Faith* (November 1963), the "liberal" Pope Paul VI praised "Our Venerable Brother Michael Gonzi" for "what you have been doing now for many years for the conservation and the increment of Catholic life in your important archdiocese". The Pope went on to express "great satisfaction with the way in which Catholic traditions have been truly maintained, and for the fidelity to the teaching of our holy religion", and generously included in his blessing "even those who might have given some ground for apprehension and sorrow to their Pastors". He expressed no "apprehension" or "sorrow" that his "Venerable Brother" should have forbidden Maltese Catholics to vote for Mr. Mintoff and should have ordered the withholding of absolution from any who did.

MOST PEOPLE thought that the fuss over Nelson Rockefeller's divorce had died down, reported the *Daily Herald's* New York correspondent, John Sampson (8/11/63). But then, a few weeks ago *The Sign*, a Catholic magazine with a wide circulation, showed a picture of Mr. Rockefeller and his new wife, the former Mrs. Margaretta Murphy, and commented: "To terminate a marriage of 31 years and marry the newly-divorced mother of four young children, and then to present himself to the American people as a man with the integrity and character to lead them is just too much. The flagrant transgression of our code of life has properly drawn the rebuke of Americans of all faiths. Rockefeller should now withdraw". *The Sign*, it seems, was trying to do a "Gonzi" act.

CANON John Pearce-Higgins, Vice-Provost of Southwark Cathedral, has been figuring in these columns a good deal lately. This time we have to report a letter he wrote to the *South London Press* (25/10/63), reprimanding a staff writer on that paper for questioning "psychic" phenomena. Did not "top ranking scientists such as Sir William Crookes, Sir William Barrett, Sir Oliver Lodge, and many others" set out to de-bunk psychic phenomena and then "become converted to their reality and to the evidence for survival after death which they provide"? We judge from other parts of the Canon's letter that he has read a good deal in support of spiritualism, but we judge from the above excerpts that he hasn't yet encountered Mr. Trevor Hall's exposure of Sir William Crookes.

CANON Pearce-Higgins does not, of course, regard the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England as binding. Two vicars who appeared on a brain's trust panel with Dr. Elsie Toms of St. Albans (Herts) do. In answer to the question, "Do you agree with capital punishment?" they said they had to, because of the Articles (*Daily Herald*, 13/11/63). They were referring to Article 37, which states: "The Laws of the Realm may punish Christian men with death, for heinous and grievous offences".

The Catholic Fear of Thought

By G. L. SIMONS

MANY UNREFLECTIVE people find it satisfactory to talk approvingly of the "free world" where "free" is merely synonymous with "non-communist". However this use of words is unfortunate for two main reasons. Firstly it distorts the international situation by over-simplification, making the Western world seem highly virtuous by definition. Secondly it clouds the meaning of words by using them in circumstances where they do not apply. I refer in particular to the use of the word "freedom". It is said by certain people that the West has freedom whereas the Communist countries do not. Since freedom is thought to be desirable many people are quite prepared to believe that they have it if they are told so repetitively and with authority. Unfortunately, however, the passion with which they assert their possession of "freedom" has little connection with their understanding of the word. Were it otherwise it would popularly be regarded as laughable to include amongst the nations of the "free world" such Catholic countries as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland.

For of all freedoms one of the most essential is the *freedom to think*. Freedom to think is logically necessary for democratic freedom, since democracy loses its significance when the electorate uses its mandate in an unthinking and automatic fashion. Freedom to think cannot be estimated too highly; from it flow all the riches of science and philosophy, and many of those of great literature and art. Independent and free thought is essential for a vital and progressive society. Thus men must be encouraged to use their minds, to question assumptions, to think for themselves. Because mental freedom is important, forces which militate against it should be firmly opposed. *One such force is the Roman Catholic Church.*

From the time of the inception of the Vatican Holy Office (whose members are still called Inquisitors—concerned with the "discovery, punishment, and prevention of heresy") the Catholic Church has shown its fear of independent thought. The cruel members of the Spanish Inquisition have their counterparts in the modern world, as can be seen when a modern state (e.g. Spain, Portugal) falls under the sway of the Vatican. When state and church are unified the Church becomes the supreme moral authority using the power of the state to punish independently minded persons. In Franco's Spain people have been jailed for the criminal offence of not attending Mass on Sundays, and Protestant pastors have been sent to jail and even shot.

There are two principle ways in which the Catholic hierarchy attempts to quell thought and discourage intellectual investigation. The first is through education. Catholic children are systematically indoctrinated into a creed most of the major tenets of which would under normal circumstances be questioned by any healthy young mentality. To court the favour of the Vatican, which in due course he received in abundance, Benito Mussolini declared, "I wish to see religion everywhere in the country. Let us teach the children their catechism . . . however young they may be . . .". This has always been the technique of Catholic educators—to brainwash young children into such an emotionally inhibited and intellectually inept state that the mere occurrence of a questioning thought is interpreted as sinful and impious.

The aim of Catholic education is to create a state of mind which acquiesces, which accepts, which is obedient,

orthodox and unthinking. There is no freedom to accept or reject God. To consider the possibility of God's non-existence is an immoral act which must be immediately suppressed. I quote from *Freedom through Education* (page 23) by Reddan and Ryan which is a standard guide for Catholic teachers: "Freedom to worship God implies in its correct meaning and interpretation that every man should acknowledge God as his Creator, submit to His divine rule and will, embrace the eternal truths which alone insure salvation. This is true freedom. It is opposed to that so-called 'liberty of conscience' which a seditious and rebellious mind dominated by man's lower nature and blinded to truth and goodness employs to undermine, overthrow or destroy the infallible authority of religion to guide and direct all the individual's conduct in terms of the moral law".

Catholic education is ideological indoctrination of the most severe kind. Intellectual statements (which to all disinterested persons are highly questionable) are taught as absolute fact which only immoral and unworthy people doubt. The Catholic Church is convinced of its monopoly of truth. In the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* we read: "Truth is one and absolute; the Catholic Church and she only has all the truth of religion. All religions whatsoever have varying amounts of truth in them, but the Catholic Church alone has all." Moral statements (which to all people whose natural sympathies have not been warped by dogma appear unreasonable and harsh) are taught as the will of God which is queried only by wicked heretics. And there is no moral dilemma in which a Catholic finds himself for which the Catholic Church does not claim to be able to supply the divinely-sanctioned answer.

The systematic approach to Catholic education is never more rigorous than in the selection of text-books. Gradually more and more books written by Protestants are being abandoned in Catholic schools to be replaced by works of orthodox Catholics. Religion is so all-pervasive in Catholic schools that it is even customary to insert pictures of saints, priests, altars, etc., into books that nominally have nothing to do with religion, e.g. the Seton Series in Arithmetic, widely used to teach young Catholics to count.

But the careful indoctrination does not stop with the primary school. At Catholic colleges and universities it is equally destructive of the spirit of free enquiry. In a special encyclical Pope Leo XIII ordered the Catholic world to recognise Thomas Aquinas as the greatest philosopher. And many students of philosophy in Catholic colleges never even hear of the brilliant modern thinkers whose works have superceded those of Aquinas and the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages. For example, the ex-priest Joseph McCabe who was a Catholic professor of philosophy for four years said he had "remained ignorant of the very names of the chief English, American and German thinkers of the time". Similarly the Head of the Department of Psychology at the Catholic University of America admitted (under cross-examination at a hearing on censorship) that he had never heard of Dreiser, Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Steinbeck, Wolfe, Maeterlinck and several other writers.

Hence it is apparent that the Catholic Church feels that it can only preserve its principles by keeping its members in ignorance about alternative ideas. That this negative

and reactionary attitude should be reflected in poor Catholic scholarship is to be expected. And this was confirmed by Professor Reyniers of Notre Dame when he said, "On the basis of productive scholarship we have no prominent universities . . . we are at the bottom of published research, just as our medical schools are at the bottom of the medical ratings list . . . There is only one-fourth as much productive scholarship coming from Catholics as our numbers warrant . . . Neither in its quantity nor its quality is there the slightest room for complacency about Catholic scholarship". But unfortunately the inhibiting behaviour of the Roman Catholic Church is not restricted to education.

The Vatican attempts to discourage all Catholics from reading certain books, seeing certain films or certain theatre productions. It also organises Catholic opposition, usually in the form of economic pressure, to any publisher, film-maker or theatre manager who is considered by the Catholic hierarchy to be presenting work which is against the interests of Catholicism.

The most well-known example of Catholic censorship is the *Index of Forbidden Books*. This *Index* comprises about 5,000 books (written by historical and modern authors) which Catholics are not permitted to read. Pope Pius IV declared it a mortal sin to read a condemned book. It is sad that the *Index* contains some of the greatest world literature. For example, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Bergson's *Creative Evolution* and Paine's *The Rights of Man*, are typical of the masterpieces to appear on the *Index*. All the works of David Hume also appear, with much of Locke, Voltaire, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Bacon, Hobbes, Dumas, Hugo, Rousseau, Anatole France, Emile Zola, Renan, Descartes, Sartre, Gide and many others.

The picture looks all the more dismal when it is realised that the *Index* is not intended as an *exhaustive* list of forbidden books. In fact according to Canon Law there are eleven categories of books which no Catholic (below the rank of bishop) is permitted to read under penalty of mortal sin. However, literature is only one art-form that receives the attention of the Catholic hierarchy; none which reaches the general public is neglected.

For example, in America the Catholic Legion of Decency is concerned with the censorship of films which it considers disagreeable. The public pledge of the Legion, ordered by Pius XII, states that the signatory will avoid, and encourage others to avoid, all films that are "dangerous to the moral life", and will furthermore avoid all places of amusement where the films are shown. It is estimated that about 9,000,000 American Catholics have signed the pledge, and thus often have sufficient economic power, through boycott, to jeopardise the success of a new film. Some films which were condemned by the Legion, but which survived nevertheless, were *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Forever Amber* and *Mr. Roberts*.

Catholic pressure techniques are also applied to broadcasting, the theatre and the press. For a careful and detailed account of these deplorable activities see Chapter 9 in *Freedom and Catholic Power* by Paul Blanshard.

In 1947 the American Catholic Philosophical Association published a tract on Aquinas and American freedom of which the following quotations are a part: "Because religion is a matter of basic justice, freedom of religion does not mean the liberty to be religious or non-religious . . . Religion must be expressed by external actions performed in a church at an orderly and proper time . . . Human beings are not free in such matters . . . Free speech is not free to injure faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, temperance, truth, or any other virtue protecting

the welfare of the individual or society." Hence it is apparent that the Catholic Church is opposed to freedom of speech and the toleration of any ideas with which it disagrees. It is obvious why the Vatican was well satisfied to ally itself with such fascist dictators as Mussolini, Franco and Hitler to whom the idea of extensive censorship of all literary and artistic communication also appealed.

In opposing freedom of thought the Catholic Church is committed to opposition to the great principle which has enriched civilisation above all others. For this reason if we hold that art and literature, science and philosophy, independence of mind and human happiness are important and worthy of preservation we should oppose all evil institutions which would subvert man's artistic and intellectual genius for the mere consolidation of a superstitious, degenerate, cruel and misguided creed which enlightened men everywhere have outgrown. The Vatican, with its far-reaching, organised and skilful tactics, is an evil institution that would enforce just such a creed throughout the world given the opportunity.

Richard Overton

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

THOSE READERS who came to the World Union of Freethinkers week-end conference in 1961 at Beatrice Webb House, near Dorking, will not have forgotten M. Olivier Lutaud of the Sorbonne and his excellent address delivered in masterly English. Last May he delivered a talk to the French Union Rationaliste on Overton, Freethinker and Republican "Leveller" of the first English Revolution. From this notable discourse I shall take the Freethinker section as a basis for this brief note.

Among the treasures of the British Museum is a collection of pamphlets, leaflets etc. made at the time of their publication to the number of 22,000 separate items by George Thomason, bookseller, who died in 1666. He arranged them in chronological order and bound them up in 1,983 volumes. If then any reader wishes to study the period for himself, he can spend quite a few hours in the famous reading room. It is unique, in that in this collection we have for the first time in history what can be termed the Voice of the People. Or better Voices, many with a great deal to say in languages of varying vigour and clarity. Among these, not the least vehement was that of Richard Overton. Some of the pamphlets appear over his name; some over a pen-name such as Martin Marpriest; others in collaboration; others which can be identified by style and matter only.

The work which is of interest to us Freethinkers appeared in January 1644 (and was later published) with the title:

Man's Mortality, "a treatise in which it is proved both by theology and by philosophy that Man in his totality and as a rational being is a wholly mortal substance, contrary to the common distinction made between soul and body; and in which it is shown that the present thesis of the soul bound either for Heaven or Hell is mere fiction . . ."

Overton makes fun of the "fancy of the soul", advancing scientific arguments, quoting Aristotle, Lucretius and Ambrose Paré, the surgeon (d.1590), as well as the Bible. He maintained that the "soul" is merely the function of the body. "Man is only a being whose parts and members are endowed with faculties — making of him a living rational creature, and the soul is material, for what is not matter is nothing".

Overton was his own printer and publisher. The Long

Parliament was as oppressive as the Star Chamber; and only those licensed were allowed to print. The members of the Stationers' Company acted as spies to hunt down the secret presses, and the time came at last when that of Overton was discovered and seized. Other anti-clerical pamphlets which he published included a *Trial of Mr. Persecutor* in which Persecutor and his defenders Sir Symon Synod and Sir John Presbyter are convicted of a jesuitical plot against the Christ Liberator of consciences, the power of Parliament and the Public Weal; this also contains an attack on anti-semitism. Then followed a series of pamphlets against tithes and an Established Church, and the priests and pastors who fatten themselves at the expense of the "mechanics" (working-men).

Overton joined with "Freeborn" John Lilburne in producing among other works, *The Agreement of the People*, in a paper war on Cromwell, which led to the astonishing trial of Lilburne in which he was acquitted, whereon Cromwell had him banished and fined £7,000.

"Reason", wrote Overton, "is the foundation of all justice and authority; Reason has no precedent for Reason is the fountain of all just precedents"; and authority "has its source in the People". Here we have, long before Lincoln, Government of the People by the People for the People. An attack on Cromwell was entitled *The Hunt of the False Foxes or the Grandee-Deceivers Unmasked*, wherein Cromwell is depicted as follows; "Scarcely have you begun to speak to Cromwell of no matter what, he places his hand on his breast, raises his eyes to heaven, calls on God as a witness, weeps, groans, expresses his repentance, up to the moment when he thrusts you under the fifth rib . . .".

Overton disappeared after 1649, having rejected an act of pardon as a dishonour. The Levellers were scattered, never to unite again. Their influence remained; their work had not been in vain. They were in the line of the Lollards, the Anabaptists, the Cathari of earlier times, and of the Chartists and Radicals of more modern days.

BUDDHISM IN INDIA

BUDDHISM, the *Daily Mirror* reported (6/11/63) is having a big revival in India. In ten years up to 1961 there were more than three million Indian converts. They are, the *Mirror* said, mainly "untouchables" and lower castes, "who found in Buddhism the hope of social equality, which they have not got in Hindu society".

CORRESPONDENCE

A-DEISM

I see that even Mr. Cutner gives support to the notion that Thomas Paine (or for that matter, Voltaire) was not an atheist. If he was not an atheist, then he must have been a theist. But if he was a theist, how could he have been a deist? I have always understood that a theist is one who believes in a personal God who makes himself known by direct revelation. Surely Thomas Paine did not accept this.

He was a deist, and a deist is one who believes in a deity, existing apart from the world and who is unknown and unknowable. Since Thomas Paine rejected Christianity, together presumably with Judaism and Mohammedanism, he couldn't have been a theist. Therefore he must have been a-theist—unless we are going to split hairs about atheist being either passively non-theist or militantly anti-theist. There was nothing passive about Thomas.

It seems to me that a great deal of confusion is caused by not distinguishing between a-theism and what would more correctly be called a-deism. One can be an atheist and yet believe in God as deity. What we seem to require is some such word as "a-deist" which, in rejecting God necessarily rejects theism also.

REGINALD UNDERWOOD.

"WHO ARE THE HUMANISTS?"

I am writing this letter in the hope that you will publish it in your excellent journal, THE FREETHINKER. Those of your readers who are also members of the National Secular Society will have recently received a printed questionnaire titled as above. This questionnaire constitutes the first attempt ever made to gather any accurate information about "freethinkers" as a distinct section of the population. This information is needed if we are to be an efficient and well-organised force within society, as it is true to say that at present we know much more about our religious opponents than we do about ourselves. I would therefore, earnestly appeal to all your readers who have received a questionnaire but have not yet completed and returned it, to do so as soon as possible.

COLIN B. CAMPBELL
(32 Limberlost Close, Handsworth Wood, Birmingham, 20).

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