

The Freethinker

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"THE IRISH SYSTEM of education must be described as the most successful in the world. This is because it has succeeded in its aim, which is to prevent children from thinking for themselves." So spoke Dr. Owen Sheehy Skeffington of Trinity College, Dublin, last October. And, recently, in four articles in *The Guardian* (January 8th-11th), another Irishman, Peter Lennon expanded this theme. By taking an imaginary young Irish student through school and university, Mr. Lennon indicated the pressures that would be exerted to prevent the development of independent thinking.

To start with there is the question of money. Unless a boy's parents can afford to pay his fees, he will not be able to go to secondary school. But, even assuming that the money is available and the boy goes on to secondary school, he will, Mr. Lennon said, "continue to be inculcated with the kind of simple-minded religious instruction and biased history of his country which will seriously impair his ability for objective thinking".

Dr. Tierney and Dr. Browne

Supposing, though, the boy belongs to the small number of families who are able—by paying the fees and the cost of board—to send their son to university. He then goes on to "what he fondly believes to be a seat of culture and learning", University College, Dublin. But, "Instead of finding himself in an atmosphere where young people make brave, even if occasionally inept or misguided attempts to express themselves, everywhere our student turns", said Mr. Lennon, "he finds himself under constraint". Students' councils are discouraged from criticising the "decrepit educational system", speakers to various students' societies have to be approved by the College authorities. In fact, "No independent action of whatever nature is encouraged at UDC", which is dominated by one of the group of despotic figures who throw their shadow over Irish life", Dr. Michael Tierney, president of the College.

Three years ago, Dr. Noel Browne, one of the few outspoken members of the Dail, charged Dr. Tierney with making his own temporary appointments to university posts, without notice or advertisement, in complete disregard of the College charter. And, Dr. Browne asserted, in order to suppress opposition, Dr. Tierney had instituted a reign of fear because of the insecurity of such temporary appointments. As a result Dr. Tierney was strongly censured by the Convocation of the National University of Ireland, but he retaliated by refusing to allow the Convocation to meet in the university, where it had been meeting for half a century. Moreover, a Government inquiry led, not to a reprimand but to a legalisation of the position.

Such floutings of legality and public well-being are possible only because Dr. Tierney is supported by the most powerful figure in Ireland, the Most Rev. John Charles McQuaid, DD, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate

of Ireland, a veritable "Grey Eminence".

It was Dr. McQuaid, of course, who was responsible for the notorious sabotaging of Dr. Noel Browne's mother-and-child welfare scheme. And it is Dr. McQuaid who is responsible more than anyone else for the poverty—in all senses—of Irish life today. No doubt the Archbishop is aware of "reformist" trends in the Catholic Church, as exemplified at the Vatican Council. Like the Archbishop of Malta, however, Dr. McQuaid shows no signs of heeding them. It may be necessary for the clergy in Austria, France, Germany — possibly even England—to adapt themselves to a secular, scientific age. Not so in Ireland.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Church in Ireland

By COLIN McCALL

The Archbishop and the Clergy

Perhaps it is significant, too, that Dr. McQuaid, a classical scholar and former headmaster, has never been exposed to what has been termed "the rough and tumble of parochial life". Above all, though, he typifies the Catholic clerical attitude in a backward, largely agricultural country. Mr. Lennon cited a pastoral letter insisting that the problem of suffering is best solved, not by theoretical discussions but by "the loving acceptance of our pain". And, Mr. Lennon went on: "When we listen to his [the Archbishop's] bland reports, read out at mass on the number of hot meals served to young mothers in food centres (meals which he also seems to think relieve them of 'anxiety') we feel that he would not raise too much objection to substituting the word 'poverty' for 'pain'". Mr. Lennon is probably right. And, after all, the Archbishop could give scriptural justification for such a substitution: are not the poor to be always with us; are they not blessed? And, in Ireland's case, isn't it the time-honoured practice to export poverty?

There is, however, a limit—even if a high one—to the number of Irishmen who can emigrate to America, Australia, Britain and elsewhere. Now, anyway, the industrialisation of Ireland itself is beginning, and the overseas capital will bring changes in its wake. The Archbishop would be well advised, then—for his own and his Church's sake—to moderate his attitude while it is not too late. There *are* priests in Ireland who are sensitive to the "wind of change"—Jesuits like Father Peter Connolly and Father John Kelly, for instance—but they are exceptional. On the whole the Irish clergy is ignorant and arrogant, and solidly behind its Primate.

The Laity

And the laity? For the most part it puts up with things as they are, having been conditioned to do so. Most of the intelligent and many of the less intelligent get out, anyway, and sometimes, it must be said, out of the clutches of the Church too. For though the Irish swell the Roman Catholic congregations—and populations—of the English-speaking countries, the men especially often take advantage of the freer conditions to let their religion lapse. A hard struggle faces those who stay behind. There must—as Dublin Freethinkers have informed me—be a lot of un-

belief in the capital, but it has no means of expression. The rumours of the pressures exerted by the Archbishop's House are, as Mr. Lennon says, "only too true". Dr. McQuaid's secretary will "see to it that editors are in no danger of forgetting what might be 'regrettable' to the Archbishop" and 'phone calls are often received by the press suggesting how "delicate matters" should be handled.

Not only is there censorship, there is self-censorship for fear of the consequences. Should an editor or a television producer not "consider the Archbishop's feelings", he might well find himself out of a job.

Mr. Lennon's Offer

The Archbishop has, of course, his defenders, one of whom wrote to *The Guardian* in protest against Mr. Lennon's "offensive, irresponsible, and unjustified attack". But, according to another writer, the articles understated the position. Apart from a minority of ordinary clerics, wrote Sean O. Maoilbhríde of Birmingham, "the Catholic Church has been consistently reactionary to the point of opposing, at all stages, the modern revolutionary movement".

Of the two Dubliners (additional to Dr. Sheehy Skeffington), one was pessimistic. Ireland's hope, said the latter, "would seem to be in the field of education . . . But this is largely the preserve of the Church, and the fences around it are not likely to yield before the pressure of lay opinion . . .". Desmond Fennell, by contrast, was irate. "Perhaps your readers can imagine", he wrote, "how they would feel if they were to read in a leading German or Spanish newspaper a venomous attack by an English journalist on certain English laws and institutions . . .".

In his reply, Mr. Lennon emphasised that he had publicly offered his articles to any paper in Ireland that wished to print them, and that the offer still stood. I wonder if there will be any takers?

"With-It" Worship

By J. A. MILLAR

FROM THE ANCIENT Egyptian worship of the scarab—or sacred beetle—to the current worship of our contemporary teenage demigods, the Beatles, the Churches have ever had the good sense to place importance on the discriminate use of music as a means of luring otherwise reluctant adherents into their gloomy precincts. The Pagan gods and goddesses who were patrons of the art included Pan, Orpheus, Apollo and Celia, the Muses Euterpe and Terpsichore. They were, in fact, almost as numerous in their varying forms as gods and goddesses of "love"—and just as well distributed geographically.

Although the Christian Church's services to music are not so great as claimed by theologians, music has, nevertheless, been a sphere which, because of its peculiar nature, has suffered less at the hands of the priest than many another art form. Indeed, the Roman castrati are a legend in musical circles though the Vatican, understandably, would rather pretend it never did cut off male sexual organs in order to produce a more harmonious blend with their pipe-organs.

Stalin branded "modern" music as opposed to the spirit of the USSR, and banned it as a decadent product of Western imperialism. Belatedly (as usual), the Churches are catching up with the Bolsheviks. They are realising that if, as the Communist asserts, current musical trends are reactionary and decadent, they are just what are needed. Accordingly, many churches are experimenting

with popular music as part of their services.

It was of course, General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, who first "got with it". "Why should the devil have all the good tunes?" he asked, and proceeded to have special lyrics written to popular tunes for his brass bands, the most popular musical combinations of their day.

A recent convert to his school of thought is the Rev. A. G. Waters, Vicar of St. Peter's Church, Brockley, where, we are told, "Parishioners may soon be swinging into the latest refrain of an old hymn or doing the Madison or Hully-gully in the aisles". (*Evening Standard*, 7/1/64). According to the same article, the Church of England has a "pop-hymn specialist"! He is the Rev. G. Beaumont who is to provide the "hymns" for a service that the Rev. Waters is holding in response to an appeal to "get with it Man", in a letter which offered the not uninteresting snippet that "the shake is best. It sort of comes natural, and you can let the worship bubble up from deep down".

Even in the with-it world of "shake", "twist" and guitars, however, the "One true Church" has demonstrated its divine foundation once again for, whilst the Protestants are still experimenting with the "Mersey Sound", the Vatican has achieved the highest goal to which the Churches' new hymns can aspire—a disc in the Top Ten. This distinction has been achieved by Rome's top "pop" artist the now famous singing Dominican Nun, Soeur Sourire, with her record "Dominique".

Perhaps with an eye to ensuring that the next smash hit shall be on the Anglican "label", the Church of England has just published a revised Hymn Book. A number of hymns have been excluded from this new edition because, a Church spokesman stated, "they misrepresented the character of God". Amongst those omitted is *Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild!* Freethinkers have been claiming for years that that particular description of God was a misrepresentation, and it is good to know that the Church at last agrees with us. The same spokesman added that "the word mild in its modern sense gives a false impression. Jesus was strong and virile—not mild".

This is the first time we have heard virility claimed for Jesus, but it will help the new image. It will make it so much easier to adapt modern lyrics and tunes to church hymns if God is strong and virile and has surrendered to his ancient sexual taboos.

ABORTION LAW REFORM ASSOCIATION

THE JANUARY 1964 *Newsletter* of the Abortion Law Reform Association contains a report of Dr. Glanville Williams's presidential address to the Association on October 30th, 1963. Dr. Williams pointed out that abortion up to the thirteenth week of pregnancy was legal under the old Common Law, which allowed abortion before quickening. This remained the position in England till 1803, when misguided legislation first made abortion during the early weeks of pregnancy a crime. The Association, Dr. Williams said, must aim at restoring the legal position substantially as it was before 1803, if it wished to eliminate the menace of the illegal operation. There were, after all, no backstreet quacks who removed appendixes or duodenal ulcers, because there was no reason for their existence. These social blights were found only when out-of-date laws prevented medical men from exercising their own judgment.

The *Newsletter* also reports the retirement of Colonel James Campbell from the chairmanship of the Abortion Law Reform Association. We join with the Association in wishing Colonel Campbell a happy retirement.

Mrs. Grundy

By F. A. RIDLEY

The English seem to have become much less prudish in the past ten years. The so-called "four-letter words" are printed in full; skirts are even shorter than they were in 1926; sexual behaviour as far as can be judged, is less restricted by taboos and prejudices than at any other time in our history. But are we really in the midst of a permanent revolution in manners?

The author of *Mrs. Grundy* thinks not. His book is a detailed and absorbing study of English prudery (which he defines as interference, organised or unorganised in other people's pleasures) as it has found expression in various fields since the middle ages.

THE ABOVE quotation from the publisher's blurb attached to Peter Fryer's recent book appropriately entitled, *Mrs. Grundy—Studies in English Prudery* (Dennis Dobson, London) indicates the purpose of the most recent volume to be dedicated to that famous name, and to the intriguing subject-matter that it connotes. Our author, formerly a leading member of the Communist Party (which he left over the controversial events connected with the abortive Hungarian revolution and its violent suppression by Russian intervention) and the author of a book on Portugal, sets out to expose the octopus-like grip of Mrs. Grundy on all aspects of British social life with infinite gusto, and an erudition which can only be described as encyclopedic. Indeed, the only serious criticism that I have to make of this admirable critique of what one could also describe as Victorianism in its widest connotation (though its subject matter is actually far older) is that Mr. Fryer's erudition at times overloads his narrative whilst in particular, he has added far too many notes, many—perhaps, even the majority—of which could well have been included in his text. That said, it only remains to congratulate both Peter Fryer and his publishers on having produced what is not only an admirable volume, but equally a record of English puritanism in its worst sense that is of permanent social value. Indeed the more so if, as Mr. Fryer himself appears to believe, Mrs. Grundy like the evangelical poor is always destined to be with us.

That there is still something to be said for this melancholy assumption seems to be indicated by a recent observation which I heard myself. When a resident in Clerkenwell was asked whether he had ever been to the Sadlers Wells Opera House, near where he lived, he indignantly replied, "I've never been to see that filth". Like his iconoclastic predecessor, John Milton, Peter Fryer evidently fears the reappearance of "new foes threatening to bind our souls with secular chains". For certainly, as his narrative abundantly demonstrates, Mrs. Grundy is evidently a lady of Protean shape who reincarnates herself in a multitude of diverse forms. If, as seems the case here as elsewhere, "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance", the defenders of social freedom will find a whole arsenal of ammunition in Peter Fryer's heavily documented account.

The very first of Fryer's numerous notes answers the inevitable query, who originally was Mrs. Grundy? I confess I did not know that the original Mrs. Grundy was the neighbour in Thomas Morton's play, *Speed the Plough* (1798) of whom it was continually asked, "What will Mrs. Grundy say?" Again, and speaking for myself, I am grateful to Mr. Fryer for thus introducing me to perhaps the most famous woman in English history: certainly (as indeed the whole purpose of this book is to show), the most influential! How influential this symbolic figure has been is here traced in a dozen different fields of social

behaviour (or in the "Grundyist" view, misbehaviour), which range from banning four-letter words (prior to a recent famous case in English law) to prohibiting not only the twist, but even such untwisted dances as the waltz. From Bands of Hope to combat drink in the young, to Sunday closing of all possible forms of amusement, Mrs. Grundy's hand was heavy and ubiquitous at all times, though in some more than others.

Puritanism, which has enthroned that good Calvinist Mrs. Grundy in the place occupied in Catholic lands by the less censorious figure of the Virgin Mary, has been rampant. Shakespeare was already noting its earlier manifestations in *Twelfth Night*: "Dost think that because thou art virtuous we shall have no more cakes and ale?" Half a century later when the Puritans did seize power under the Commonwealth, their heavy hand spared neither morris dancers, witches nor maypoles. Was not even the sympathetic historian, Macaulay, constrained to make his immortal comment that the Puritan zealots of the Commonwealth prohibited bear-baiting not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators? And though the reign of the saints was politically of short duration, it has yet left its mark in the English Sunday—still a bye-word on the Continent—which was to attain its zenith in Victorian times and is still far from extinct.

There is reputed to be still in existence a hostelry near Chester which is half in England and half in Wales, in which on Sundays (until recently at least), alcoholic liquors could only be served in the English section of the pub, where the still Calvinistic Welsh licensing laws did not apply. "Nothing was more dreary and tedious"—wrote a French police official in 1784—"than an English Sunday whether in London or the country". "It is the finest sight in the world" he added ironically, "to see men, women and children looking at each other gloomily and yawning as they trudge along, or sitting with folded arms close by their windows—which are always shut—counting the passers-by".

Under the title, "Misery Martin against the 20th century", Peter Fryer devotes a diverting as well as informative chapter to an old acquaintance of the National Secular Society, Herbert Henry Martin—more generally known to his less pious contemporaries as "Misery" Martin, secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society from 1925-1951. Our author thus apostrophises this modern hero of sabbatarianism who, if his zeal has by now received its commensurate reward, must have a special seat reserved for him in whatever region purveyors of human misery go to. For, recalls our author, "few Englishmen in the present century have done as much as 'Misery Martin' as the popular press christened him, to stop people enjoying themselves in ways he disapproved of". Then follows a lengthy (if by no means complete) account of the activities of this sabbatarian hero who died in the odour of sanctity in 1953, and was followed by an equally zealous, if scarcely as miserable successor, Mr. Harold Legerton.

Founded in 1831, the Lord's Day Observance Society had been preceded by many similar societies devoted to the exclusive maintenance of the English Sunday in its integral gloom; an objective (laudable or otherwise!) which harks back to the Puritan ascendancy of the mid-17th century, when a chaplain of Charles I was im-

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This Believing World

The Rev. G. W. Grubb is the "second" example of a cursing parson we have had recently. Writing in his parish magazine at Spaxton, Somerset, he solemnly declared a "religious curse on any in Spaxton who gave false information to the Press, or to the Bishop, or of the Bishop or his priests". It is true that nobody seems to know anything about such information, but why interfere with Mr. Grubb's fun? Mr. Ebsary, Spaxton's people's warden, was something of a spoil-sport. The "whole village is laughing", he said. "You can't take a thing like this seriously".

★
Another parson, the Rev. M. Nicklin of Romford, implores his parishioners not to worry him with "piffling" matters, when he is doing his best to help them spiritually. "What sort of service is the man-in-the-street looking for?" Mr. Nicklin asks (*Daily Sketch*, January 22nd). His wife apparently is expected to be an "unpaid curate", and the whole situation is unsatisfactory. Indeed, the life of a parson these days is, like that of a policeman, a most unhappy one. There is, though, the grace and beauty of the religion of Jesus Christ to compensate.

★
More ghosts are recorded at Christmas, it seems, than at any other time of the year. The latest to come to our

The Apple is Bitten Again

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

FATHER CARSON was worried about his health: it was . . . just possible . . . that he had been overeating. But he was a young man; and his stomach should be good for a good many more good years, he fervently hoped. Still, it was wise to send for the doctor; as a priest is a valuable member of the community, and cannot take too much care—of himself. But when the doctor appeared on the priest's doorstep, it looked as if it was the doctor who was in need of special care. He did not appear to be half the man he was; and he asked in an extraordinary thin voice if he could come in. Then he hopped across the doorstep, slipped on the mat, and the priest saw . . .

Even in his panic the appalling logic of the thing struck the priest. People had always said that an apple a day keeps the doctor away; and so half an apple might keep half the doctor away? Yes, the priest had eaten only half an apple after his breakfast cereal with thick cream, his bacon, eggs, sausages and mushrooms, his generous helpings of toast, Devonshire butter and ginger marmalade. The apple—quite a good apple which his housekeeper had carefully selected—had suddenly seemed superfluous if not actually unwise. He had used a great deal of self-control, as a priest must, and had denied himself the pleasure of finishing it. Now the poor priest had to help the half doctor, neatly cut down to the middle, to his feet or rather foot and get him hopping into the sitting room where he flopped down on a sofa and promptly fell asleep.

It was with a new sense of shocked outrage that the priest then realised that his housekeeper would have put the half apple he hadn't eaten in the garbage can before she went to select the best steaks at the butcher's. Yet his duty was clear. He dragged himself into the backyard and gave the can a savage kick so that the refuse was spread out on the ground. After that, he had to get down on his hands and knees and sort out the muck like a hog. Finally, with anguish, he saw *the* half apple, already rust-coloured. He prayed for courage to eat the filth in order to make the doctor whole again.

notice was reported by the *Daily Sketch* (January 21st), the landlord of the Chequers public house and his wife being "scared to death" when their eight-year-old daughter saw "a white-robed and hooded figure early one morning," which opened her bedroom door and disappeared. This ghost story must be true because a local legend tells of three Protestants being burned at the stake after having been first imprisoned in the inn. Perhaps the local priest or parson will now exorcise the spook, aided or course, by *Psychic News* and a trustworthy medium.

★
The Russian Archbishop who blessed the Thames on January 19th did so in the following saintly terms: "Do Thou O King, who lovest mankind, come down and sanctify this river". This was followed by the sign of the cross. In addition, the holy man sprinkled the altar at St. Dunstan's with holy water but not, so far as we know, drawn directly from the blessed river.

★
The Rev. John Hickmore, Minister of Christchurch Congregational Church, South Oxendon, Essex, is the latest clergyman to enliven his service with a modern beat. He invited a four-piece group known as The Falcons to play their electric guitars, organ and drums on January 26th, "because I like their music and I think God is no square either".

But it was not the priest's lucky day; for exactly at that moment the wine-merchant's vanman, a notorious atheist, chose to make his delivery. The wretched vanman did not wait for the priest to find composure and time to stutter out any explanation, but promptly spread the rumour that the holy father was a dung-eating black beetle who made a secret mid-morning snack of anything his housekeeper had thought fit to throw out.

Well, you may find all this pretty incredible; but it is the explanation which the priest swore was the truth. The doctor had vanished, he said, as soon as he'd been able to eat the whole of the apple which keeps a whole doctor away. If any of his parishioners didn't believe him, he became quite angry; for he was used to people believing the miracles which he recounted in the pulpit. Of course the priest had to admit that it had been very forgetful of him to try to eat an apple on a day when the doctor was due to call; but forgetfulness *is* not, he insisted, the same thing as being stupid.

MRS. GRUNDY

(Concluded from page 43)

prisoned for the surely obvious assertion that the original biblical Lord's Day was actually the seventh and not the first day of the week; and when an anti-Puritan satirist penned the surely immortal lines: "To Banbury came I a profane one, and there I saw a Puritan one—hanging of his cat on Monday, Because it killed a mouse on Sunday".

The Anglo-Jewish Sabbath has a long and melancholy past; can we be sure that it is past?

Mr. Fryer has written a most valuable book. As a social annalist he deserves the grateful thanks of all progressive people. Those parts of his book which deal with the innumerable sexual inhibitions thought up in successive epochs by Mrs. Grundy, often illustrate that inspired commentary on St. Paul, "To the pure, all things are pure whilst to the impure, all things are scientific".

This is a book for permanent reference: we hope that it will enjoy the wide and prolonged circulation which its practical utility, no less than its remarkable merits, deserve.

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound).—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.
London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY, J. W. BARKER, C. E. WOOD, D. H. TRIBE, J. A. MILLAR.
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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

- Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, February 9th, 6.45 p.m.: O. MANNS, "New Gods—Is Secularism Awake?"
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Tuesday, February 11th, 7.30 p.m.: REV. T. E. DALTON, "Unitarianism—Then and Now".
Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street), Sunday, February 9th, 3 p.m.: DONALD MCRAE, "How I Became An Atheist".
Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 9th, 6.30 p.m.: A. F. M. BRIERLEY, "Humanism Today".
Manchester Branch NSS (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, February 9th, 7.30 p.m.: S. NEWTON, "The Failure of Inoculation".
Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenter's Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, February 9th, 7.30 p.m.: F. A. HORNIBROOK, "Live Without Tension".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1), Sunday, February 9th, 11 a.m.: F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT, MA, "Reforming the Law".

Notes and News

IT IS most appropriate that our review of the paperback edition, of Marion Starkey's *The Devil in Massachusetts* (publishing profits in aid of Oxfam) should be by Eric Maple who is the author of *The Dark World of Witches*. We join Mr. Maple in recommending this book to readers for its intrinsic merit as well as for the cause it supports. At 3s. 6d. it is excellent value.

ANOTHER celibate priest has laid down the law on dress and dancing for teenagers. This time it is Father Francis Dickinson of Alton, Hants—who obviously knows about these things—declaring that many girls "dance in a way that emphasises their bodies without realising the effect it has" (*The People*, 19/1/64). They should "dress in accordance with the type of dance they are doing", by which the Father means that they shouldn't wear flared skirts. Not if they are "energetic dancers", anyway; "they are too provocative". The Father approves of "twist dresses, which are not revealing, and jeans, though there is the danger that the latter might be "too tight and show off the girls' figures even more". To summarise:

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

J. W. A., £1; S. Hessey, 10s.; G. Matson, 10s.; K. Graham, 2s. 6d.; A. Stringer, £1 2s. 6d.; E. Rose, £1 17s. 6d.; J. Bellamy, £2; J. Gentry, 5s.; J. Little, £1; D. W. Coleman, £10; A. W. Coleman, £10; A. Faiers, 10s.; F.J.M., £2 2s. 6d.; R. Gerrard, 10s.; J. T., £1; G. N. Tole, 10s.; W. Wilkie, 12s. 6d.; W.M., £5; S. H. Hoddes, 10s. 6d.; E.C.R., 5s.; F. M. Lord, 5s.; H. Strange, 2s. 6d. Total at January 31st, 1964, £39 15s. 6d.

Father Dickinson wants to ensure that dancing remains "an innocent and healthy occupation", not indulged in for "sensual satisfaction".

WE CAN'T help wondering what Father Dickinson would think of the proposed new habit for the Sisters of Mercy at St. Xavier College in Chicago, USA. A *Daily Telegraph* photo (27/1/64) showed Sister Mary Jeanine and Sister Olivia in the present full-length garb, with the trim figure of model Bernice Pink in the suggested two-piece calf-length outfit. What next: nylons for nuns?

ROMAN CATHOLIC Paul Johnson might favour a change in his Church's attitude to birth control (Notes and News, 31/1/64). Not so Patricia A. Halloran of Yorkshire who, in a letter to the *New Statesman* (24/1/64), expressed surprise at Mr. Johnson's "incapability to understand one of the most basic and simple laws of God". There is no doubt in Mrs.(?) Halloran's mind that to prevent life by "unnatural methods" is "contrary to God and Nature" and that anybody who rejects her Church's teaching on the matter does so for "totally selfish, irresponsible reasons". But could there be anything more irresponsible than Mrs. Halloran's suggestion that we should not "artificially" limit earthly population because "Heaven's capacity" is unlimited?

MR. JOHNSON'S original *New Statesman* article (17/1/64) was, of course, prompted by his Church's treatment of Dr. Anne Biezanek, who was refused communion unless she closed her birth control clinic. Since then, Dr. Biezanek's Polish husband has said that she would have to choose between the clinic and her marriage. This ultimatum was later withdrawn, but the nasty odour of sanctity remained. It will, we are sure, be condemned by Mr. Johnson. No doubt it will also be deplored by John O'Callaghan, who interviewed Dr. Biezanek for *The Guardian* (21/1/64) and who also came in for feminine Catholic criticism.

MRS. PRISCILLA O'REILLY of London was "disturbed" by Mr. O'Callaghan's article; disturbed by the "superficial way in which it dealt with some serious matters" (*The Guardian*, 28/1/64). It said nothing about the "safe period", which "is proving extremely successful", and never mentioned that "fine organisation", the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council. Because of these glaring omissions, Mrs. O'Reilly assumed that Mr. O'Callaghan was a non-Catholic. But as *The Guardian* informed her, he is in fact a practising Catholic.

"THE RHYTHM of life is nearly back to normal," reported the Rev. Keith Flint, Parson to the islanders of Tristan da Cunha (*Sunday Express*, 19/1/64). Nearly, but not quite. Churchgoing on the island "seems to have suffered from the islanders' exposure to England's 'civilising influence'", said the parson with a note of bitterness. "Neither the children's services nor our Evensongs now attract more than 30 or 40 worshippers," he explained.

THE PRESIDENT of the National Secular Society, D. H. Tribe, will appear in the ITV *Sunday Break* programme on February 16th.

The Problem of Death

By DAVID TRIBE

WE OFTEN HEAR it said that, whether the message of religion is true or false, it brings hope to the living and comfort to the dying. In the folk-lore of popular preachers and writers of religious tracts appear lurid—and completely untrue—stories of how notorious unbelievers died screaming for God. Belief in God and an afterlife is, we are told, a psychological need.

What is the truth? People do not have a psychological need for any specific belief, but for the satisfaction of emotional drives. These are many and varied, including such paradoxes as adventure combined with security, self-control with letting off steam, planning for the future with not worrying about tomorrow. It is desirable that people shouldn't just drift along through life, but should have a personal philosophy and a purpose.

If man were really a "spiritual" being, no doubt these needs would be "spiritual", with all that that might imply. (Wise men don't waste their time trying to guess the unguessable). But all the available evidence suggests that man is a physical being with material, intellectual, emotional and moral needs only. To give real satisfaction a philosophy must be credible all the time, and not just in the hysterical or mystical atmosphere of a Revivalist meeting or a Catholic mass. A purpose must be geared to a credible philosophy and realisable aims, or it is nothing but fanaticism bordering on the pathological.

In the days when it was possible to believe in a literal "Friend for little children above the bright blue sky" and to gain a sense of purpose from striving to reach after death a "home for little children" in the same locality, religion may have given life a stable frame of reference. But this is only one psychological need. Freedom from fear is another. By "religion" most people in Europe and the Americas mean Christianity; and if this much-promoted creed has promised more than almost any other, it has also threatened more. Though it is fashionable today to play down hell-fire in religious advertising campaigns, this teaching is a central part of the Christian story. No one, save Enoch, Elijah and the thief at Calvary, can be sure that his name is written in the "Book of Life". God "saves" whom He will. To the great mass of humanity, according to Hebrews 9, 27, "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment". However much a man may think his beliefs bring promise of salvation, the outcome must remain in some doubt. According to the Catholic creed, some actions or omissions are in themselves "mortal sins", bringing certain hell-fire. If anyone dies screaming for God—and some people do—he is not an atheist, but a backsliding believer.

In reality, to place the universe under some Supreme Being, make Him pleased or angry by trivialities of human belief or behaviour, and see some cosmic purpose in man's existence is a piece of paranoia that seems the more ridiculous the more we come to understand the natural world. The universe operates according to predictable laws. "Life" is the name given to complex biochemical processes. Human "consciousness" and "personality" derive from man's nervous and endocrine (hormonal) systems, and can be observed to change under the influence of drugs, accidents, operations, illness and age. All the evidence indicates that when the body disintegrates at death they disappear. "Spiritual body" and "life after death" are contradictions in terms, and so completely meaningless.

Is there anything very horrifying or bleak about these notions? Certainly not horrifying. Real horror comes from a belief in unseen principalities and powers arbitrarily controlling human destiny and stoking the fires of hell for the unwary. Secularism reveals death as no more to be feared than sleep. It comes either suddenly through accident to the previously healthy, or slowly to those whose living processes are running down. To one group it is an unpleasant visitor, yet free of grim foreboding; to the other it may well come as a friend, bringing release from the anguish of physical suffering, helplessness, dependence, and feeling of uselessness. It is natural and inevitable, comprehensible as part of the flux of all things—waxing and waning, rising and falling, synthesising and disintegrating, living and dying.

Scientific understanding cannot of itself, however, remove all the suffering of death. Perhaps it will always be the supreme tragedy. But a little commonsense and kindness will do much to help.

The only purpose in life is the purpose we give it. You will hear people say that if there is nothing else beyond then life is pointless. This is sheer neurosis. What is pointless is to waste time on vain speculations, to denounce reality for what it is and fret for what it cannot be. A sensible person accepts life for what it is and strives to make it a little better. Indeed, this life becomes more precious if we regard it as unique. If man is not a waxen puppet vainly trying to change the world by prayer, but a reasoning and sympathetic being tackling the hunger, disease, injustice and other improvable vagaries of life, then there can be real achievement and satisfaction. A "vale of tears" becomes a valley of decision. An anxious tomorrow becomes an active today.

Life has its mysteries, but is not mystical. The moment of entering and the moment of leaving it are determined by natural laws, where human decision-making play their part. Should life become intolerable, suicide or euthanasia should be at hand. Sad as this solution is, it is even sadder to see life groaning on for the superstitious fear of ending it. We should be filled not with horror but with compassion. Perhaps we could have helped to avert this choice by giving more attention to the loneliness, poverty and lack of care that too often attend old age.

How frequently the money lavished on funerals is conscience money; the unctious phrases of the panegyric a substitute for the kind words unsaid while the friend or relative was alive. It can often be observed that in those countries where life is cheapest death is often most expensive. It is natural for the bereaved to mourn. But the scars of parting would heal the sooner if there were less bitterness to repent and a keener shared interest in tackling the really important problems of the world.

For the bereaved and for the living who face death, there is the abiding knowledge that people do not die leaving not a trace behind. The dead live on in their children, in the recollection of those who knew them, and in all the ways, whether great or small, in which they have helped to change the world.

WITHOUT COMMENT

The total number of men entering the ordained ministry of the Church of England last year was 633. This was the highest figure since 1911, when 640 men were ordained.

—Daily Telegraph (24/1/64).

The Evil Ones

By ALASTAIR C. F. CHAMBRE

THERE IS A TENDENCY among many who have rejected, or have found no need ever to accept, religious dogma either to become apathetic towards the organisations whose views they no longer share or, apparently, to be afraid to express their unbelief in public. Freethinking parents who fail to exert their rights regarding religious indoctrination in schools, Atheists who take the oath in court are two obvious and well-known examples.

This has always been a dangerous trend. The adherents of orthodox religions seldom overlook any chance to publicise their religiosity (they even inflict it upon purely secular gatherings—for instance at public dinners by means of the ridiculous mumbo-jumbo of “grace”) and they are, as we all know, aided in their campaign against intellectual freedom by practically all sections of the press and the other media of mass communication.

Perhaps the main objection to organised religion is not that it is based on false premises but that it assumes the right to control the minds of all individuals, showing, when the opportunity occurs (as with the Roman Catholic Church in Spain), complete intolerance of all divergent views, being as ruthless in pursuing its aims as any totalitarian political ideology.

In spite, however, of the continued use to the utmost of all propaganda media at their disposal, there has been a welcome reduction, in recent years, in the influence of orthodox religion on the life of the individual. In this country this welcome move away from the Church has been particularly noticeable in the healthier attitude towards sex which now prevails, particularly among the young, who are being freed at last from the unhealthy complexes encouraged by the anti-life inhibitory attitude of orthodox Christianity. This attitude has caused untold misery in the past.

But before we became complacent and regard the Church as a dying force which, given time, will wither away under the impact of higher education and the advancement of scientific knowledge, let us take note of a certain insidious and evil movement which is becoming apparent in our society today.

There has been, during recent months, signs of increased activity of such pressure groups as MRA, which has few equals in the use of the loaded phrase in its propaganda. With apparently plenty of financial backing, MRA is attempting to halt the liberalising movements of the past few years and reintroduce the anti-life, guilt-producing, prudish morality of orthodox Christianity. We can see these evil movements in action in the recent criticisms of Dr. Henderson and the Minister of Education, in the criticism of the more liberal sections of the Church who, with welcome modernity, are supporting the “new morality” and for calls for a return of “puritanism” in certain right wing periodicals.

This anti-liberal conspiracy may not be significant at the moment but, if treated with complacency, may gain sufficient power to make life for the coming generation as unhealthy as it was for the children of Victorian times. It must be fought.

MARX MEMORIAL LIBRARY

37a Clerkenwell Green E.C.1.

To All Modern Thinkers: A series of lectures in the Library on Marxism in all aspects. February 20th and 27th: Political Economy in Socialist Society, by Ted Ainley. February 26th and April 23rd: Shakespeare. His Times and his Philosophy, by Albert Levine. Questions and Discussion; all invited. All start 7 p.m. Admission 1s.

The Witches of Salem

By ERIC MAPLE

IT IS HIGH TIME some of the cobwebs were swept from the myth-ridden subject of witchcraft, and *The Devil in Massachusetts*, by Marion L. Starkey (published by Trust Books, in aid of Oxfam, 3s. 6d.), is the kind of book that contributes to that good work. For one thing the author is concerned less with theory than with the facts which she has unearthed from the archives of Salem and elsewhere. These facts are terrible enough by any standard, for they describe what happened to a New England community caught up in the madness of a witch hunt.

The spark which began the conflagration was ignited by Tituba a West Indian slave woman whose tales of mystery and imagination so inflamed the minds of her audience of adolescent girls that they convinced themselves that they possessed the power to detect secret witches within their own community. Officially recognised as witch-hunters they embarked upon a campaign of denunciation which resulted in the arrest of hundreds and the death on the scaffold of twenty of their neighbours. The persecutions only came to an end when the Establishment found itself threatened, and hurriedly applied the brakes.

Amid the turmoil of this barbaric episode we observe two great antagonists, the cleric, Cotton Mather, and the sceptic Robert Calef, whose relative stands epitomise the whose history of intolerance. Needless to say it was the latter who was compelled to fly for safety from this American outpost of Old Testament mythology.

This is a most important book for several reasons. In the first place it makes a signal contribution to our understanding of Seventeenth Century witchcraft and in the second it exposes the machinery by which a community can be stampeded into destroying itself. In addition the psychological factors underlying the condition known as possession, are clearly indicated.

It is necessary to stress that no adequate understanding of the phenomena of Salem witchcraft is possible without some preliminary study of witchcraft delusions in the Old World, of which those in New England were but belated examples. Essex, England, known as the Witch Country can still provide clues to the mystery of Essex Massachusetts where the great American tragedy was enacted nearly three hundred years ago.

Readers will discover this to be an absorbing book and the omission of the somewhat melodramatic illustrations of the original edition is an improvement. Devotees of the witch-cult theory of the late Margaret Murray, however, will find little to encourage the survival of a hypothesis which historical research has so far failed to confirm.

This book should be bought not only as a contribution to Oxfam but for its own intrinsic worth.

It is perhaps a side-light upon the kind of world we live in that some of the communities to which Oxfam extends its helping hand are the last refuges of the kind of witchcraft experienced in Massachusetts's darkest hour.

TRUST BOOKS

All publishing profits donated to OXFAM
Fangio: Foreword by Stirling Moss, by Fangio, 3s. 6d.
The Devil in Massachusetts, by Marion Starkey, 3s. 6d.
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CORRESPONDENCE

HOLIDAYS IN SPAIN

In the coming year one million English people will go to Spain for their holidays. They will enjoy the golden beaches, the hot sun, and, above all, the cheap prices.

There is another face of Spain, a much darker one, that will receive scant attention from the majority of tourists. This is the face of beating and torture, of firing squads, the garrotte and of interminable prison sentences.

The millions of tourists that visit Spain are a valuable source of income to the Franco regime. The foreign currency derived from tourism enables Franco to meet his trade deficit. Without this income the regime would only be able to cover 20 per cent of its trade deficit.

The relatively small proportion of Spanish workers directly involved in the tourist industry obviously do benefit, but the vast majority of Spanish people do not. The regime benefits, the hotel owners benefit, the speculators benefit—but this new wealth does not filter down to the rest of the people because the Spanish economy is organised to ensure that the rich get richer and the poor stay poor. In fact, the poor become poorer owing to the inflationary effect tourists have on prices—a tourist can outbid a Spanish worker for anything, any time.

By going to Spain for your holiday you are giving valuable financial support to a fascist regime and none to the Spanish people.

The Spanish people would gladly welcome you to Spain if your presence there did not serve to worsen the conditions of poverty and if your holiday did not help to sustain a tyranny.

We ask you to avoid taking your holiday in Spain until we have removed the fascist regime that exists there today.

A. ROA, Secretary,

National Confederation of Labour of Spain in Exile (G.B.),
15 Ledbury Road, London, W.11.

WHAT IS GOD?

Mr. Gregory S. Smelters presents some interesting information about the use of the word "God". It is a pity that these details are entirely irrelevant to the article of mine to which he refers. My problem is philosophical, not semantic. In not perceiving this, Mr. Smelters completely misses my point. G. L. SIMONS.

PETER

Thomas Bodenham asks for proof that Peter went to Rome. There is no proof that he ever existed. Outside the New Testament the only references to him are in apocryphal and patristic writings, of doubtful authenticity or too late to be considered evidence.

I have little doubt that Peter is as mythical as his Master. He bears more than a superficial resemblance to the key-carrying gods of several mythologies, such as Janus and the nameless time-god of Mithraism.

In view of Peter's present occupation the following passage from the Book of the Dead is significant: "The doors of heaven are opened for me, the doors of earth are opened for me, the bars and bolts of Seb are opened for me, and the first temple hath been unfastened for me by the god Petra". (Budge trans. chap. 59.) Surely the greatest hall porter who ever lived!

R. J. CONDON

FROM THE "ENEMY CAMP"

I have just recently had the misfortune to read your publication of the 3rd January. Surely it would further the Humanist cause if you made certain that facts were correct before you published them. I am referring to the letter from Mary C. Blakiston (Padua, Italy)—firstly when a Catholic and Protestant marry they *are* married if they marry in a Catholic Church. Secondly, when a man or woman marry a first cousin, aunt or an uncle they obviously do not do this in a Catholic Church, so the marriage is invalid. The priests require information that prevents any such unhappy occurrences in a Church. Presumably a register office does not require the same information and mistakes can occur. Thirdly, the act of copulation is *not* regarded as sinful pleasure alone—it is only regarded as sinful when contraception is practised . . . Intercourse is regarded as a God-given pleasure.

I could continue to dissect the letter from your correspondent, however, as you do not presumably publish letters from the "Enemy Camp", I shan't bother. AN INDIGNANT CATHOLIC.

ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

The contest between the atheist and the agnostic seems unending. The atheist denies the existence of God, and the agnostic retorts that this assertion cannot be proved. Evidently then the argument turns on the meaning of "proof". Science knows nothing of absolute proof. The scientist asserts that

A causes B, although the cautious may ask if it is not possible that the cause of B might be, not A but some element of A, or even that God might cause B to follow A. These suggestions the scientist dismisses as improbable. Hence probability becomes the proof of truth.

But if proof consists in the demonstration of a high degree of probability, a high degree of improbability is also an adequate basis for denial of an assertion. If all the facts point to the improbability of an assertion, we declare it untrue—which is the justification for the atheist position. HENRY MEULEN.

ONE HERESY AFTER ANOTHER

The great heresy fight of the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century is against (atheistic) Communism which constitutes the greatest threat "the Church" has ever had.

We (in 1964) are witnessing the beginning of a battle between two giant despotic dictators. Both are seeking to control the world and both are ruthless.

In so far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned it would seem this fight is a fight to the finish for its survival.

The Roman Catholic Church can flourish with many different forms of governments. It could make a deal with Communism but it cannot make a deal with Atheism.

Maybe soon, for a time, Communism will soft pedal its atheistic actions and expressions. N. E. S. WEST.

OBITUARY

We regret to report the death of Nancy Chappell, wife of A. E. Chappell, Hon. Treasurer of Wales and Western Branch of the National Secular Society. Mrs. Chappell, who was 74, died in St. David's Hospital, Cardiff, after a short illness. A lifelong Freethinker, she was for many years an organiser of the Co-operative Women's Guild.

The cremation took place at Thornhill, Cardiff, on January 31st. We send our sympathy to Mr. Chappell.

NEW PAPERBACKS

- Guide to the General Election**, by R. L. Leonard (Pan Piper), 3s. 6d.
Cuba: An American Tragedy, by Robert Scheer and Maurice Zeitlin (Penguin Special), 5s.
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