

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIV—No. 52

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

Religion in School

By MARGARET KNIGHT

BRIEFLY, we can say that church schools get three quarters of their capital costs and the whole of their running costs from public funds. As Humanists we oppose state grants for sectarian schools—particularly for Roman Catholic schools, which are primarily indoctrination centres and only secondarily places of education. A. C. F. Beales, a member of the Catholic Education Council, and Reader in Education at King's College, London, has said: "[Our] basic philosophy must not only be a part of education but must be the core and centre of it, and every subject in the curriculum must be considered as expressly an instrument for making that philosophy prevail in the formation of [our] children's character and beliefs." In pursuance of this policy, Roman Catholics insist that as far as possible every subject in their schools shall be taught by a Catholic.

Roman Catholics themselves admit that the educational standard of their schools is below that of the state schools. They regret this, of course, but feel that the price is well worth paying—if it must be paid—for the advantage of shielding children from contact with any point of view but their own. Intellectual training, for them, is not the most important thing, most important is spiritual training, pursuit of virtue. But one cannot resist saying that if the pursuit of virtue is their primary aim, then the results—by our vulgar secular standards—are not impressive. Roman Catholic delinquency rates are two to three times those of the general population.

Unsound
It is sometimes argued that because Catholics pay rates and taxes like everyone else, they are therefore entitled to say what sort of education their children should have. But this is unsound. If carried to its logical conclusion it would mean special schools for Communists, Mormons, Exclusive Brethren etc. The fact that the parent makes a small contribution towards the cost of his children's schooling doesn't entitle him to demand that the state shall provide a special sort of school, or that it shall indoctrinate his child for him. Indoctrination is no part of a school's function. If a parent wants his child indoctrinated, he should do it himself, or get a church to do it. It is not reasonable to expect the state to pay. In the US, Australia and New Zealand, church schools get no support at all from public funds.

The first plank in our platform therefore, is to get state

grants to church schools discontinued. But this is not the whole aim. Even undenominational schools have Religious Instruction ("RI"), and this so-called religious instruction is usually just Christian indoctrination. As such, it is no more defensible than the political indoctrination of children in totalitarian countries.

Farce and Menace

"RI" is at best a farce, and at worst a menace. The most that can be said in its favour is that in some cases it is no more than a waste of time—that it goes in one ear and out at the other. But unfortunately it is the more intelligent, sensitive, thoughtful child who reflects on what he is taught and reads, and who finds it intellectually confusing and emotionally disturbing. No intelligent child today can fail to see how incredible many things are that he is asked to believe, and how morally shocking some of the Christian doctrines are.

In bewilderment the child may ask questions—very sensible questions. (e.g. "Why did God make fleas and germs—does he love them?" "If it's so nice in heaven, why don't people want to die?") If he does, he will get embarrassed, evasive answers—that "s y m b o l i c", spiritual truth is different from literal truth, etc. (Spiritual truth would appear to be a special kind of truth not subject to the law of contradiction!) So, just as the child's intellectual curiosity is beginning to awaken, he is introduced to a realm of thought in which nothing means quite what it says—in which no statement can be taken at its face value, no line of thought followed to its logical conclusion. Not a good start!

Tolstoy said that: "A man into whom meaningless and contradictory assertions have, during childhood, been instilled as religious truth—unless with much effort and suffering he free himself from them—is a man mentally diseased". Strong words, but they were written in 1902, when the Eastern Orthodox Church in Russia was more superstitious than even the Catholic Church today. (If anyone quotes these words, I hope he will make clear that they are Tolstoy's, not mine—and that I'm not suggesting that all Christians today are mentally diseased. But it is interesting to see what Tolstoy felt about what some would regard as "the childlike and beautiful faith" of the Russian people in the days before the Revolution.)

"RI" can produce not only intellectual confusion but



emotional disturbance. One need not be much of a psychologist to realise how a small child is likely to be affected by the story of Abraham—who is held up to admiration because he was prepared to kill his son, and offer up his dead body as a burnt offering, when God told him to. And what is a child to make of the doctrine of the Atonement—the story of a God who begat a son, and then killed him to appease his own wrath against his own creation? And above all, of course, of hell—this appalling doctrine of an eternity of torture, inflicted by a God whom the child is told it is his duty to love?

The doctrine of hell is stated plainly and repeatedly in the New Testament, but the Protestant Church has decided, more or less unofficially, that Jesus's statements on the subject were "symbolic". But Roman Catholics, who are at least consistent, still believe in, and teach the literal existence of hell. Cf. the *Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, approved by the Roman Catholic Archbishops and Bishops of England and Wales, and appointed to be used in all their dioceses. Question: "Shall not the wicked also live for ever?" Answer: "The wicked also shall live, and be punished for ever in the fire of hell".

Moral Damage

In most Protestant schools today, hell is soft-pedalled. But Protestants can't be too complacent. An inquiry among Protestant schoolchildren, of which the results were published in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* six years ago, suggested that at the age of 12, one in three of the children believed in hell. A disturbing fact, because I suggest that no child can believe in hell without suffering emotional or moral damage. If he is frightened and puzzled about reconciling hell with a supposedly loving God, he suffers emotional damage. If he is undisturbed, and thinks hell is for bad people and that it serves them right, then he will suffer moral damage. It is not much use telling a child that cruelty is wrong, if in the next breath you tell him things that imply that the ruler of the universe is a monster of cruelty.

So intellectual confusion, emotional disturbance, moral damage can all result from "RI." And there is another, more indirect, way in which moral damage is done. A common argument for religious instruction is that it is an essential basis for moral training. This is dangerous. If a child is taught that there is no reason to be good if one doesn't believe in a supernatural father-figure who will reward and punish: that the obligation to be honest and truthful and kind is dependent on believing in the virgin birth and the resurrection—then there is an obvious danger that if the child later outgrows these beliefs he will throw out the moral baby with the mythological bath-water; decide that it was all old wives' tales.

Delinquency

We are repeatedly told that the current rise in the delinquency rate is due to the decline in religious belief. And there may well be something in this. But it doesn't mean that the best way to reduce delinquency is to step up religious indoctrination. It means, rather, that we must base moral training on some less precarious foundation than myth.

It is particularly dangerous to give the critical adolescent of today the impression that authority, "they", the establishment, are trying to put something over on him; that they have a vested interest in getting him to believe a lot of legends that they don't really believe themselves, but that they think it is a good thing for him to believe, because it will make him more docile. No doubt, in so far as the adolescent does believe this, what he believes is something of a travesty. Authority is not quite so consciously cynical as that. But it is a travesty that contains

too much truth to be comfortable. And it is the inevitable result of trying to base moral training on myths.

In Its Place

Christians will want to ask (1) if you succeeded in doing away with "RI" what would you put in its place?, and (2) if you don't want moral training tied up with religion, what sort of moral training do you want? We reply that (1) we Humanists don't want children to be indoctrinated with Christianity, but this doesn't mean that they shouldn't learn about Christianity, as about other world religions. Not all the Christian stories are puzzling or frightening—some, like the nativity, are beautiful. And in any case, whether stories are beautiful or horrifying, whether morally edifying or very much the reverse, they are part of our cultural heritage—woven into our literature and architecture and art, as are other mythological stories such as St. George and the dragon, and King Arthur and his knights. The child should certainly hear them, but hear them frankly as stories, not as something that it is a duty to try and believe.

But Christianity is more than a set of colourful stories. It is also a philosophy of life, though a pretty confused one. In the sort of set-up we are advocating, children—at any rate older children—should learn something about all the great world religions and philosophies: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Marxism, Humanism. One would expect more time to be given to Christianity than the others, as it is the official religion of this country—just as more time is given to British history than to the history of other nations. But Christianity should be presented as one of many possible religions or philosophies, not as the Truth, which everyone ought to accept.

We answer (2), that there is sometimes a false assumption here. It is a mistake to think that children can be taught morality in the same way as they are taught history or arithmetic. "Morals are caught, not taught". Children acquire their moral attitudes, in the first place, by more or less unconscious imitation of people they love and admire, and whose approval is important to them. Now moral behaviour is essentially co-operative, socialised behaviour—considering other people's needs and interests as well as our own. In so far as it can be taught, it is taught, not by classroom lessons, not by a process of intellectual instruction, but by something more like what psychologists call conditioning. To try and teach co-operation to a group of children all sitting still in their separate desks, is rather like trying to teach a person to swim on dry land.

Socialised, co-operative behaviour is something children learn primarily in action, in the give-and-take of their day-to-day relations with other children. And the chief function of school in moral training is to provide opportunities for this co-operation and to encourage it. If younger children are working effectively together on, say, preparing scenery and costumes for a play, decorating classroom walls, looking after animal pets: or if playing games together—learning to play fair, win without boasting and lose without sulking, be leader one day and follower next—this is rich food for social growth. It is far better than sitting at desks learning about the ascension and Pentecost, repeating meaningless creeds, or singing sentimental hymns or ferocious psalms.

*A Happy Christmas
to all our Readers*

A Marxist View of Christian Origins

By F. A. RIDLEY

A few years ago an American paperback edition appeared of what is probably still the best as well as best-known of Marxist critiques of Christian origins. This was the book of the famous German socialist and historian, Karl Kautsky—*Foundations of Christianity* published originally in 1908 during the heyday of German Social Democracy, of which Kautsky (1854-1938) was the leading Marxist scholar and ideologist.

Kautsky's book went through many editions prior to Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, whereupon—along with a multitude of socialist and anti-Nazi literature—it went up in the Nazi bonfires, in a wholesale conflagration of all reminders that pre-Nazi Germany had once been a civilised land. Kautsky himself succeeded in escaping from Germany, and died in Holland shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. Rather ironically this most learned and ideologically "orthodox" of Marxist scholars, who had known Marx and Engels personally, lived to incur the furious hatred of the present-day self-styled professors of Marxism, the Russian Bolsheviks!

Surely to be fiercely denounced as a "renegade" by both Lenin and Trotsky, and then later to be exiled by Hitler, represents a somewhat curious juxtaposition. However, whatever one may think of his ideology, Kautsky was without doubt a great and an outstanding historian, who made important contributions to socialist theory and indeed to several divergent fields. Incidentally, his book, *Thomas More and his Utopia*, sheds a flood of light on both utopian literature in general and specifically upon English history as seen through European eyes in the era of the English saint and martyr of the Catholic Counter-Reformation.

In his *Foundations of Christianity*, probably his most comprehensive book, Kautsky applies the materialist conception of history as elaborated by its joint founders, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—with both of whom he collaborated closely during their later years—to the complex many-sided problem of Christian origins. Here, one notes that, whilst his detailed criticisms are usually in line with those of the critical European scholarship of the time when his book was written, his emphasis diverges from that of modern non-Marxist scholars in a number of important respects. For primarily—and this is perhaps the most important point at which the Marxist critique of religion diverges from non-Marxist criticism—religions represent *mass* creations, they are the product ultimately of social conditions, as and when they affect the lives and living conditions of large numbers of people at a given time and place.

According to this historical theory, Christianity was not the creation of any individual Christ, nor for that matter was Buddhism the personal creation of any historical Buddha; at most, certain exceptional individuals may have given a certain impetus to social and to religious tendencies ultimately due to impersonal factors then at work in their contemporary society. When viewed from this angle some questions to which "bourgeois" (i.e. non-Marxist) scholars attach great importance, and to which they are in the habit of devoting much of their space, dwindle into relative insignificance.

It becomes really a matter of very little importance who "founded" Christianity, for whether or not there was an individual Jesus, the religion now named after him would still have evolved eventually and essentially in the

same way. Its dominant ideas were, so to speak, in the air at the time, and would inevitably have assumed flesh and blood either sooner or later even if, for example, there never had been a Galilean messiah named Jesus, or if the famous twelve apostles could be conclusively proved to have been merely human personifications of the signs of the Zodiac. Kautsky himself, though, rather cautiously accepts the historical existence of a historical Galilean, mainly on circumstantial evidence, whilst conceding that existing records are unreliable.

It must surely be considered that the discovery since Kautsky's day of the Essene (a sect referred to by Kautsky) Dead Sea scrolls powerfully reinforces the above thesis of Christian origins. For these apparently contemporary documents certainly demonstrate that the messianic idea with which early Christianity originated was already very much in the air before any distinctively Christian cult first emerged. One can surely also add that the logical acceptance of the fact that Christianity initially started as a mass movement would serve at least one useful purpose, by cutting down the somewhat tedious literature relating to the historicity or otherwise of the various gospel heroes. Do they really matter all that much? For according to Kautsky, it would seem to follow that had say, Jones rather than Jesus been the commonest name in first century Palestine, Christianity would still have emerged in much the same way!

In a series of lucid and erudite chapters, Karl Kautsky covers virtually the entire evolution of the Mediterranean culture in his far-flung search for the social, economic and cultural conditions, the end product of which was the initial mass movement in first century Palestine from which the Christian Church was later to stem under the impact of contemporary world conditions. In succession the evolution is depicted of the Jews of the Old Testament with their cult of Jehovah still officially incorporated in biblical Christianity; of the Jews of the Diaspora (Dispersion) early scattered in the commercial centres of the Mediterranean to whom Paul preached and amongst whom the early Christian communities—the germ of the later Catholic Universal Church—took root. Whilst, along with this Jewish evolution we are led through the tortuous mazes of ancient secular history, culminating in the huge slave empire of Rome, the oppressor and eventually conqueror of the "Chosen People," the Jews and of their Holy Land, Palestine.

That the earliest Christian movement started as a messianic anti-Roman movement (as forcibly depicted in what is probably the oldest Christian scripture, the Apocalypse), Kautsky regards as highly probable. The first overt manifestation of what later became Christianity, is to be found in an unsuccessful messianic insurrection against Rome, the leader of which (the Jesus of history) was crucified by the Romans. As our author himself comments: "Jesus did not go to Jerusalem to die as in the later legend, but to inaugurate the messianic kingdom, the kingdom of God on earth". Later on, by the workings of contemporary historic irony, the legend of this crucified, and subsequently resurrected messiah, got mixed up with a bundle of Gnostic myths outside Palestine in the Jewish "dispersion" and, after the collapse of the messianic ideal after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, primitive Christianity evolved into the complex theology

(Concluded on page 412)

This Believing World

After a devastating attack on our lunatic Sunday laws on TV and reviews of the Crathorne Commission's report in our national journals we now find that nothing can be done to change them until the wishes of the people are ascertained. As far as the government, any government, is concerned, the truth is that the Sabbatarians are so strongly entrenched that losing their votes would be too dangerous. The simplest and easiest way out of the difficulty is to leave things as they are. In this, both the wishes of "our Lord" and the Lord's Day Observance Society would, if not quite satisfied, at least be pacified.

★

The Bishop of Woolwich wants to know (*Daily Express*, November 28th), "What kind of person do you think Jesus really was?" Almost any fervent Christian could easily tell him. First of all, though a Jew, he was totally unlike a Jew. He really looked like a European Renaissance nobleman. Then, he always looked like God Almighty, for he was God Almighty—though not of course a Jewish conception of him. He obviously did not have a "Jewish" nose; he was always dressed in a spotlessly clean nightgown (washed for him by Mary and Martha) and he invariably walked about "doing good". Though the common people heard him gladly, the fact remains that as soon as they could, they yelled for his crucifixion and were satisfied when it happened.

★

Dr. Robinson dismisses all this—no doubt with contempt—and concentrates on the miracles of Jesus. Did they take place? He argues that "the evidence for the miracles is just as good, and just as primitive, as the evidence for the teaching". In fact, the evidence for the parables and the Sermon on the Mount is like that of the miracles, "tied up together." And Jesus, the Bishop said, always spoke "with authority". Moreover, "with God, all things are possible", and as Jesus was God, why should we not believe in everything written about him in the gospels? Why not indeed?

★

So happy in the cause of religion are some of our national journals that, when a man who is already a Christian is converted to Christianity and is ordained as a Church of England deacon, his story must be printed and with a smiling portrait. The *Daily Sketch*, for example, (December 8th) enthusiastically gives us a portrait of Mr. T. Fields, an inspector on London Transport, who was given a chance by the Bishop of Southwark to enter the ministry, and is now a padre ready to work for Jesus as well as for the buses. And he is going to treat everybody as "a fellow human being". No wonder this makes news.

★

It may well be that Jesus working "miracles of healing" was a much more popular God than when he merely taught in parables—most of them being in fact so obscure that they still have to be explained. In any case, one healer, Mr. Harry Edwards, has a huge following, and as far as his publicity reports tell us, he has cured thousands of incurable cases. His success makes a fascinating article in the *Sunday Express* (December 6th) by Dr. Cedric Carne. We are told of a boy suffering from quite incurable infantile paralysis, who was in two ticks able again to walk perfectly; of a woman with incurable arthritis cured in two minutes—and so on. Even the popular broadcaster, Freddie Grisewood, testified to being absolutely cured of incurable arthritis.

★

Dr. Carne tells us also that Mr. Edwards claims that his

spirit guides are Lord Lister and Louis Pasteur—though we always thought his successes in healing were really due to Jesus Christ himself still doing medical work "in the spirit" whatever that means. Dr. Carne was quite convinced of all the cures, but if he were ill himself he tells us he "would not go to a spirit healer", nor "advise others to seek their help". Isn't that scepticism run mad?

Marlowe Quatercentenary

OPENING to the word-music of Christopher Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd* beautifully spoken by Paul Hansard, a meeting sponsored by the National Secular Society took place at Conway Hall on December 4th, to celebrate the quatercentenary of the birth of this great poet. To an appreciative audience Richard Clements gave a sensitive and scholarly lecture on Marlowe's work during his short and tempestuous life (1564-1593). Born at Canterbury on February 6th, 1564 into a family in the tanning and shoemaking business, Marlowe was baptised two months before Shakespeare's baptism at Stratford. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury, and at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, from which he matriculated and took his BA degree in 1584 and his MA three years later. He left Cambridge in 1587 for London where his four great theatrical successes were produced—*Tamburlane the Great*, *Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II*, and where he was connected as a dramatist with the Lord Admiral's and Strange's companies.

Marlowe knew Thomas Kyd who shared his unorthodox opinions, and was friendly with Walsingham and Raleigh. The lecturer thought it was possible that he may also have met Bruno who was staying in London about that time. The place and value of Marlowe among English poets would be impossible for historical criticism to overestimate. Swinburne wrote that "*Tamburlane* must always be remembered with distinction and mentioned with honour." Rumour associated Marlowe with Raleigh's school of atheism, and he was known to hold heretical opinions. It was assumed therefore, that his summons to appear before the Privy Council was in that connection, but before he could do so however he was killed in a tavern quarrel at Deptford, and England was the poorer for his loss.

At intervals during the evening there were readings from Marlowe's works. David Tribe gave the very moving speech from *Edward II*, Act 5, scene 1, where the king speaks with Leicester at Kenilworth, and also the speech of Barabas, Act 1, scene 1, admirably rendered. Paul Hansard was very fine in *Tamburlane the Great*, in the king's lament by the bedside of the dying Zenocrate, and really impressive in the final dramatic midnight scene in *Dr. Faustus*.

A most rewarding evening, and the National Secular Society is to be congratulated in having arranged this moving tribute to the great freethinker poet.

E.C.

A MARXIST VIEW OF CHRISTIAN ORIGINS

(Concluded from page 411)

and organisation that in time became the Catholic Church. After its foundations had thus been laid, the history of Christianity became merged with that of the ancient non-Jewish world, and after the opportune "conversion" of Constantine (4th century) with the evolution of the Roman Empire in particular, and with the evolution of the society that later emerged from it.

Such in the briefest and necessarily inadequate outline is the thesis of this important book of a great Marxist thinker and scholar.

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

Telephone: HOP 2717

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates: One year, £1 17s. 6d.; half-year, 19s.; three months, 9s. 6d.

In U.S.A. and Canada: One year, \$5.25, half-year, \$2.75; three months, \$1.40.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, S.E.1.

Inquiries regarding Bequests and Secular Funeral Services should also be made to the General Secretary, N.S.S.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

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 J. W. BARKER, L. EBURY, J. A. MILLAR and C. E. WOOD.

(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), Sunday, December 27th, 6.45 p.m., Speaker: W. MILLER. Subject to be announced.

Notes and News

SYDNEY SILVERMAN'S Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Bill was due to be debated by the House of Commons just before Christmas—December 21st to be exact. But, as a policeman in a *New Statesman* cartoon reminded a vicar, "without capital punishment there wouldn't have been no Christianity."

THE POPE received Mr. Moise Tshombe, the Congolese Prime Minister in audience on December 10th and handed him a message calling on the Congolese people to "unite their efforts and energies to check discord and hatred..." Only peace "based on truth, justice, loving charity and freedom," would "permit the young Republic of the Congo to build for its children a solid future and to hold with honour the place due to it in the concert of nations". The Pope's message continued. It recalled the deaths of missionaries and asked for "everybody to learn again to respect his brother" (*The Birmingham Post*, 11/12/64). Later, at a reception at the Congolese Embassy, Mr. Tshombe predicted that the Congo rebels would soon be crushed. But a durable peace cannot be bought with a loan, he said; it "needs a divine force." That was why he had gone to the Pope and asked him to pray for the Congo.

THE proposed Sunday ferry to the Isle of Skye will operate only between 1 p.m. and 10 p.m., Lieutenant Colonel D. H. Cameron of Lochiel told a meeting of Inverness County Council (*The Glasgow Herald*, 11/12/64). These times had been chosen, he said, so that people attending church would not be disturbed, and to enable people visiting the mainland during the day to return to Skye the same evening. The Rev. John Morrison, Free Church of Scotland minister of Bayhead, North Uist has appealed to the

council to oppose the ferry. "Our people in Skye and the islands are looking to the county council for a direct word at this time", Mr. Morrison said. "To delay would mean a major tragedy." The Council should "rise to the occasion and make a decision" and "in the name of God, a decision in favour of these worthy people." The council deferred a decision on Mr. Morrison's proposal pending a meeting of Skye District Council.

"WITH the birth of my new baby I now had four children under five years of age." The writer is the Roman Catholic Dr. Anne Biezanek, in her book *All Things New* (Peter Smith 17s. 6d., paperback 7s. 6d.). Dr. Biezanek admits that she was becoming coarsened mentally and physically, and beginning to dread the sight of her husband. So she started taking the contraceptive pill and decided to help other women in a similar predicament. "If only you had been born sooner what a lot of misery would have been saved," one woman wrote to her, "... my mother had 18 children, 12 of whom lived in hunger and for the most part barefoot and ill-clad... I think a woman should not have to face the awful dread of becoming pregnant in order to keep her husband's love, and the marriage together."

"BYRON," the modern youth presented by Michael Crawford, turned his scathing attention to the Church of England on *Not So Much a Programme...* on December 13th, referring to the parsonic voice as "sort of educated-constipated". "Nobody human would listen to that saliva for pleasure", he added, and he doubted if a god would either. Peter Shaffer, author of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (the play about the Spanish conquest of Peru) strongly supported the sketch. In fact he "violently" repudiated "any form of church." Another guest, novelist Penelope Mortimer, considered the Church dead, but thought it deserved better obsequies than Byron's. Both surprised MC David Frost when they denied that the good in Christianity had outweighed the bad.

THE night before, BBC TV had given us a glimpse of the farewell performance of *Beyond the Fringe*, which seemed almost as good as when we saw it years ago. Alan Bennett's sermon had been altered a little (not entirely for the better) but it was still a superb parody—the sermon to end all sermons one would have thought.

AN expurgated edition of *Fanny Hill* (about three-quarters the length of the original), *The Perfumed Garden* and the *Kama Sutra* have recently been banned in Edinburgh. David Kemp (*The Scotsman*, 17/12/64) explained how the prosecutions occurred. "An anonymous 999-caller complained that *Fanny Hill* was on sale in a shop in Leith; another citizen, also anonymous, handed a copy of *The Perfumed Garden* to a police officer, remarking that this was the sort of thing they were selling in Edinburgh; after perusing this latter work, the authorities decided also to prosecute the *Kama Sutra*, mentioned in its introduction." (Incidentally, both *The Perfumed Garden* and the *Kama Sutra* are sold in THE FREETHINKER bookshop.) The law, as Mr. Kemp remarked, is an ass. It was hardly an accident that both the booksellers prosecuted were from the Leith Walk area, not from the fashionable George Street or the university area. Scottish law discriminates over the "place" of indecency and a book may be regarded as appealing to artistic taste in one shop and to prurient curiosity in another. Indeed the books are not banned in Edinburgh, and may be consulted in the libraries.

Secularism—Label and Reality

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

AFTER the spate of recent articles and discussion, the most hostile observer would not be in a position to claim that the freethinking movement is unwilling to discuss its internal state in public. It is clear that the movement falls into two major divisions, the mild humanist and the definite secularist. Nor is it by any means certain that the differences do not go far beyond mere disagreements over policy and do not cut deep into the ideological sphere. If the present writer be correct, there are grounds for asserting that some measure of fifth columnist activity has wrought considerable havoc. He is not in a position to divulge publicly all that has come to him over the last few weeks and is bound by honourable pledges of confidence but he has no hesitation whatever in reiterating his original charges which, despite Mr. Robert Dent, do not appear to differ from those of Dr. Purcell, or in asserting that certain highly placed ecclesiastics have considered it well worth their while to pay some personal attention to the forces of organised humanism. At the same time, he has been puzzled by a great deal of the pro-religious humanism which has emerged in discussion. It seems to desire humanism to be a religion incorporating not a little of the attitude and some of the values of Christianity. In order to achieve this end, it would deny the right of the secularist to speak his mind and indeed frequently treats him as a greater enemy than the churches themselves. When the writer was ejected a few years ago from writing for the small magazine of a *soi-disant* humanist group, he thought that his experience might well be limited to this isolated circle and that he would not find resentment elsewhere directed towards anti-ecclesiasticism in sociology and anti-clericalism in ethics. But he is now left wondering whether this ideological backwater did not represent a crude expression of not a little of the so-called humanist movement.

These reflections have been prompted by the article which Mrs. Kit Mouat contributed to THE FREETHINKER, "Labels and the Fifth Column" in answer to the present writer. Much of her article concerned education, adoption and various subjects which had little specific relationship to the immediate issues. But there were several points at which she seemed anxious to reply on behalf of the more moderate humanist viewpoint. Mrs. Mouat seems to regard the present writer as a litigious person because he referred to the laws of defamation. How could it be defamatory to call anybody a Christian or a Humanist? Can terms usually so void of objection ever be answerable at law? Mrs. Mouat's question is clearly emotional and fails to understand that the law of defamation in this country is extremely far-reaching. It is defamatory legally to call anybody a "Christian" or a "Humanist" if, by using these normally unobjectionable terms, the person making the allegation defames to any degree the other person's regular public professions. For example, a list of crimes committed by Christians, an assertion that such was characteristic of devotees of this creed, and a further assertion that Mr. X "is a practising Christian" would certainly be actionable! So too would a similar assertion that somebody was a "Christian" or a "Humanist" if thereby the assertion indicated, for example perjury, a moral hypocrisy imputing degeneracy of character, or a putting oneself forward in the guise hypocritically to obtain money or services. Analogy in the leading cases may be found in those which decided

that it is defamatory to call somebody a "Hottentot" in South Africa [Pitout v Rosenstein (1930) OPD 112] or to call a member of the Labour Party in this country a "Communist" [Braddock v Bevins (1948) IKB 580]. I can only summarise the remark on libel raised originally by Dr. Purcell by saying that, in his standard work, *The Law of Defamation*, Richard O'Sullivan, QC, took this line. The pity is that Mrs. Mouat did not secure proper legal advice before mentioning the issue at all. In the days of Bradlaugh, the secularist movement was very careful of its law and was well-advised by Professor Hunter and others. The time has certainly come again when it should pay an equal attention to the legal aspects of the issues at stake. The law of trusts affords an excellent case in point.

A further important point is raised by Mrs. Mouat when she asks whether it is possible to limit the membership of the humanist movement to people who can be considered as standing within the mainstream of free-thought. Of course she is correct in claiming that it would be difficult to phrase the matter in suitable terms upon any form of application for membership. It is all but impossible to approach the question from this angle. But it is not impossible for humanist societies and groups to make clear what they mean by humanism. How, for example is the term to be defined by the British Humanist Association? Does this joindure of the Rationalist Press Association and the Ethical Union understand humanism to exclude the supernatural in any shape or form? Is its humanism inclusive enough to embrace some religious interpretation? Could it be extended to include those who, like Origen or Erasmus, would consider themselves as Christian humanists? Until these questions are answered by explicit definition, an element of confusion must arise. But it is at the organisational level that problems of definition and inclusion must be settled.

The stated objectives of the National Secular Society concerning the meaning of secularism show that definition is possible and desirable. At the moment, the scene is bedevilled by "non-militants" who claim to call the tune by demanding that the "militants" should be silent. Mrs. Mouat would herself exclude devotees of Jesus from the humanist ranks. But what of those who refuse to ally humanism to any form of anti-clerical or anti-ecclesiastical line? Of course, it is impossible to exclude people who enter by making an entirely false representation. A Tory could join the Labour Party by concealing his real views just as a republican could do the same and join the Monarchist League. But, if the objectives of the society are clear, such a person is at once revealed as ludicrously out of place when his true positions emerge. In short, the real trouble is that, for all too many humanists, humanism is not a term clearly defined by embracing specific loyalties or antagonisms.

At this stage again, Mrs. Mouat seems concerned about coexistence. Of course, there are spheres of living or levels of discussion at which coexistence with Christians is possible. At the social level, for example, Christians and secularists must coexist together. In various spheres of academic activity, the division merely does not arise. Some liberal-minded Christians are more possible to live with than their more dogmatic and short-tempered brethren. But all of this is merely beside the point. The churches as a whole stand for a mystical and theological

view of reality which is alien to the philosophy of the secularist. Matters of social morality or of personal conduct are derived from this theology. Historically, most Christians have imposed upon society both belief and conduct alike by means of excessive intolerance. The history of the Inquisition is an outstanding example. But one might also recall the Test and Corporation Acts within the English legal system, the rooted intolerance of the state church or the equally sectarian intolerance which has marked most of the dissenting bodies. For the secularist, this history which still continues within practical life, is an affront to a social morality seeking the usefulness of human happiness. Coexistence is impossible, a fact which the more clear-sighted of Christians have seen for themselves when humanism has come to be discussed. Indeed, the very points which arise out of the wider areas of discussion such as secular education, the blasphemy laws, laws concerning Sunday observance, the marriage laws, laws affecting sexual behaviour or child adoption alike reflect the issue of intolerance when their history is considered objectively.

The central point which arises out of Mrs. Mouat's article is that there are two groups, the mild pro-religious humanists and the definite secularists. It is merely befogging the issue to say that there have always been two groups, that in the days of Bradlaugh working-class secularism was paralleled by scholarly, middle-class agnosticism. It is of course perfectly true to say that, a century ago, the middle class agnostic did not favour the more strident methods of the National Secular Society or of G. W. Foote and THE FREETHINKER. But this was largely a question of tactics and of audience. There was not a great and lasting difference between the ideas popularised by Bradlaugh and those propounded by Sir Leslie Stephen. Morley could spell God with a small "g" and Matthew Arnold could refer to the doctrine of the Trinity as "a fairy tale of three Lord Shaftesburys". Victorian agnostics of the type of T. H. Huxley and secularists of the school of Bradlaugh marched shoulder to shoulder towards a common goal and together wrought out a considerable chapter in the history of the development of freedom of thought. One has only to turn back to the works on science and theology of Dr. Draper or of A. D. White to realise that the more academic agnostic was not worrying himself unduly over coexistence with Christians or about interpreting his agnosticism as a religion.

Today, circumstances have changed and a mild, constructive humanism has too often come to mean nothing more than a mystical or pro-religious restatement allied as it is with fatal ideas of coexistence. All and sundry have drifted into the movement under this vague banner. The result is a threat to the whole freethinking heritage in this country. I make no apologies for claiming that the roots of a movement finding itself so sapped need purifying. After all, the conception of purification has a far wider validity than its warped presentation as seen through the hysteria of MRA. The time has come for some very definite and plain speaking, a point that I may make as I was not the author of "The Reverent Humanist"! Traces of an obvious fifth column are present and must be dragged into the light of day. Too many have been deluded by appeals for mildness and used all too unwittingly by the pro-religious who have ulterior motives to serve. A welter of organisational philanthropy can do the movement a grave disservice by posting constructive and critical thinking. The churches have not retreated and in many ways have strengthened their position. It is time that the gravity of the situation

should be seen more clearly. Secularism pure and simple has an important part to play in the present situation as has the National Secular Society with its independency in the field of organisation. Its task is to stand firmly for the historic positions marked out in the battle for freedom of thought, to make clear through its declared aims that old cries and positions are not surrendered and to disown all that would befog the issue as denoting something which would finally hand over the victory to superstition and reaction. It is simply because the main tenor of Mrs. Mouat's article clearly fails to serve these ends that I find it necessary to answer it by repudiating it as an adequate exposition, whether practical or historical of the secularist case.

"The Loom of Life"

By D. M. CHAPMAN

SCIENTISTS find it difficult keeping up with even the highlights in fields other than their own, so is it any wonder the intelligent and inquisitive layman has trouble? The definitions of relatively recent branches such as general semantics, ethology and cybernetics may even be unknown to him while many features of modern physics are just too difficult for the non-professional to understand. Although the elements of genetics are reasonably well known (in a vague way) still the science of genetics has added a dimension or two to its structure after having been integrated with some important modern discoveries. It is Rona Hurst's self-imposed burden in *The Loom of Life* (Pemberton Books, 10s. 6d.), to relate something of the new genetics to the interested reader who may have become aware of his ignorance of such increasingly popular terms as DNA.

The first few chapters deal with the history of genetics, some of the pioneers of which were close friends of Mrs. Hurst. Too often their names are invoked without any illuminating anecdote to characterise them for, although their very names may be fraught with significance and feeling for the authoress, they are nothing to the reader who feels he is merely reading an anaemic account of the old, old story of Mendel and his peas.

All the information needed for the understanding of what is known of the mechanics of heredity is presented, but I have the feeling it could have been done more efficiently by means of a few large diagrams *à la Scientific American*.

In a short exposition one cannot, of course, point out all the exceptions to every statement but I do feel one should not say all hormones are proteinaceous and that all viruses cannot be seen with the light microscope. Referring to the protein coat of viruses as "nutritive" is sloppy, while stating that antibodies are produced in "lymphocytes" (sic) is controversial to say the least.

Mrs. Hurst touches on many of the important problems of modern life such as radiation, misuse of insecticides, artificial survival of genetic misfits, overpopulation and the possible effects of extraterrestrial germs on this planet; however, it's almost always just a mention of these problems that she makes—along with a sigh that if only a "superman" (i.e. saviour?) would come on the scene to instruct us properly... etc., etc. Many of the more scientific ideas are also treated superficially and should not have been mentioned in this frustrating deluge of brevity, e.g. "How memory works is still mysterious though research is gradually building up some sort of picture". Throughout the book one gets the feeling of research going on in a disembodied ethereal fashion to

the repetitious tune of "Isn't it wonderful what science is doing for man?"

The change of pace is often alarming, for the rhetoric of a denunciation of war gives way in one paragraph to an exposition on some plant's chromosomes in the next. Much of the material is downright irrelevant and wandering, and one often wonders what Mrs. Hurst is doing mixing embryology with phoney patent medicines in the same chapter, which as a whole doesn't really have much to say about genetics anyway.

The chapter on instinct is hardly germane to the discussion and boils down to a collection of believe-it-or-not stories. The evolution of mind takes up another chapter, but here too the treatment is sketchy and not likely to add to one's knowledge or understanding. Sometimes mind is opposed to matter then at other times to instinct.

Freethinkers may find irony in that Mendel's innocuous gardening in a monastery should have been so important in strengthening Darwinism. The instructive Lysenko case would have added interest but is missing. Readers of this book will learn though, that even bacteria have viral diseases so that I hope to hear this mentioned at the Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park when the effects of the Fall are expounded.

25th December, BC or AD?

Five hundred years before this time,
Lord Buddha came, or legend lies,
And with his birth in sweetest chime,
Came faint carillon from the skies.

To him rich gifts were brought from far;
He too was born by Heaven's command,
And wise men knew, by sign of star,
That man's salvation was at hand.

Quote not to me what Simeon saw,
I hate to spoil that lovely tale,
Yet worthy priest in Eastern lore
To Buddha child did say "All Hail".

From Buddhist tales these stories grew,
Let us be free from fancy's flight,
Be fair and give the East its due,
They told them first, they may be right.

Men's hopes composed that Angel song,
Of Christmas hymns the diadem,
Good men had wished for ages long,
To write the score for Bethlehem.

You rightly ask, why do I seek,
To spoil a picture held so high,
Why daub with doubts and words so cheap,
The heralds' message from the sky?

Naive perhaps to callous Don,
Who calls religion so much dope;
Yet I offend good simpleton,
Who mixes facts with faith and hope.

I ask you, Sirs, to think like men,
Examine well the tales of youth,
The cosy dreams they told us then,
Can you accept them as the truth?

What in that probe you prune away,
For fact or fiction tales must be,
Teach not to minds of softest clay
Those parts that go with minstrelsy.

That Great Man said, whose birth we mark,
Cause not the young to stumble down,
Let Crib and Manger, with the Ark,
Be tales we love, not truth we own.

If not, they take the path Paul trod,
And fable holds in most of them;
The Blood Sport of the Very God,
Will then begin at Bethlehem.

D.F.M.

CORRESPONDENCE

HUMANISM ADRIFT?

It has always seemed to me that "converts" to Freethought are always likely to run off the rails at times and although I thought Dr. Purcell's article in the *Humanist* poor, I also do not think Mr. Micklewright's notion of a "Fifth Column" over-bright either! Robert Dent speaks of it as "overdramatising" I would rather think it moralising, the latter a very bad habit leading inevitably to looseness of thinking.

Its most simple expression would be: "All freethinkers are good and all Christmas bad or immoral." Those of us who have friends holding all manner of beliefs or none know that the personal qualities that build up a real friendship are seldom a question of belief. I know a well known Freethinker who borrowed a book from me and who apparently deliberately refrains from acknowledging a written reminder, but that somewhat dodgy attitude does not qualify my freethinking.

It is amusing to hear Christians attribute the good social work of a Freethinker to his Christian upbringing, but if the benighted Freethinker will be perverse and do good works without ever having been a believer that is indeed a very difficult one to sort out.

ROBERT F. TURNEY

FAMILY PRESERVATION BILL

R. Gresham Cooke, Conservative MP for Twickenham, is bringing a Bill before Parliament called "The Family Preservation Bill". This is aimed at one particular section of Christians, namely the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren and it would make it a punishable offence to give any teaching or instruction leading to a breach of marital obligations.

This bill to me is just a consummate piece of impertinence. It assumes that because the Exclusives' interpretation of the Holy Bible leads to certain hardships on non-conforming members, they must therefore be punished according to the saintly lights of Mr. R. Gresham Cooke and the writers of 170 letters of complaint received by him.

He should first delve into the effects of the interpretation and doctrines of other multifarious Christian sects, before singling out one insignificant group which does not conform to his interpretation of the "Book." He would find that Christianity was one long history of brutality, cruelty and torture imposed on suffering humanity, by its pastors and priests. That's why this bill is sheer hypocrisy.

N. CASSEL

EDUCATIONAL PAPERBACKS

SPECIAL

Audrey Harvey *Tenants in Danger* 3s.

FICTION

H. E. Bates *The Sleepless Moon* 5s.

Anthony Bloomfield *The Tempter* 4s. 6d.

Jeremy Brooks *Henry's War* 3s. 6d.

Alberto Moravia *A Ghost at Noon* 3s. 6d.

Georges Simenon *The Stain on the Snow* 4s. 6d.

David Storey *Flight into Camden* 4s.

Roger Vailland *The Sovereigns* 3s. 6d.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Sex in Society Alex Comfort 3s. 6d.

Affluent Society J. K. Galbraith 5s.

Business of Management Roger Falk 3s. 6d.

Child Care and the Growth of Love John Bowlby and Margery Fry 3s. 6d.

Child, the Family and the Outside World D. W. Winnicott 4s. 6d.

Diagnosis of Man Kenneth Walker 5s.

Dreams and Nightmares J. A. Hadfield 5s.

Education: An Introductory Survey W. O. Lester Smith 3s. 6d.

Freud and the Post-Freudians J. A. C. Brown 4s.

Fundamentals of Psychology C. G. Acock 4s.

Hidden Persuaders Vance Packard 3s. 6d.

Homosexuality D. J. West 3s. 6d.

House of Commons at Work Eric Taylor 4s.

Introduction to Jung's Psychology Frieda Fordham 3s. 6d.

John Citizen and the Law Ronald Rubinstein 7s. 6d.

Local Government in England and Wales W. Eric Jackson 3s. 6d.

Normal Child and Some of His Abnormalities C. W. Valentine 4s.

Organization Man W. H. Whyte 4s. 6d.

Psychiatry Today D. Stafford Clark 5s.

Psychology of Sex Oswald Schwartz 4s.

Plus postage from THE FREETHINKER Bookshop