

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIV—No. 28

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

IN THE FREETHINKER of May 15th, Colin McCall reviewed a book by the Hungarian author István Ráth Vég, *From the History of Human Folly*. In that review I met the name of Balthazar Bekker, the man who wrote *De betooverde Weereld* (The Enchanted World). I'm sorry to say, if that mention is a sample of the reliability of the reviewed book, I can have little confidence in it.

Bekker, it was stated, wrote his book in Louvain in 1691. The year is correct, but the place must be a mistake. For Louvain, now in Belgium, belonged at that time to the Southern Netherlands, then under Spanish domination and entirely Roman-Catholic; so a Protestant clergyman, a "dominee," in Dutch (*ee* to be pronounced as *a* in "late") would have had no opportunity for writing a book there.

Balthazar Bekker
In reality Bekker, who was born in 1634 and died in 1698, was never in Louvain. His birthplace was a tiny village in the northern part of Friesland, where his father, who was also a parson taught him all he had to know in order to gain admittance to the university. Bekker first studied philosophy at Groningen, and later theology at Franeker, where in those days there was a small university. There he graduated as a doctor and in turn served as a parson in several Frisian villages and in Franeker, until in 1679 he went to Amsterdam, the intellectual and political centre of the Republic of the Seven [Netherlands] Provinces. Previously, he had solicited a professorship at Franeker University, but without success, probably because he was already suspected for his broadminded, rather rationalistic, religious views. But in Amsterdam he found a place which did justice to his great intellectual capacity and, although his orthodoxy was not beyond doubt, he was a very influential personality in the theological circles.

In 1680 he had already argued from the pulpit against the prevalent fear of the influence of comets and, at the desire of one of his admirers, he published this sermon in print, under the title, "*Onderzoek van de Betekeninge der Kometen* (Inquiry into the Significance of Comets) and in this form it reached far beyond the bounds of his parish. But Bekker continued his studies and came to the conclusion that belief in the power of the devil was contrary to the Holy Scriptures and to human reason. Man has to combat the evil qualities in himself and cannot shift them on to the devil. He set down this opinion in the first volume of *De betooverde Weereld* in 1691. The book caused an uproar and was considered blasphemous by his colleagues and the majority of the faithful, who believed it would make people irresponsible if they thought that the devil had no power over them. The Synod deprived him of his office.

Nevertheless, in 1695 the second part of Bekker's work appeared and in it he dealt with witchcraft and sorcery. But it was not the main part of his argument; he used it above all as the proof of the harmfulness and the unten-

ability of belief in the devil. Emphatically he insisted that for a century the tribunals in the Northern Netherlands had not condemned any sorcerers or witches. In fact the last known trial, followed by an execution of a witch within the Republic, took place in the little town of Schoonhoven in 1597. Afterwards, there had been several trials of sorcerers or witches, but all had ended with the acquittal or, in the worst cases, with the banishment of the accused. There were even instances where the plaintiffs were punished for slander or false complaint. In most cases the judges consulted professors of medicine at one of the universities, whose advice was always against the imputed sorcery.

VIEWS AND OPINIONS
A Battle Against Superstition
By J. G. RAUSCH

Witchcraft Denied

But it was still a big step from this to the outspoken denial of witchcraft. Bekker was condemned for refuting texts like Exodus 22, 18: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Moreover many theologians felt offended because he had sharply attacked those who perpetuated the superstition by trying to cast out devils and evil spirits from supposedly possessed people by means of prayers and exorcism.

Bekker was also permanently excluded from the Lord's Supper, which amounted to a kind of excommunication. These and other discriminatory measures deeply hurt him, but he preferred to remain a member of the Church rather than to form a schismatic sect. So he submitted himself to his "punishment," but he didn't deny his works.

Sympathisers

Of course many people did not agree with the way in which Bekker was treated, but they were to be found mostly in the upper classes, the class of the "regents" i.e., the great merchants, forming an aristocracy without titles. This class was, in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, always more enlightened than the mass of the people, and the Burgomaster and Aldermen of Amsterdam refused to withhold Bekker's salary after his dismissal. At the same time they opposed efforts to fill his former post as long as he lived. In this way they did not interfere with the popular prejudice, which, perhaps, they judged good for the mob, but they prevented the victim from becoming wholly an outcast.

Bekker died in 1698, a broken and disappointed man, although preserved from material misery. Among his partisans only a few had the courage to defend him in pamphlets or books. After his death, his son, a student of the theology, was obliged to publish a leaflet, wherein he contradicted the malicious rumours that his father had displayed great terror of hellfire on his deathbed. Bekker died as he lived, bravely, without fear. He had foreseen these rumours so, at the moment of dying, there were a number of witnesses, who could bear testimony about what had really happened.

His book raised violent controversies, but as he had predicted to his wife when he first issued it, it assured

immortality for him and his family. Soon after the first Dutch edition it had been translated into German (1693), French (1694) and English (1695). But about the German translation, it is said that a second printing was only needed after 88 years!

Bekker was a very ugly man; portraits by a friend don't exaggerate his outward appearance: a big, hanging nose and a wide mouth. His enemies didn't neglect to ascribe his ugliness to his being a prey of the devil he had dared to deny. In reality, however, he was a noble man without a trace of vanity.

It remains a remarkable fact, to which Bekker had drawn attention, that the witchcraft-delusion had already begun to fade in the Dutch Republic at the beginning of the 17th century, whereas in Germany, France and England it was still rampant until the latter half of the 18th. It is true, in all countries voices were raised against the existence or the effectiveness of witchcraft, but nowhere had they such lasting results as in the Northern Netherlands. Of course, the mass of the people, led by the Dutch Reformed Church, still believed in sorcery and witches, but this belief was disdained by the more intelligent men, mainly in the upper classes.

Witches' Weigh-house

A Dutch scholar of German origin, Dr. Kurt Baschwitz has studied the history of witchcraft in Holland and has published his findings in two remarkable books, *De Strijd met de Duivel* (The Battle against the Devil) of 1948 and *Van de Heksenwaag te Oudewater* (About the Witches Weigh-house at Oudewater), which appeared in 1941, under a pseudonym. (Being of Jewish descent, Baschwitz had fled to Holland from Hitler's Germany and during the war he was in hiding and could not publish under his own name). He ascribes the waning of the witchcraft-delusion to the relatively great liberty of speech and of publication in the Northern Netherlands. Because of this, it was impossible for the witch-hunters to avoid criticism from the sceptics, among whom the Dutch Jews were prominent. There was an atmosphere of reasonableness fostered by the enlightened upper classes which accepted nothing without sufficient proof.

One of the characteristic aspects of this concerned the Witches' Weigh-house in the little town of Oudewater, between Utrecht and Rotterdam. It is generally known that witches were supposed to weigh much less than the normal weight: in witch-trials this point had often been put forward as a proof for the guilt of the witch. It is said—but Baschwitz has found no proof for it—that the weighing house of Oudewater was assigned by Emperor Charles V as a place where the weight of those accused of witchcraft could be impartially established. Anyway throughout the 17th century from all over Western Europe, people imprisoned for witchcraft appealed to their right to be weighed in Oudewater; and no one was ever found to weigh less than normal for her or his stature. This fact, too, certainly helped to undermine the belief in witchcraft in Holland.

The Witches' Weigh-house in Oudewater still exists. Tourists visiting this picturesque little town may be weighed there and receive a certificate that their weight is normal for their stature.

THAT'S THE QUESTION

Last week a Dundee business man interviewed 14 teenage boys for a job. He was surprised to find 13 of them had no connection with a church. Worse than that, their families had nothing to do with a church either. Where, oh, where have we gone wrong?

The Sunday Post (21/6/64).

Canada's Flag

By D. M. CHAPMAN

It's a sad characteristic of human nature that irrational problems can arouse the concern that they do while many important problems go unheeded. Not long ago riots broke out in the subcontinent when a hair supposedly from the beard of the prophet was stolen from a Muslim shrine. Canadians smiled at this, but now we are embroiled in just as silly a squabble over a flag.

Canada has the distinction of having neither a definite flag nor a national anthem of its own. The Red Ensign, modified and borrowed from the Royal Navy, served as a temporary Canadian flag to be flown alongside the Union Jack — and often with the Stars and Stripes. A similar confusion has resulted in two quasi-national anthems. Not only do Canadians stand at the end of a public function during the playing of *God Save the Queen* but also often at the beginning one must put up with *O, Canada*. The new design sports three snappy red maple leaves symbolising the British, French and "assorted" elements of the population, the original inhabitants not deserving even a bud. At each side is a vertical blue band symbolising "From ocean unto ocean", a distinction shared with several dozen other nations. The French element is said to feel that the Red Ensign gives Canada an irksome colonial air; nevertheless, there are those who thrive under this sentimentality.

To illustrate the mentality of those who get excited over flags, I quote from the *Vancouver Province* which stated "... he [Lester Pearson, the Prime Minister] has not been able to count the noses of Canadians who are outraged at the thought of abandoning a flag sanctified by the lives and the blood of thousands of our countrymen in two great wars ...". Here's a pitiful confusion between the part played by a symbol and the ideals for which it stands. As if one were fighting for a flag! Changing a design on a piece of cloth can hardly be expected to change the ideals that people value.

"Sanctity" at first sight sounds like a worthwhile commodity that could be increased to make the flag even more sanctified, but this would mean having another war. On the other hand, if we had a new flag and another war this would also become sanctified. After this future war the members of the Royal Canadian Legion (who are keenly interested in flags) will have some fresh war stories to hear for after twenty years, even the same World War II yarns must be getting rather stale.

When one is aware of the origin of the institution of flags, the whole matter takes on a ridiculous aura. In ancient Egypt it was believed that everyone had a twin in the form of the placenta (or afterbirth) which also had a soul. When Pharaoh went into battle, not only did he take his army but he also brought along his placenta held aloft on a pole. In this way Pharaoh considered himself as being all there, even if we don't! Later to draw attention to this obscenity, a pennant was attached. Archers in particular found this addition to be useful in making allowance for the wind, so that in later times when it was considered too risky to bring along Pharaoh's "twin", it was just the pennant that was left. As time went by, the pennant increased in size, carried the king's emblem and became a substitute and symbol of the placenta — or in plain English, a flag.

WITHOUT COMMENT

At Eastbourne, a town official said that bathers who wore the topless swimsuit would be prosecuted under a by-law passed in Edwardian days. The by-law says: "At all times, females shall wear dresses reaching from the neck down to the ankles."

—Daily Mirror (1/7/64).

Chemical Memory

By COLIN McCALL

FOR SOME years now, Professor James V. McConnell of the University of Michigan's Mental Health Research Institute, has been experimenting with widely distributed marine and freshwater planarian worms of the phylum *Platyhelminthes*, the lowest animals with a rudimentary brain and the type of synapses found in higher organisms. As long ago as 1920, a Dutchman, P. Van Oye, reported that he had taught planarians to follow a path to food, but his paper seems to have been generally overlooked, and it was in 1953 that Professor McConnell, then a graduate student in psychology at Texas, and Robert Thompson (now Professor of Psychology at Louisiana State University) began to train the flatworms using the Pavlovian "classical conditioning" method.

Their simple apparatus consisted of a semi-circular plastic trough, about a foot long and half-an-inch across, with electrodes at both ends and two lamps above. When the trough was filled with pond water, an electric current could be passed through it which caused the planarian to give a vigorous muscular contraction. The onset of light provided the conditioning stimulus. The animals were generally given three seconds of light, with the shock turned on for the final second. If the animal learnt, it would come to anticipate the shock and therefore respond when the light first came on; its anticipatory responses would be "conditioned."

After a series of "inefficient" experiments—as Professor McConnell calls them in a report in the *New Scientist* (February 20th, 1964)—it was found that the planarians responded approximately twice as often to the light after training trials as they did before. Comparison with control groups that had received only light or only shock, indicated that the behavioural change was indeed "classical conditioning."

Now planarians have remarkable powers of regeneration. If a member of the freshwater species used, *Dugesia dorotocephala*, is cut in half across the middle, each half will grow into a new organism within a few weeks, the tail section even growing a new brain and new eyes within a week. So, after Professor McConnell had gone to the University of Michigan in 1956, he and two fellow workers, Allan L. Jacobson and Daniel P. Kimble, extended the Texas experiments to see if either half of a conditioned organism would retain any trace of its training. They subjected the planarians to between 25 and 50 trials a day, at one minute intervals, and "it took but 134 trials, on the average, to bring our experimental group to a criterion of 23 conditioned responses out of any block of 25 contiguous trials." Once the animals reached this criterion they were cut in half and given a month to regenerate, after which they were retrained to the original criterion.

It was expected that the heads would show retention of the original learning, because they retained the original brain, and in fact they "showed no more 'forgetting' than did our control animals which were conditioned but not cut in half." The experimenters were not, however, "prepared for the equally great amount of savings shown by the tail regenerates." Even though these tail sections had grown entirely new brains, "many of them displayed almost perfect retention of the original training." And the Professor tells us that many later studies both in his own and in other laboratories, have shown that "the tails typically show *better* retention than do the heads, probably because the tails, lacking brains, are protected from

the interfering effects of new learning during regeneration, while the heads are not." It was clear, then that memories are not merely stored in the planarian's brain; indeed, the data suggested that learning resulted from some biochemical change widespread through the body.

The chemical hypothesis was tested by Reeva Jacobson (no relation of Allan Jacobson, but now married to Daniel Kimble), who cut animals in half, discarded the tails and trained only the heads. Once these animals had reached the criterion, the tails were again cut off and both heads and tails allowed to regenerate. The tail regenerates, it will be noted, were completely reformed animals, developing from a tail that had previously grown onto a severed head. Yet when tested, these animals revealed "significant retention of the original learning," pointing again to a chemical explanation of memory.

If memories were stored chemically in the planarian body, it should be possible to transfer some part of the "learning" from one animal to another, if the chemicals could be transferred. Cannibalism provided the method. Pieces of trained planarians were fed to hungry untrained ones and, after several such meals of "educated" tissue, the cannibals were found to have ingested part of the training along with the tissue. This experiment was controlled, and was repeated not only by Professor McConnell and his colleagues, but by other investigators. It seemed clear, then, that "some part of the learning process" is "transferable from one flatworm to another via ingestion."

Would it be possible to transfer more complex forms of behavioural change by cannibalism? Planarians were already known to be able to learn comparatively complex mazes, and the Professor's team used a hexagonal water-filled maze with side alleys from each of the six angles, fitted with shock attachments. Immediately the animal left the hexagonal centre pathway and entered an alley, it was shocked and forced to return to the hexagon. Given only a few trials per day only two days a week, the planarians attained "a relatively stable and long-lasting maze learning." Moreover, this learning was maintained after the planarians had been cut and had regenerated, and seemed to transfer via cannibalism as well.

The planarian is, of course, a simple animal with simple digestive processes, and it is not to be expected that a similar cannibalistic transfer of training could be effected in higher organisms where the enzymes and acids secreted during digestion would destroy chemicals taken through the mouth. If the "memory molecules" could somehow be injected directly into the nervous systems of higher animals, however, it might be possible "to achieve a very peculiar form of transfer of training."

Now the Swedish biologist, Holgar Hydén had suggested that the memory molecule might be ribonucleic acid (RNA), which is produced by deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA, the substance responsible for genetic inheritance) in the cell nucleus and then moves out to the surrounding cytoplasm, where it controls such cellular functions as protein synthesis. And two years ago, Professor McConnell obtained suggestive but not definitive results by injecting a substance containing RNA and a good many contaminants from the bodies of trained planarians into the bodies of untrained ones. Last year was spent in collaboration with biochemists searching for a method of extracting purer RNA from the animals. This was found,

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This Believing World

Sir John Maud, Master of University College, Oxford, was one of the people chosen by ATV to explain why he believed in Christianity; and he began the other evening to tell us something about the human quality of "compassion." But what has this to do with such doctrinal Christian beliefs as the Trinity, angels, hell, devils and miracles. The compassion of Jesus was dragged in, of course, though some of us cannot help wondering what had happened to this when he damned *all* unbelievers — meaning, of course, that they would spend eternity in hell where the fire is never quenched. Sir John gave us (in the *TV Times*) the usual pious rigmarole, "Christ can live in us and we in Him," but we could not expect him to tell us what this means.

★

While there is all this hullabaloo in the Roman Church about contraceptive pills, it is well to remember that some Roman Catholic theologians "have expressed the opinion that in times of revolution and violence it is lawful for women, particularly for nuns, to take contraceptive pills and precautions against the danger of becoming pregnant through rape" (*The Observer*, May 13th, 1962). It is "lawful" in fact "to resist personal violence." But of course the problem is argued out so lengthily, that most people, in particular Roman Catholics get hopelessly confused; and as they know nothing as a rule about such controversy, they swallow the theological pronouncements of, let us say, a Dr. Heenan as if he himself were God Almighty.

★

The Dean of St. Paul's, Dr. W. R. Matthews, dealing with the great conception (*Daily Telegraph*, May 30th) that "good works not caused by faith in Jesus Christ" have no right to be called good works—that, in effect, no one without faith in Jesus can be called virtuous—takes almost half a column to make it clear that he does not agree with it. "We shall make no advance," he says, "if we regard all virtues as spurious except those that grow up in our own spiritual soil." And Dr. Matthews does not like "depreciating the spirituality of the religious heroes" of other religions. "Could anything be more ridiculous than competition in sainthood?" he asks. This is all very well, but what about the "virtues" of people who have *no* religion. After all, most, if not all, delinquents, young and old, were taught religion and the superiority of Christianity over *every* other religion.

★

So, neither Newton nor Einstein said the last word on gravitation. According to the *Daily Mail* (June 15th), Professor Fred Hoyle has "startled the world with a new theory of gravity," claiming that neither of his great predecessors "could explain why gravity should be a pulling force instead of a push." He asks, "Why should the earth not fly away from the sun?" Professor Hoyle has produced "an all-embracing theory," maintaining that "the most distant stars have a profound effect on our everyday world." For instance, "if a lot of the most distant stars were wiped out, people on Earth would find they had grown heavier. The sun would shrink and become hotter." But was the truth, not once and for always given by God himself in Holy Writ, where there is nothing about gravitation, or Professor Hoyle. Never question anything in the Bible, leave that to the Church and its priests. It is so much easier and far more comforting to swallow the first chapter of Genesis than have one's devoted faith disturbed. Hoyle indeed!

"Most Hated Woman in America"

THE "most hated woman in America". That is how *Time* (15/5/64) described Madalyn Murray who, after last year's successful appeal to the Supreme Court against school prayers, is now turning her attention to the tax exemption enjoyed by US Churches. "If no other American has enough guts to fight them, then I will", she says, and — according to *Time* — "lawyers concede that Mrs. Murray's . . . suit is not without merit". While no one knows how much potential revenue is involved, it is clear that the amount is enormous. It has been estimated that church groups own 14 per cent of all taxable property in Pennsylvania, 17 per cent in Maryland and 18 per cent in New Jersey. "The Roman Catholic Knights of Columbus do not pay income taxes on their rental revenue, which comes from such sources as the land on which Yankee Stadium stands, a Detroit steel warehouse and a Connecticut steel mill. In New Orleans, Jesuit-run Loyola University pays no federal income tax on its revenues from its radio and television stations . . .".

"My Christian neighbours", Mrs. Murray has pointed out, trampled her flowers, broke her windows, "beat up" her son Bill and his young brother more than a hundred times. She has been flooded with abusive letters and received "everything from a psychotic document repeating the word 'kill' to a newspaper picture of herself smeared with excrement". Already the "most hated woman in America", what will Mrs. Murray be if she wins her suit against church property tax-exemption?

FACING THE FACTS

CHRISTIANS ARE asked by the Overseas Missions Board of the Scottish Episcopal [Anglican] Church, to "face the facts." In the first sixty years of this century — the *Scottish Overseas News* (Summer 1964) reports — the Christian population in the world increased from just under 800 millions to just over 800 millions, but "the proportion of Christians has decreased from just over one half to just under one third." At one time Anglicans could look at the pretty coloured maps of the world "with an Anglican Diocese stamped on every continent and island," but now "every Christian Church is spread very thinly over these vast areas." Not only that, but the areas of human life over which Christianity has influence are also shrinking." Indeed, the Overseas Missions Board considers it "hardly an exaggeration" to say that "every state today is a secular state." To add to the gloom, we are even prepared to question the 800 millions!

CHEMICAL MEMORY

(Concluded from page 219)

and the preliminary results of the experiments with it are expected any time.

Meanwhile, the cannibalism data indicates that, in Professor McConnell's words, "a major overhaul of our theories of learning is long overdue, for these data imply that, while contiguity is often a *sufficient* condition for the establishment of an engram [memory], it is by no means a *necessary* condition." It may well be profitable, the Professor says, "to consider 'learning' as being nothing more nor less than a chemical change which brings about a relatively permanent alteration in the organism's behaviour." Learning would have been acquired, whether the chemical change was induced by "psychological contiguity" or by cannibalism.

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 and J. A. MILLAR.

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: 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

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street, Birmingham, 1). Sunday, July 12th, 6.45 p.m.: I. GEFIN "The Current Significance of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament."

British Humanist Association (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8). Sunday, July 12th. Two Sessions, 11 a.m., and 2.30 p.m. Introductory Course on Humanism. Speakers: Peter Draper and Graham Kingsley.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1). Sunday, July 12th, 11 a.m.: Dr. Helen Rosenau "Has Art a Function in the Modern World?"

Notes and News

WE ARE particularly happy to print as our Views and Opinions this week, an article by the erudite Dutch Free-thinker, J. Gerhard Rausch. Mr. Rausch has edited a number of freethinking papers, including *Bevrijdend Denken* until it ceased publication early this year, and is on the editorial board of the monthly *Ratio* of Amsterdam. He is also a member of the General Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers, where his linguistic ability is invaluable. We had the pleasure, last year, of spending a few days with Mr. Rausch and his charming wife at their home in Utrecht and when sending us the present article, Mr. Rausch expressed the hope that we might again visit him. If we did, he promised to take us to the Witches' Weigh-house at Oudewater. At all events, he said, "you will see a lovely little town with a stork's nest on the roof of the fine Renaissance-style town hall." We hope sometime to be able to accept our Dutch colleague's kind invitation.

★

WARTIME DIPLOMATIC documents released by the US State Department last month included the account of a conversation in January, 1943 between Pope Pius XII and the American diplomat, Harold Tillman, assistant to

President Roosevelt's personal representative at the Vatican. The Pope—according to the *Daily Mail* (19/6/64)—said that he feared there was foundation in Allied reports of German atrocities, but he felt that they had been exaggerated for propaganda purposes. And he "explained that when talking of atrocities he could not name the Nazis without mentioning the Bolsheviks and this, he thought, might not be wholly pleasing to the Allies." Pius's sense of fairness is touching, no doubt, but we wonder if Hitler's victims would have appreciated it.

★

"ONE OF the most important reasons for Pope Pius XII's terribly wrong decision might have been that the Pope—no friend of democracy, according to Heinrich Bruning—as well as more than just a few members of the high Curia (to be sure unconsciously rather than consciously) saw, in Hitler's war against Russia, the possibility of liberation from Communism." Thus, Dr. Friedrich Heer, Professor of Catholic History at the University of Vienna, as quoted in the New York programme of Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* (here called *The Representative*). A number of other statements for and against Pius were quoted, including Albert Schweitzer's that, though the Protestant Church failed as well, the Catholic Church "bears the greater guilt for it was an organised supranational power in a position to do something, whereas the Protestant Church was an unorganised, impotent national power." And the play's director, Herman Shumlin, reminded the audience that the platitudinous statement dictated by Pope Pius in the play is "rendered as it was published in the Vatican Journal, the *Osservatore Romano*." A replica of the original statement in Italian is printed in the programme.

★

IT MUST be six or seven years ago that we had the pleasure—and it really was a pleasure—of debating with the Rev. Walter Gill. He is not by any means the only liberal-minded and unorthodox Methodist we have met, but he is probably the most outspoken, and his statement (in an article in *Fellowship of the Kingdom*) that "The word is made flesh, as far as it can be in any baby, at the birth of every child," earned him a reprimand from his Church's doctrinal panel. Now a private session of the Methodist Conference has found Mr. Gill guilty of heresy and expelled him.

★

THE TIME has come—twenty years afterwards—to review the Butler Education Act, which perpetuated the dual system. At least, so John Grigg (formerly Lord Altrincham) thinks, and we agree with him. In a well reasoned article in *The Observer* (28/6/64), Mr. Grigg contended that the state ought to stand for "an open, non-sectarian (and, of course, non-political) education," that its "philosophy" ought to be one of "free choice for each individual—not just for parents;" that it "ought to have no special relationship with any religion or any Church," and that "it ought in future to give no financial support to any schools other than its own."

★

MR. GRIGG cited the remark made by the non-conformist peer, Lord Rochester during the 1944 debate, that: "If the Roman Catholic Church claims the right to teach children a distinctive, and to us an unwelcome, sectarianism, and to do so insists on contracting out from the national scheme we think that they should in all fairness foot the bill." The case of the then Lord Rochester and the former Lord Altrincham seems to us unanswerable. Archbishop Heenan "replied" to it in *The Observer* the following week (5/7/64)—and in the usual manner.

Politics and Religion — Two Human Weaknesses

by BOB CREW

When the British Government refused to let the runaway Williams family into this country from South Africa and the ruthless white government which organised racial prejudice on a scale currently unparalleled in the world, the British authorities lent themselves to South African propaganda almost as if the whole incident were a fantastic hoax to improve the image of Dr. Verwoerd's regime.

The arrival at Southampton of the Cape Coloured family who sold their home in South Africa and used their savings to pay for the sea voyage to England where they hoped to settle was genuine enough. There they were, mother, father and three sons; all their belongings with them including an upright piano. Listening to their public denunciation of apartheid and the wicked South African Government, few would have doubted their sincerity, or their plight, as they spoke up to a barrage of press and publicity men who had come to meet them; inspired by the clean smell of freedom, they sniffed it all back in the Land of Free Speech.

Then the Williams were refused entrance to Britain because they could not produce a work permit. So back they went on a boat to Cape Town, defeated in their effort to escape from tyranny by British red tape which seemed at that time as if it had committed them to whatever sinister punishment the South African Government could arrange before their return. Mr. Williams's comments about apartheid had received widespread publicity and it was not unnatural to fear that reports had reached the hypersensitive ears of the South African Government which has a reputation for showing its displeasure in no uncertain terms. Possibilities of the family's fate were many and gruesome: they might have been arrested and detained indefinitely under the Ninety-Day Detention Act as hundreds of other unfortunate people had been arrested for much less than criticising the Government. It must have been a very worried family indeed which stepped apprehensively ashore in their old home town.

Observing the works of Satan and not by any means dispirited by the Christian influence in South Africa which has no practical answer to apartheid other than packets of spiritual bromide for those poor devils who fall foul of it, Christian Action in this country cabled Cape Town to engage a legal adviser to protect the Williams family from South African officialdom. Again more publicity, none of which was particularly concerned with the two most telling aspects of the whole affair: (a) the stupidity of British red tape in this instance and, (b) the fact that Christian Action had employed a man of secular law to implement God's law, which by now seemed rather inadequate to deal with the work of the Devil. Communications with South Africa were clearly more efficient than with the heavens above, unless of course the Good Lord wasn't very interested in the appalling state of affairs in the Cape.

Now because the Williams are a Cape Coloured family (that is of mixed race) they are represented in politics by what is called a "Coloured Representative," who is a white man allocated to the coloured community because coloured men are not permitted to sit in Parliament. The adviser picked to represent them in law was a certain Mr. Bloomberg, the son of a "Coloured Representative." The dear old Christians probably considered Mr. Bloomberg to be suitable for the task with which they had charged him because he was the son of a "Coloured

Representative." With the obvious lack of appreciation for South Africa's political realities that one might expect from religious enthusiasm, the Christians put their money on Bloomberg. There are only four "Coloured Representatives" in South Africa, all of whom are listed as "Independent Members of Parliament," because they are supposed to be independent of the opinion of those they represent—and so the double talk goes on, but the point is that "Independents" are as biased as the rest of the parliamentarians, otherwise the Coloureds would have no representation at all.

It is at this point in the proceedings that the unhappy incident begins to arouse suspicion. Strange reports about the Williams family appeared in the British press. The world heard that the family were really very happy in South Africa, nobody wanted to persecute them for their views, let alone harm them! But what were their views we may ask? It seemed that the Williams family had never said a detrimental word about the South African Government, in fact at press conferences in the Cape our friend Mr. Williams was now expressing his appreciation of the facilities which Cape Coloureds enjoy. In the heart-warming atmosphere of friendliness and love of humanity, the South African Government welcomed back the runaway family and offered them a house.

Simpletons in Britain proclaimed that the South African Government had been grossly misrepresented in this matter. A lot of fuss had been made about nothing and in particular about apartheid and the South African Government. Those who had campaigned to save the Cape Coloured family were too hysterical and suspicious by far; judging from the family's apparent change of heart, even the few who had tried to save them must have begun to doubt the Williams's sincerity. The Christians were embarrassed, poor souls, but what is even more unkind, their efforts to save other victims in South Africa could have been weakened by world reaction to the Williams's case.

So what had at first appeared to be a demonstration against the intolerable conditions existing in South Africa was beginning to look like an example of how good things are for the Coloureds. By this time, the British authorities had issued the required permits for the Williams to land in Britain if they so desired. We heard that Mr. Williams would not make a second trip to the Land of Free Speech unless Christian Action agreed to provide return tickets for the family who might not like living in Britain after all. As the mood took them, the Williams family started out on their second trip to Southampton.

The Williams are now home and dry in Britain. The interest of the press has fizzled out rather wetly, not out of character with the piddling way in which this monstrous farce has been handled. The South African Government has had its say and exploited the plight of an innocent family for propaganda purposes at a time when its image is shamefully beheld. It has sought to demonstrate at a time when the London Conference on Economic Sanctions against South Africa was sitting to consider the recommendations of a special United Nations Commission (including among its members Sir Hugh Foot). Coily, the South African Government set out to kid the British public that it should not be judged too harshly, knowing very well that a British Government (Labour or Conservative) would be reluctant to introduce economic measures against South Africa despite its

dislike of apartheid. Public opinion might be expected to make things difficult for South Africa in the years ahead, and I suggest that it was with this in mind that the South African Government played the Williams case in this way. British newspapers have had their say and they have generally said the wrong things, but perhaps it is too soon to judge them. The simpletons who lapped up these stories have had their say, too, putting all the feathers in South Africa's hat.

Obviously everything the Williams family said on their return to Cape Town was done under pressure and duress. The statements they made about conditions of their return to Britain were more likely to have been conveyed by Mr. Bloomberg who must be a very naïve man indeed to think that they would convince the world's thinking communities. I do not know if the Williams family are religiously inclined; certainly they should be grateful to Christian Action who with tender regard for the Holy Spirit must have had their appetites whetted even further by the fact that Mr. Williams is himself a humble carpenter.

Author's Note

Organised religion in South Africa is as ambiguous as it is in any other country when it comes to facing the difficult problems of our time. Whilst it is the usual practice in the large majority of Churches of all denominations for Europeans and non-Europeans to worship separately, only individuals in the Church communities have attempted to oppose the Government's policy of apartheid. The Dutch Afrikaans Church is quite unashamed in its support of a theoretical apartheid although it doesn't actually dirty its hands in the practice which is ably carried out by the politicians. The Society of Friends (Quakers) has maintained a remarkable silence during the blatant injustices of the Christian regime and although the South African Congregational Union talks once a year at its General Assembly about preparing the African people for closer integration in the social system, it has an unimpressive record when it comes to backing up its words. There is no convincing evidence of South Africa's Churches demonstrating their outright condemnation of apartheid; apart from the feeble statement from time to time criticising some of the more extreme cruelties of racial injustice only a handful of rebels in the Christian camp have made any impression on the world in their protests. In the absence of any practical expression of God's will through the media of his disciples on earth, the Christian and other Churches are clearly without conscience or moral fibre in their conduct in South Africa today.

OPENING OF BLACKHAM HOUSE

A HUNDRED and fifty members of various Freethought and Humanist organisations attended a Garden Party at 35 Worple Road, Wimbledon, London on June 28th, to celebrate the opening of Blackham House, the Ethical Union Housing Association's new home for 20 elderly residents.

Miss Rose Bush, chairman of the Association spoke of the hard work and generosity of a comparatively small number of people which had made the project possible. She also referred to the co-operation of the architects and builders, whose interest and guidance had smoothed out many difficulties.

Then, after Lord Willis (playwright Ted Willis) had formally declared Blackham House open, the new building was inspected by the visitors.

Sex Misconceived

By D. W.

ONE OF the more irritating aspects of the birth control controversy is that it has to be regarded seriously. There is no escape from this. The Roman Catholic attitude blocks help to impoverished countries needing to control their populations just as it affects the extent of family planning in Britain. On the international level the absence of birth control has, as its dreadful corollary, the presence of death control. In Britain parents unable to accept family planning methods face the uncertainty of the safe period, endure the tensions of abstinence or accept the yoke of a succession of children.

The question being so furiously debated really deserves, and only escapes, derision because it involves theology. Yet there is no indisputable theological basis for the prohibition of birth control. What has happened is that a philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas has been advanced as an irrefutable law. This philosophy could as well have been rejected as it has so tenaciously been held. And so the interpretation, or views, of celibate priests are foisted on to their unwilling flocks and allowed to block birth control method to countries which desperately need it.

The arguments against birth control, were this not a theological matter, would receive the scorn they deserve; unfortunately they must be taken seriously. Apparently birth control is against the natural law although sexual intercourse, confined to the safe period with the intention of not having children, is acceptable. If the intention and result are the same in both cases it is surely absurd to reject one method and accept the other. And is not the natural law flouted every time we wear spectacles, have a blood transfusion or even ride in a car.

One cannot help thinking that what the Roman Catholic Church objects to is not so much birth control as the sexual act. While they recognise the need for this act they appear to wish to curtail the sexual pleasure of marriage. And here they seem to have a sadly distorted view of sex. They fail to realise that its sole function is not the begetting of children. It is the most total and powerful way in which one human being can express love for another. And by niggardly rationing the sexual act to a theologically determined period they caricature marriage and abuse the love of two people.

At its fullest, best and most beautiful, sex is an expression of love for another person. They are unlucky indeed who see it as a clandestine thrill, a dirty act or a barely tolerated pleasure to be bought by enduring unwanted children. What the birth control ban does, is not confine people to having sex to procreate children but rather to having children so that they may enjoy sex. Instead of a warm, secure loving relationship with desired children, many people are having to settle for a tension-laden marriage fraught with the danger of having more children than they can adequately support.

Eventually, amidst laboured explanations for the change in the unchangeable, the Roman Catholic hierarchy will give family planning their sanction for, with the development of the pill, any ban will increasingly become a meaningless gesture. In time they may also look at their attitude to euthanasia, divorce and the choice between the life of a mother or child in a light designed to evaluate personal considerations rather than perpetuate outworn dogma. For the moment, while they drag themselves into the twentieth century, those who feel obliged to adhere to Roman Catholic doctrines, must suffer. Let us hope that their pain will not be too prolonged.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHARLIE PEACE

I am sorry if my article conveyed the impression that I believed Charles Peace to be a criminal because he was a religious man. It is a mere truism to say that Peace would probably have been as bad a character whatever his views on religion might have been. At the same time, as the book which I mentioned pointed out, he seems to have been genuinely religious and sincere in his evangelical views. The obvious lesson is that religious dogma has nothing to do in itself with the building up of character, a point made by many authors and notably by Dr. Argyle in *Religious Behaviour* a few years ago. I will not comment upon the suggestion of your correspondent that I was causing Christians to laugh or was relying on a hope that my readers might be ignorant. One can only regard such criticisms as being merely silly.

F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT.

It is surely Mr. G. McKenzie, not Mr. Micklewright, who has let his thinking run a little wild. I fail to see how Mr. Micklewright in his articles on Charlie Peace could be said to have deduced that Peace was what he was because of his religion. Mr. Micklewright simply and truly infers that, like so many more, Peace was a rascal in spite of his being deeply religious and that his religion had no elevating influence. It is quite possible that his unbridled religious emotionalism may have intensified his rascality.

I remember as a boy, hearing my grandfather and his fellow magistrates telling stories of how Peace, before embarking on his nefarious exploits would pray to God to bless them and grant him success. He may have been to some extent insane. There are forms of religion to madness near allied.

Also, Mr. McKenzie should know that Humanism is not a religion. Humanism is an ordered, secular way of life. Could Peace have understood Humanism and accepted it, he must have inevitably been a different and better man.

REGINALD UNDERWOOD.

THOMAS PAINE, STATUE

Although, as Christopher Brunel says, the audience at Thetford were compelled to take shelter from torrential rain during the ceremony, yet it was carried through to the letter, and Paine, like Ajax, defied the lightning.

Yet the 15th century Parish Church of St. Andrews, Blofield (also in the county of Norfolk) was damaged by lightning and one of the four statue pinnacles was torn from the tower and fell crashing to the ground.

There may be a moral in this—I don't know!

The Lord, as so often before, may have been showing his impartiality. But this seems a dereliction of duty. He demands the worship of his followers and surely has the responsibility to give them some encouragement by indicating that he can still be a God of wrath. If he had only struck the Paine Statue instead of the statue on Blofield Church consider the effect. The publicity would have been enormous—papers which ignored the ceremony or gave but scant coverage would have made it front page news with banner headlines. Parsons all over the country would have preached sermons about it—it would have rivalled the celebrated Angels of Mons.

But perhaps the Lord did intend to hit the Paine statue—but missed his aim.

W. COLLINS.

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CHRISTIAN BURIAL

On my recent visit to Spain I met a gentleman residing in a liberal district whose son visited a town with a strong pro-Fascist movement. The visitor was taunted by Fascist youths, manhandled and finally killed in an upsurge of hysteria. News of the "accident" did not reach the father for some days. He instantly sent a searing letter of protest to the chief of police in the town where the murder had been committed. In reply he was coldly informed that he had no need to be so distressed as the local priest had taken the trouble to make inquiries and had discovered that the dead boy had a good "moral" record apart from his sinful liberal opinions. So the priest had "mercifully" decided to stretch a point and give the political heretic a Christian burial. This had been done without consulting the father in order to tidy up the unfortunate business as quickly as possible. The bereaved freethinking parent told me that for him the clerical smugness was almost the least bearable aspect of the whole ghastly tragedy.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

TOO SERIOUS?

May I please say that in my opinion, Mr. Ridley in his excellent article on Judas Iscariot, was manifestly guilty of taking this ridiculous story too seriously, and giving too much weight to the opinions of the pedlars of this rubbish. The whole story is obvious nonsense unless one can reconcile reason with a god who planned his own painful and ignominious destruction, and who had never heard of prevention being better than cure (the Adam and Eve story).

As a man born and bred in the Roman Catholic faith, I am constantly aware of a tendency to think and speak in their terms, but as a freethinker I am in no doubt that the vast majority of the Catholic clergy are much mistaken but sincere fools. To treat their vapourings with any degree of respect is to do them more than justice, and surely not worthy of the good Mr. Ridley. They live in cloud-cuckoo land, victims of their own imaginations.

And I think he knows it!

A. J. BROWNE.

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